



# SPECIALIZED S-WORKS DIVERGE

BY NICK LEGAN

→ This is by far the longest-term review I've done during my time at *Adventure Cyclist*. I took delivery of a Specialized S-Works Diverge frameset in the fall of 2017. With over a year aboard the bike, thousands of miles covered, maintenance performed, and parts replaced, the Diverge — despite a few quirks — has become a trusted cycling companion.

The Diverge is somewhat unique in the dropbar bicycle world, with two standout features setting it apart. The first is the front suspension. The Diverge offers 20mm of progressive travel using Specialized's Future Shock, an assembly built into the headset. The bike arrives with three different springs of varying stiffness that can be used in the Future Shock. I settled on the stiffest one and haven't looked back. While some riders worried that the suspension would affect the handling of the bike, in my experience it has only been a positive effect. Even when sprinting out of the saddle, you simply don't notice the Future Shock. But on rough roads it certainly takes the edge off. Make no bones about it, this doesn't smooth out a rough trail the way a full suspension mountain bike can, but it's great for long miles on tarmac, dirt, and gravel.

The second divergence (get it?) from many other gravel bikes is the exceptionally low bottom bracket.

## SPECIALIZED S-WORKS DIVERGE

**Price:** \$4000 (frameset, w/ seatpost, Ceramicspeed BB, and spares box)

**Sizes available:** 48cm, 52cm, 54cm, 56cm, 58cm, 61cm (and 64cm as complete)

**Weight:** 19.02 lbs. (as tested, no pedals)

## TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

- **Stack:** 613mm
- **Reach:** 379mm
- **Head tube length:** 178mm (including 50mm Future Shock)
- **Head tube angle:** 72.5°
- **Seat tube:** 500mm
- **Seat tube angle:** 73.5°
- **Top tube:** 561mm (effective)
- **Chainstays:** 421mm
- **Bottom bracket drop:** 85mm
- **Fork Offset:** 50mm
- **Trail:** 60mm (calculated using 40mm tire)
- **Wheelbase:** 1025mm
- **Standover height:** 776mm

## SPECIFICATIONS

- **Frame:** S-Works FACT 11r carbon, Open Road Geometry, flat mount disc, three bottle mounts, fender mounts
- **Fork:** S-Works FACT carbon, flat mount disc, mid-blade fork mounts, fender mounts
- **Handlebar:** FSA Adventure compact alloy, 400mm
- **Stem:** PRO Vibe 7S 120mm
- **Brake levers:** Shimano R8070 hydraulic/Di2
- **Brake calipers:** Shimano Ultegra R8070 flat mount, 160mm Center Lock rotors
- **Shift levers:** Shimano R8070 hydraulic/Di2
- **Front derailleur:** Shimano Ultegra R8050



- **Rear derailleur:** Shimano Ultegra RX805-GS
- **Crankset:** Shimano Ultegra R8000, 172.5mm, 46/34T
- **Cassette:** Shimano HG800 11–34T, 11spd
- **Bottom bracket:** Wheels Manufacturing for press fit, 24mm spindle
- **Seatpost:** Thomson Elite, 27.2mm
- **Saddle:** Selle SMP Blaster
- **Headset:** Specialized Diverge, with Future Shock, 20mm travel
- **Hubs:** Shimano RS770 straight-pull, 100 x 12mm front, 142 x 12mm rear, thru-axles
- **Rims:** Shimano RS770 tubeless, carbon laminate, 24h
- **Tires:** Michelin Power Gravel, 700c x 40mm

#### GEARING RANGE

	46	34
11	115.5	85.4
13	97.8	72.4
15	84.8	62.7
17	74.9	55.2
19	66.8	49.4
21	60.5	44.7
23	55.2	40.9
25	50.8	37.5
27	46.9	34.8
30	42.2	31.2
34	37.3	27.6

**Contact:** Specialized Bicycle Components, Inc.  
15130 Concord Circle, Morgan Hill, CA 95037,  
877.808.8154, [specialized.com](http://specialized.com)



While many gravel bikes have settled on 70mm of bottom bracket drop (a vertical measurement taken from a line that bisects the front and rear axles), the Diverge BB drops 85mm. That's a pretty big difference, one that is noticeable in two instances: fast descending/overall handling and crankarm clearance. One is a joy, the other is a nuisance.

The Diverge handles like a dream, aided by wide tires (up to 700c x 42mm tires clear the frame and fork), the Future Shock, and its stable yet lively geometry. The low bottom bracket height gives you a feeling of being *inside* the bike, or between the wheels, instead of atop it. It lowers the rider's center of gravity and lends a sense of confidence on both paved and dirt descents. I've ridden the Diverge with everything from 28mm to 42mm tires, and in all cases the bike loved to carve a corner.

