



NEW ALBION PRIVATEER

Price: \$390 (frame); \$130 (fork)

Sizes available: 650b: 44cm, 48cm, 50cm; 700c: 52cm, 54cm, 56cm, 58cm, 60cm, 64cm

Size tested: 58cm

Weight: 26.6 lbs. (with rack, but without pedals)

TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

- **Stack:** 612mm
- **Reach:** 391mm
- **Head tube length:** 185mm
- **Head tube angle:** 72°
- **Seat tube length:** 580mm (center to top)
- **Seat tube angle:** 72.5°
- **Top tube:** 585mm (effective)
- **Chainstays:** 435mm
- **Bottom bracket drop:** 72mm
- **Bottom bracket height:** 280mm
- **Fork offset:** 50mm
- **Wheelbase:** 1048mm
- **Standover height:** 820mm

SPECIFICATIONS

- **Frame:** Tange Infinity double-butted chromoly steel main triangle with tapered chromoly rear tubes, rack and fender mounts, three bottle mounts, pump peg, semi-horizontal dropouts
- **Fork:** Chromoly steel, lugged, cantilever bosses, rack and fender mounts, low-rider mounts
- **Handlebar:** Soma Hwy One, 31.8mm clamp, 440mm
- **Stem:** Soma Crane, 31.8mm clamp, 80mm, 17° rise
- **Rear derailleur:** Shimano Deore RD-T610-SGS Touring, 10spd
- **Front derailleur:** IRD Sub-C braze-on (plus clamp)
- **Brake levers:** Gran Compe
- **Shift levers:** Rivendell Silver friction bar-cons

NEW ALBION PRIVATEER

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

→ Sometimes the adventure in adventure cycling is simply finding the bike.

As an ill wind swept the globe in 2020, staples many of us took for granted — yeast, toilet paper, bicycles — vanished like MREs at a preppers' jamboree.

If it could roll, roll it did, and right out of sight too. Big-box cheapos, bike-shop beauties, garage-sale beaters.

My friends and I traded bullets about parts availability and serviceable alternatives, like quarantine cooks wondering what they might substitute for some crucial ingredient in an otherwise doable recipe.

One colleague desperate for adventure, a freelance photographer largely idled by the pandemic, dragged a 30-year-old Bianchi out of his basement, had it set to rights by a local shop, and went kyoodling around and about in the long gaps between assignments.

Naturally, this is when *Adventure Cyclist* emailed to ask if I had my eye on anything to review ... assuming we could get it.

In fact, I had been casually interested in a throwback of sorts, a Pescadero from Soma Fabrications. Described on the Soma website as “an evolutionary hop and sidestep to the traditional road sport/endurance road frame,” the chromoly Pescadero accepts wide tires and rim brakes, two of my favorite things.



- **Brakes:** Paul Component Engineering MiniMoto
- **Crankset:** IRD Defiant, 46/30T, 172.5mm
- **Cassette:** IRD Elite Wide Range 10spd, 11-34T
- **Bottom bracket:** IRD QB55, threaded
- **Headset:** Tange Seiki TechnoGlide threadless, 1 1/8in.
- **Seatpost:** Soma Layback, 27.2mm
- **Saddle:** Soma Hishou, chromoly rails
- **Hubs:** Shimano 600, 132.5 x 9mm rear, 100 x 9mm front, QR
- **Rims:** Mavic Open Pro, 32h
- **Tires:** Soma Everwear, 700c x 38mm

GEARING RANGE

| | 46 | 30 |
|----|-------|------|
| 11 | 114.9 | 75.0 |
| 13 | 97.3 | 63.5 |
| 15 | 84.4 | 55.0 |
| 17 | 74.5 | 48.4 |
| 19 | 66.5 | 43.4 |
| 21 | 60.2 | 39.3 |
| 24 | 52.8 | 34.4 |
| 27 | 46.7 | 30.5 |
| 30 | 42.0 | 27.5 |
| 34 | 37.1 | 24.2 |

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PATRICK O'GRADY

But when I emailed Stan Pun of Merry Sales about it, he replied that the Pescadero was not to be had in any size. No new stock until November, maybe December.

And then, like a savvy chef glancing at his pantry, he added: “We do have new Privateers in stock. Our only other rim-bike frame.”

And so the adventure began.

The Privateer wears the badge of New Albion Cycles, like Soma a Merry Sales brand. An all-rounder capable of medium-duty touring, commuting, and just plain rolling around to no particular purpose, the Privateer is “like a Soma Double Cross with a lower bottom bracket height, longer chainstays, and heavier tubes,” Pun said.

“Like a Soma Double Cross” is a good recommendation. I did a lightly loaded three-day tour on one some years back, and it served me well, especially on the final day, which included a longish, rolling unpaved stretch.

Like a Double Cross, the Privateer is versatile. The chromoly frame has 132.5mm rear spacing so you can use either 130mm or 135mm hubs. Dropbar? Sure thing. MTB bar? If that’s how you roll. Speaking of rolling, the semi-horizontal dropouts give you some latitude as regards drivetrain: derailleurs, internally geared hub, or singlespeed.

