



SALSA CUTTHROAT

BY NICK LEGAN

→ IT'S NO COINCIDENCE that Salsa named its carbon fiber dropbar 29er the Cutthroat. The cutthroat trout is the official state fish of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. Fans of the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route will notice that those states are home to the famed Adventure Cycling Association route. The Cutthroat is a machine designed for the GDMBR, and more specifically for the race along the route, the Tour Divide.

Setting out to design a bike made to cover nearly 2,800 miles of dirt and gravel roads as quickly as possible has its challenges. The bike needs to be reliable, comfortable, and as lightweight as possible. It must provide opportunities to carry extra clothing, shelter, food, and plenty of liquids. It must consider the needs of a self-supported cyclist. And if you're Salsa, a brand known for affordability, it needs to do all that without costing a fortune.

While \$3,300 is a lot of money, I have to say that the Cutthroat delivers on its promise. It is wonderfully comfortable, lighter than virtually any other dropbar 29er, and has smart features that Tour Divide racers and dirt road riders alike will appreciate.

SALSA CUTTHROAT RIVAL 1

Price: \$3,299

Sizes available: S, M, L, XL

Size tested: M

Weight: 22.18 lbs. (without pedals)

TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

- **Stack:** 619.5mm
- **Reach:** 375.6mm
- **Head tube length:** 115mm
- **Head tube angle:** 70.0°
- **Seat tube:** 482.6mm (center to top)
- **Seat tube angle:** 74.0°
- **Top tube:** 565mm (effective)
- **Chainstays:** 445mm
- **Bottom bracket drop:** 70mm
- **Fork offset:** 45mm
- **Trail:** 88mm
- **Wheelbase:** 1057.4mm
- **Standover height:** 787.1mm

SPECIFICATIONS

- **Frame:** Cutthroat Carbon with Class 5 Vibration Reduction System, four bottle mounts, toptube bag mounts, 2x compatible
- **Fork:** Cutthroat Carbon, clearance for 29 x 3.0in. tires, internal wire routing for dynamo hubs, crown mount for light, triple mounts
- **Handlebar:** Salsa Cowchipper, 31.8mm, 420mm
- **Stem:** Salsa Guide, 90mm
- **Brakes:** SRAM Rival hydraulic disc, 160mm Centerline rotors



- **Brake levers:** SRAM Rival 1
- **Shift levers:** SRAM Rival 1
- **Rear derailleur:** SRAM Rival 1 Long Cage, 11spd
- **Crankset:** SRAM GX 1000 XSYNC 38T, 170mm
- **Cassette:** SunRace CSMS8 11-42T
- **Bottom bracket:** SRAM PressFit BB92
- **Seatpost:** Salsa Guide 27.2mm
- **Saddle:** WTB Volt Comp
- **Headset:** Cane Creek 40
- **Hubs:** DT Swiss, 100 x 15mm front, 142 x 12mm rear, thru-axles
- **Rims:** DT Swiss C1800 Spline
- **Tires:** Maxxis Ikon 29 x 2.2in., 60tpi, EXO, tubeless ready

GEARING RANGE

	38
11	99.6
13	84.3
15	73.0
17	64.7
19	57.7
21	52.2
24	45.6
28	39.2
32	34.3
36	30.6
42	26.0

Contact: Salsa Cycles, 6400 West 105th Street, Bloomington, MN, support@salsacycles.com, 877.668.6223, salsacycles.com



READY TO RUMBLE, SELF-SUPPORTED

Look closely at the Cutthroat and you'll see plenty of protrusions for the mounting of water bottles, cargo cages, a bolt-on top tube bag, and even a rear rack. While most will use the Cutthroat as a bikepacking or gravel bike, it's nice to see the rear rack mount. This opens up a new world for many rack-and-pannier fans: a carbon fiber touring bike ready for the roughest of roads.

On the size medium reviewed here, there are three bottle cage mounts inside the main triangle and one more on the underside of the down tube. Each of the fork legs has a set of triple mounts, which can be used for bottle cages or cargo cages. For riders who prefer a framebag inside the main triangle, Salsa's EXP is a perfect fit. In fact, Salsa prioritized the space inside the main triangle so that, compared to a Fargo, a Cutthroat rider can use a framebag one size larger than normal. The only trade-off is the reduced space between the down tube and front tire. Only a small water bottle will fit under the down tube.

On the top tube you'll see a pair of bosses for a bolt-on top tube bag. Salsa produces an excellent example, as do many other bag makers.