The downside to the Diverge's exceptionally low BB is that it's easy to clip a pedal or crankarm in rocky or wooded terrain. If you like to tackle the occasional singletrack section, the Diverge requires a bit of finesse to navigate without a crank strike. While annoying in those instances, on more refined surfaces it's rarely an issue, though it does mean that you won't be pedaling through corners the way you can on a bike with a higher bottom bracket.

The fork trail (the horizontal distance between the front tire's contact patch and where a line through the steering axis would hit the ground) is kept close to what you would see on a road touring bike at 60mm with 40mm tires fitted. So the Diverge is set up for stability when it has large tires. Switching to narrower tires will

decrease the trail and bring it more in line with a road racing bike. With a 28mm tire, the trail changes to 56mm, within 1mm of Specialized's Tarmac model. So the Diverge can be made a bit livelier with narrower tires, which is an option I appreciate.

### MY BUILD

As for parts on the Diverge, I installed a Shimano Ultegra R8000 Di2 group with hydraulic disc brakes and the new RX clutch rear derailleur. I ran nonstock 46/34T chainrings and an 11-34T cassette. This gave me a 1:1 low gear, which is great for gravel riding though still a bit tall for touring. While the Diverge served as a test rig for many different parts, more often than not I used a pair of Shimano RS770 tubeless wheels shod with a variety of tires, many of them reviewed here at *Adventure Cyclist*.

When sold as a frameset, and in certain complete bike packages, the Diverge arrives with Specialized's CG-R seatpost, a kinked carbon post with an integrated elastomer that helps

dissipate vibrations. Unfortunately, its setback is too much for my short femurs. Instead I used a zero setback Thomson Elite seatpost to mount my beloved Selle SMP Blaster saddle. Up front I paired a PRO stem and FSA's alloy Adventure handlebar. Finally, I run iSSi Flash III pedals with extra long +6mm spindles.

### VERSATILITY

Billed as an "adventure and gravel bike" by Specialized, the Diverge, like many gravel bikes, has an incredible amount of built-in versatility: it offers three bottle cage mounts, front and rear fender mounts, and a front rack can be fitted thanks to mid-blade fork mounts. This means that using bikepacking bags, or a combination of bikepacking bags and front panniers, makes the Diverge a handy light touring bike. While my gearing choice is aimed at gravel riding and racing, it's certainly possible with subcompact cranks (e.g. 46/30T chainrings) and wide-range cassettes to lower the gears sufficiently for light touring.

While most definitely expensive (the S-Works line is Specialized's premier range), that price tag delivers a light bicycle. Built with reliable components, the Diverge I've ridden and raced for the last year weighs 19 lbs. That's an exceptional weight for a bike with 40mm tires, aluminum wheels, bars, stem, seatpost, and 20mm of suspension. That's something that any rider can appreciate.

But if you don't want to plunk down four grand for a frameset, note that Specialized produces a wide range of Diverge bicycles. Base models with aluminum frames forego the Future Shock but bring the price down to \$1,100 for a complete bike. But that still gets you plenty of tire clearance, a carbon fork with mid-blade mounts, and a Shimano dual chainring drivetrain with a 1:1 low gear. Importantly, the Diverge E5 also receives the same geometry as the S-Works, with its low bottom bracket and dialed front-end numbers. To get the Future Shock, you'll want to look



at the E5 Comp models. They again utilize an aluminum frame, but the price is bumped up to \$1,900 for the suspension and nicer components. Spend another \$200 and you can start to look at a bike with a carbon frame and Future Shock. Crane your neck even higher and you can direct your gaze at the top of the heap S-Works Diverge, available in \$9,000 and \$10,000 variants.

Beyond light touring, I love that with a change of wheels I can join my friends on a road ride and then the next day switch it back to explore mining roads and singletrack. This isn't a feature exclusive to the Diverge; many gravel bikes can be used this way. But with its low bottom bracket and dialed trail measurement, the handling manners of the Specialized suit me nicely. We've also received a number of letters from readers over the past few years who have outfitted Diverge models in many touring configurations that still perform well unloaded — it's a popular machine.

The *pièce de résistance* though is the Future Shock. The different springs can be swapped by an attentive home mechanic. The trickiest part is the headset preload adjustment, which requires a couple of tiny hex keys. (If you have any questions, certainly head to a dealer.) Instead of adjusting the spring solely with a rider's weight in mind, it's better to tailor the suspension for the terrain you typically cover. A lighter rider who sticks to tarmac will be best served by the lightest spring. But a heavy rider who also stays on paved roads won't necessarily need the heaviest spring. The medium (default) spring is likely best. Because I'm a medium to light rider, but I ride on rough roads and trails, the stiffest spring suits me. That little bit of suspension sets apart the Diverge, and it's something that can add miles to any cyclist's life as it saves hands, backsides, and joints from the jarring nature of cycling. **AG**

Nick Legan is the Technical Editor of Adventure Cyclist.

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