And if you are still not sold on the now-ubiquitous disc brakes, you have your choice of cantilevers or V-brakes.

Assuming you can find any of these items, that is.

“Yes, parts are hard to wrangle,” Pun conceded. “We haven’t even built any new Privateers for photos.”

Thus began the convoluted process of getting me aboard one. It recalled a couple of observations by author, poet, and gourmand Jim Harrison, who was known to argue that great cuisines “tend to arise from economies of scarcity” that demanded “resourcefulness in the kitchen, or what the tenzo in a Zen monastery would call ‘skillful means.’”

Fortunately, Pun is exceptionally resourceful — we have worked together on previous road tests that began with bare framesets — and between us and the guys at Two Wheel Drive in Albuquerque, we managed to build a bike that I've come to like a whole lot.

How could I not?

Finding a frameset and proceeding from there is an adventure in its own right. But it does help to start with a map, which is basically a recipe for what we hope will be a delicious journey. And I had experience with almost every ingredient we baked into my Privateer.

The Soma Hwy One handlebar, Rivendell Silver shifters and Deore rear derailleur, Gran Compe brake levers and Paul Component Engineering brakes, IRD Defiant subcompact crank — all can be found on some of my own bikes.

The wheels I robbed from my Voodoo Wazoo — did I mention there was a parts shortage going on? — so we weren't in terra incognita there either, though Soma's Everwear tires were new to me. And the Soma Hishou saddle

and Paul's MiniMoto brakes had been gathering dust on a shelf in my garage, awaiting the call to duty.

What undiscovered country there was would mostly be found in the Privateer frame and fork, a quietly stylish matte black with cream and copper accents. Happily, the frameset likewise felt familiar, possibly because I went into the review straight from an extended period of riding my 2011 Soma Saga touring bike.

Their stats were similar but not identical. The Privateer's main triangle uses the slightly heavier Tange Infinity instead of the Saga's Tange Prestige. But with its shorter chainstays and slightly tighter wheelbase — and a much lighter wheelset — the Privateer leapt where the Saga loped.

With its extra-tall head tube and comfortable upright position, it felt very much the all-rounder on my usual routes around Albuquerque — east on Old Route 66 through Tijeras, west through the North Valley to the Rio Grande and the Paseo del Bosque, up and down Tramway Road.

The 46/30T double crank didn't feel like wishful thinking because the Privateer, even with its Soma Rakku rear rack installed, was just 12 ounces heavier than the currently rackless Saga with its triple setup. A bottom end of 30x34 (24.2 gear inches) was fine for rolling terrain and moderate loads.

Without the Saga's 20-inch granny, I was a few seconds slower than usual on one mile-long 6 percent climb over crumbling chip-seal, and I huffed and puffed a little bit more. But the Privateer felt a lot livelier when bombing descents, diving through corners, or powering over rollers. Sure, you can shift down a cog or two, but the bike makes you want to pop out of the saddle and keep churning that big gear.

And the Everwear tires may be my new go-to armored 38mm. Pun and I discussed going with Soma Shikoros — I run a 33mm pair on my Nobilette and appreciate their ride quality and durability — but I wanted to try something different. And I'm glad I did. I haven't flatted an Everwear yet, and they're lighter and feel less boxy than

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the Schwalbe Little Big Bens I use on other bikes.

The Privateer fork has mounts for a low-rider rack, but I didn't install one. The Saga is for the long march; I wanted the Privateer to stay light on its feet.

I even considered losing the rear rack, but in the end decided against it; framebags are fine for streamlined light-and-fast travel, but sometimes you just want to make a quick run to the store for some toilet paper and yeast.

If I wanted to get away from it all while still taking quite a bit of it with me, totally self-contained, camping and cooking and cycling across undulating country for the better part of quite some time, my first choice would be the Saga.

But if I were thinning the herd down to one bike that could handle almost anything, I'd go straight for the Privateer. It's just the ticket for the shorter skull-flushing trips that seem so essential these days — get out, get back, have a few yuks in between — especially if there are any rocky roads on your map. Strap on an Arkel TailRider, some Dry-Lite mini-panniers, a Revelate Sweetroll, and go.

This build is elegant but extravagant. With a garage full of racks and tires, cantis and brake levers, cranks, derailleurs, and shifters, I could've Frankenbiked the Privateer on the cheap. And so can you. What we eventually cobbled together would cost more at retail than the standard \$1,500 off-the-rack Bike of the Week Club model that nobody had in stock.

But it's almost exactly what I wanted. Not a Soma Pescadero, but then I'm not sitting around the house waiting for it to show up either. I can pull the Privateer off its hook right now and go for a ride.

In fact, I believe I'll do just that.

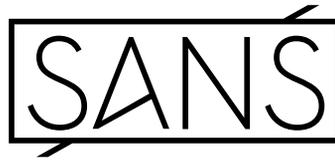
At \$520 for frame and fork, the New Albion Privateer is a sturdy, sensible set of bones. Put your skull to work on one. The bounding main awaits. 

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

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