



ROAD TEST

Monē Bikes La Roca

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HANDLEBAR

Oddmonē bar by Oddity Cycles, 75mm rise, 15° sweep, 805mm wide

STEM

La Roca Stubby fillet-brazed stem

PANNIERS

Buckhorn wax canvas

SEATPOST

PNW Rainier

FORK

La Roca rigid fork with triple mounts, rack and fender mounts

FRAME

Triple-buttressed 4130 air-hardened steel

MONÉ BIKES LA ROCA

• **BEST USES:** Mountain biking, bikepacking

• **PRICE:** \$1,325 for frame, roughly \$5,000 as tested

• **WEIGHT:** 29.5 lbs. (without pedals)

• **AVAILABLE SIZES:** S, M, L, XL

• **SIZE TESTED:** S

► Cjell Moné started welding frames in a 1990 Wonder Bread truck, the life of a true traveling artist and adventuring spirit, riding and building wherever the wind took him. They are still custom built in that truck, parked in Silver City, New Mexico, as well as production built in Taiwan by a collection of skilled frame-builders. The bike tested here is a production model, with the custom sizes or more artistic designs left for the magic of the bread truck. However, it is also Cjell's personal ride (work perks), so it was shipped to me dialed the way the creator best envisioned it, complete with rack and panniers (you never know when you want to stop for a snack or end up passing a bookstore).

The La Roca is bling but not gaudy, like a gold incisor with a tiny diamond on the cap. The fillets are clean and textured, highlighted — nay, celebrated — in gold. This is, of course, purely aesthetic, but the sort of attention to detail that goes into aesthetics is, to me, like a clean bathroom in a restaurant. It's an indicator that attention is being paid everywhere. The matching stem and handlebars are a nice touch, and even the studs of the Odyssey pedals, the valve caps, and the housing ferrules are gold, which really ties the whole look together. The gearing is also pretty fantastic, with a wide range perfect for the sorts of riding I wanted to do on this bike (and that's available in the Missoula area), the 11–50T range paired with the 34T chainring allowing for very easy climbing without overly spinning on flats.

On first ride, I took the La Roca on a multisurface ride that included pavement, dirt roads, and singletrack. It was a very wet spring and early summer, by Montana standards, so I got a chance to ride through mud, slush, and dust as the

weather shifted to our typical dry season. The La Roca feels like a definitive nod to a klunker, but with all the power of gearing and hydraulic brakes I'd want in a new bike, and a dropper post to allow for better body positioning. The klunker vibe manifested in my desire to ride this bike on singletrack in cutoff shorts and Montana-made Bedrock sandals. Yes, I am in charge of my decisions, but the La Roca was really influential as I headed out the door, whispering in my ear, "Try having some fun!" I crossed paths with a few full-suspension riders, who all smiled at my fully rigid ride as we pushed up the mountain at a surprisingly not-pained pace. Maybe it wasn't so much the bike, but the broad smile I had on my own face as I relinquished just about all stress of the day. I was on the clock, technically, but felt like I was playing hookie with a new friend, spending the afternoon playing in the woods rather than painstakingly dissecting a bike's handling.

On the descent, the Maxxis Rekon tires grabbed hold of every rock I rolled over and I felt very confident picking up some speed, and the short reach of the bike allowed me to feel nimble on switchbacks while still totally in control and not twitchy when maneuvering over various obstacles. The rear brake was a bit soft and squeaky, but it didn't hinder my ability to cruise down the ribbon of single-track that traced the edge of the mountain as it cascaded back to the road. After my own adjustments failed me, I took it into Hellgate Cyclery, our local bike shop, where it was confirmed that the brake had a warranty issue. Hey, it happens. Back in action with a replacement caliper, I felt confident enough to take the bike on an overnight. The Old Man Mountain Divide is a lightweight rear rack designed to be

compatible with thru-axles and mountain bike geometry, and the Buckhorn panniers are simple waxed canvas panniers that Velcro close and roll tight with plastic buckles. I didn't have success keeping them tightly rolled on rides when they weren't filled, but nothing fell out thanks to the Velcro, and the panniers stayed perfectly in place. Once filled, the closures seemed to work a bit better, and while fairly small, with a sleeping pad strapped to the top of the rack, I was able to carry everything I needed for an overnight very easily and plow through the trails on my way to my destination without worry of anything falling off the bike.

The bend of the Oddmoné handlebar doesn't work well with my wrist for long, straight, in-the-saddle climbs (for example, riding up a forest service road versus a flat bike path, or on terrain that causes me to constantly shift my weight). The pain ended up migrating up my arm and I thought this was possibly due to a break years ago that didn't heal correctly, but a coworker borrowed the bike and reported it also hurt his wrist. While it's a beautiful bar, it may be worth considering what sort of bend works best for your body, which is solid advice for any bike you are putting together piecemeal.

It's easy to love this bike. It feels absurd to describe a bike as *charming*, but I was charmed. Despite the sore arm, I found myself looking forward to getting to take this bike wherever I was headed, knowing it was able to handle it but not without making me feel like a kid in the process. Really, what else is there in a bike? Oh yeah — artistry, and this bike has it in spades. 📍

Carolyne Whelan is the Editor-in-Chief of Adventure Cyclist.

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