“That’s a green bike,” my wife noted. When she’s right, she’s right. Man, is this Surly Disc Trucker ever green. Greener than Slimer in Ghostbusters. Greener than Father Karras after Regan barfed on him in The Exorcist. Greener than the Incredible Hulk and the Jolly Green Giant arm-wrestling across a pool table in County Clare on St. Patrick’s Day.

Did I mention it’s green? The color is officially called Pea Lime Soup. But when I rode the bike wearing my red Gore jersey, the dish that sprang to mind was a Christmas enchilada platter (which in New Mexico means both red and green chile).

Hot plate, señores!

This new Disc Trucker marks my first professional involvement with Surly, which seems odd, given my personality. You’d think they’d be using my mug shot as a head badge.

But I’m not unfamiliar with the brand, having known cyclists who swore by their Surlys as reliable, affordable bikes. One friend in Colorado used to flog me and my Steelman Eurocross with his Surly Cross-Check. Two others have owned Long Haul Truckers, one in 26in., the other in 700c. The latter got stolen here in Albuquerque, and the owner misses it terribly.

Both the rim brake Long Haul Trucker, introduced in 2004, and the Disc Trucker, which dates to 2012, are billed as “suitable for traveling
anywhere in the world on mostly paved roads."

The 2020 Disc Trucker takes that a little further afield, aiming for “all-day, everyday comfort with all kinds of loads on all kinds of roads.”

Can you say … “gravel?”

Sure you can.

Thus the freshly updated Disc Trucker sports more mounts for hydration, storage, and other bikepacking accessories; more tire clearance on the 700c platform; shortened chainstays for greater maneuverability; and more standover clearance in case the kind of road you’re on mostly is not one.

There have been tradeoffs. The previous Disc Trucker was a 10-speed, with MicroSHIFT bar-cons; now it’s a 9-speed, with Shimano Sora STI. I like 9-speed, but I also like bar-cons; five of my own bikes are so equipped.

Braking got a nudge upward, from Avid BB7 to TRP Spyre flat-mounts. The Shimano Deore hubs and derailleurs gave way to Novatec, Alivio, and Sora. And an Alivio triple crank replaced the Andel triple, though the number of teeth remains the same (48/36/26T).

Finally, the price has risen slightly, from $1,550 to $1,675.

The complete package reminds me of my disc brake Soma Saga, a review bike I liked enough to buy. Their geometry and weights are similar, and so is the spec, because I’ve made a couple of changes to the Soma since that review (see the May 2015 edition of Adventure Cyclist). The Saga now has Spyres and Schwalbe Little Big Ben tires, which look a good deal like the Disc Trucker’s tubeless-ready Surly ExtraTerrestrials, only without the U-shaped side blocks.

But the Surly has that sweet low end of 21 gear inches, three better than the Soma. And boy, was I glad
to have it when I broke my right ankle running before I could even throw a leg over the bike.

I spent the next few weeks test-riding crutches and a clunky removable boot, occasionally taking short, slow spins on the stationary trainer. When I traded the boot for a brace that let me wear low-rise hikers, I braved the great outdoors on an old mountain bike with flat pedals. A few weeks after that, I moved the flats to the Surly, and off we went.

So when I tell you that the Disc Trucker is geared so nicely that a stove-up old rounder with a hitch in his gitalong can ride it in hiking boots, well — for a change, it’s not just hyperbole.

Being judicious about recovery and nonessential outings kept my “tours” down to about 90 minutes at a crack — the equivalent of a bike overnight ride to a Central Avenue no-tell motel and back again.

Still, the Disc Trucker and I have covered some rough ground in those short rides, paved and unpaved, hard and loose, up, down, and all around. And if I were hunting a new touring bike for when (and if) my ankle and the rest of the world return to business as usual, the Disc Trucker would definitely be on my shopping list.

With that 21-inch low gear you don’t have to muscle the bike up a steep grade, and it’s not at all stodgy on curvy downhills. Even with the ExtraTerrestrials pumped to 50/55 PSI, it slaps all the ugly out of a bad road, though you might consider something with a little more grab if you spend a lot of time away from hard surfaces.

The other day I left a hardpack climb for a short stretch of singletrack to avoid a cluster of hikers and promptly washed out the front wheel in a loose uphill corner.

If you’re an old roadie who likes to slam the stem, the tall head tube and Truck Stop handlebar with its 30mm of rise — yes, rise — will give you a bird’s-eye view of the road ahead without a thick stack of spacers. I did most of my riding with hands on the tops as though I were riding a mountain bike with a riser bar. But I would do that on a regular bar too.

• If you prefer to do your trucking with rim brakes, Surly has you covered there, too. The venerable Long Haul Trucker remains very much in the product line, according to product manager Amy Kippley. “Our Long Haul Trucker is the best,” she said. “We’re team savetherimbrake all the way. People love to build that frame up and make it their own. There’s nothing quite like touring-tinkering.” The LHT runs $1,350 ready to ride and $515 for a frameset.
• The mandolin sketched on the seat tube honors Disc Trucker engineer Ben Jungbauer, according to marketing manager Dan Rasmussen. Jungbauer plays the instrument in a folk/bluegrass band, “so we put that on there sort of as a nod to him,” he explained. “But I think it also captures the vibe of the Disc Trucker and long-distance touring in general.”
Another interesting twist: the thru-axles. The axle is captured in the usual fashion on the drive-side dropout, but there’s a vertical slot in the other dropout.

The idea is to ease removal of the rear wheel, according to product manager Amy Kippley. The slot lets the wheel drop straight down when the axle is removed, and the setup helps make sure the frame “feels stiff and nimble when fully loaded,” she said.

Speaking of fully loaded, the racks-and-sacks crowd should find plenty to like in the new Disc Trucker. Mounts abound at front and rear — for racks I used a Tubus Tara and Logo Evo — and the frame has three sets of bottle bosses, plus a spoke holder. No pump peg, though.

More of a bikepacker, are you? That’s one reason there’s no pump peg to rub a hole in your framebag, and why you’ll find three-pack mounts on each fork leg, plus two more at the crown in case you want to add a carrier like Surly’s 8-Pack Rack.

“With the growth in popularity of framebags, we found many folks were no longer taking advantage of the pump pegs,” said Kippley. “Additionally, many folks are swapping to wider tires and not running as high of a pressure, so smaller pumps have become more common for quick fixes on the fly.”

When you’re ready to fly, you’ll find a Disc Trucker for nearly every size and style of tourist. It can be had as a complete ready-to-ride bike or as a frameset, with six sizes available in the 26in. model and five in the 700c.

And as Henry Ford once said, you can have it in any color you like, as long as it’s green. Or was that Kermit the Frog? ☺

Patrick O’Grady is a contributing writer for Adventure Cyclist.