Salsa engineers also thought about fans of dynamo hubs and their related charging units and lights. The Cutthroat fork, with clearance for 29 x 3.0in. tires, also has an internal sleeve through which a dynamo wire can be routed. At the fork crown is a spot to mount your front light.

WHAT THE HECK IS CLASS 5 VRS?

While the Cutthroat is a rigid bike, Salsa uses a technology to reduce the vibration of bumpy roads. Its thin seatstays are designed to flex outwards to absorb impacts, especially those encountered on washboard roads. While I wasn't sure how much I would notice the Vibration Reduction System, I have to say that I was especially surprised by the Cutthroat's comfort over high-frequency, low-amplitude bumps. Surely the 29er wheels and tires also

help with this, but even compared to other 29ers, the Cutthroat is smooth.

And for riders in search of even more comfort, the Cutthroat has a couple more tricks up its sleeve. First of all, it's front-suspension compatible. No rigid frame, however compliant, can compete with 100 millimeters of buttery suspension.

Second, the Cutthroat frame also has clearance for 29 x 2.4in. tires with room to spare. If you want to take the edge off any road, throw on a set of big tires and run lower pressures without increased risk of pinch flats.

DRIVETRAIN

The Cutthroat did leave me feeling a little shorted in the drivetrain department. The range on offer isn't, at least for me, low enough for bikepacking in mountainous areas. Much of that comes down to the single chainring drivetrain, and it isn't helped by the large 38T ring that arrives as stock running gear on the Cutthroat.

In all fairness, Salsa's hands have been somewhat tied by component

makers. There isn't a convenient dropbar 2x mountain bike drivetrain on the market. Sure, you can buy adapters to make Shimano road shifters work with Shimano mountain bike derailleurs, and you can hack together a SRAM 2x11 drivetrain or source 2x10 parts. But those are not attractive options for a bike maker.

Perhaps if SRAM produced a dropbar shifter for its Eagle line with its incredible 10-50T, 12-speed cassette, I'd be singing a different tune. But, for now, I prefer a double chainring drivetrain on any bike that's intended for long-haul bikepacking or touring. Thankfully, the Cutthroat is 2x compatible and can be purchased as a frameset.

I also want to qualify my statements by saying that for many riders, especially those doing day rides, heading out for gnarly gravel, or who simply want a rowdy dropbar bike, the 1x drivetrain may fit the bill perfectly.

A PICTURE OF VERSATILITY IN 2018

The Cutthroat was launched in 2016, and it continues to define versatility for

the long-haul dirt and gravel road rider. While it was commissioned as a Tour Divide race machine, it is perfectly at home as a gravel bike (one with incredible tire clearance), a touring bike, a commuter, and even a dropbar mountain bike.

It has evolved since its debut with the addition of internal dynamo hub wiring and a light mount on the fork crown. Clearly Salsa is paying attention to the needs of bikepackers and touring cyclists. Although the Cutthroat lies on the racy end of the cycling spectrum, any rider can appreciate its light weight and comfortable ride. With the 20th anniversary of the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route occurring in 2018, it's wonderful to see that two decades after its introduction, the interest in one of the world's best off-tarmac routes is only growing. Bikes like Salsa's Cutthroat prove that in spades. **AG**

Nick Legan is the Technical Editor of Adventure Cyclist and is making his fourth attempt at the Tour Divide race this summer.

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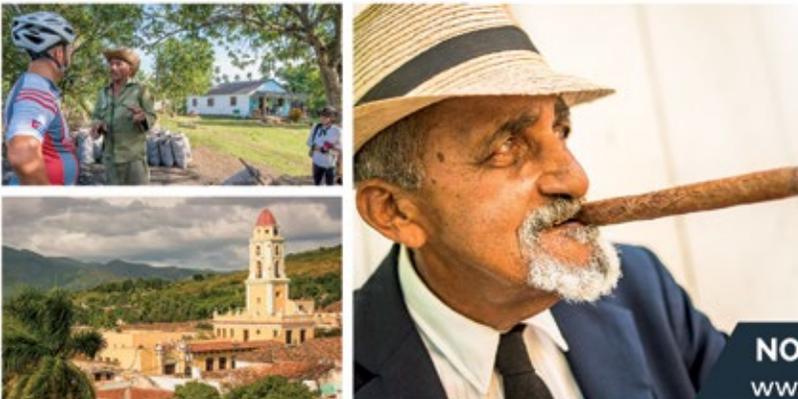


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