Soma Jawbone B-Type

Chainstays: 435-455mm, adjustable

Brifters: Shimano GRX 11spd

Brakes:
- Shimano RS785
- Shimano GRX
- Shimano GRX 11spd

Rear Derailier: Shimano GRX 11spd

Words and photo by Cody Siler
The Jawbone is available as a frameset only, with two versions: the A-Type and the B-Type. The A-Type is designed for parts-bin tinkerers, while the B-Type offers riders versatility, more compatibility and the simplicity.

The B-Type is for parts-bin, tinkerers, singlespeed, devotees, and world tourists who may be attracted to the internal hub compatibility and the simplicity.

### A-Type

- **Stack**: 55mm
- **Reach**: 377mm
- **Head Tube Angle**: 70.5°
- **Top Tube**: 555mm
- **Head Tube Length**: 155mm
- **Bottom Bracket**: 142 x 12mm thru-axle
- **Standover Height**: 805.3mm
- **Bottom Bracket**: IRD, 24mm, BSA, 73mm
- **Rotor**: Yokozuna, 180mm and 160mm (6-bolt)
- **Rules**: Standard IS disc mounts
- **Price**: Frame ($770) and fork ($270) combo, seems like a solid mid-range option for riders in search of a fun, durable, and modern single-speed, gravel, and/or touring hardtail.

### B-Type

- **Stack**: 595mm
- **Reach**: 377mm
- **Head Tube Angle**: 70.5°
- **Top Tube**: 555mm
- **Head Tube Length**: 155mm
- **Bottom Bracket**: 142 x 12mm thru-axle
- **Standover Height**: 805.3mm
- **Bottom Bracket**: IRD, 24mm, BSA, 73mm
- **Rotor**: Yokozuna, 180mm and 160mm (6-bolt)
- **Rules**: Standard IS disc mounts
- **Price**: Frame ($770) and fork ($270) combo, seems like a full-featured, versatile option for riders who want to do it all: ride smooth-to-medium singletrack and tackle far-off dirt-road over-lands.

First off, the Jawbone is available in two versions, the A-Type and the B-Type. The A-Type is focused onsimplicity, durability, and modern standards, while the B-Type offers riders versatility, more compatibility, and backward compatibility. The A-Type, then, is likely designed for weekend warriors, gravel all-rounder for day riding on gravel and light singletrack that invites bigger adventures with its sturdy touring potential. First off, the Jawbone is available in two versions, the A-Type and the B-Type. The A-Type is focused on simplicity, durability, and modern standards, while the B-Type offers riders versatility, more compatibility, and backward compatibility. The A-Type, then, is likely designed for weekend warriors, gravel all-rounder for day riding on gravel and light singletrack that invites bigger adventures with its sturdy touring potential.
it felt overly rigid on the descents. Even with 2.25in. tires at a relatively low pressure, I found myself with sore hands by the time I was halfway down the mountain. A stiff fork is exactly what you want if you’re going to load it up with serious weight for a long-distance tour, but for riders who are looking for a primarily day-riding machine, with occasional overnights as a secondary function, the Jawbone A-Type, with its Steve Potts fork, might be a better choice. On the other hand, if I were looking to pack up the bike and head south to Argentina, I would probably appreciate the sturdiness of the B-Type.

Despite its burly tubing and touring-ready appearance, the Jawbone B-Type is reasonably svelte. My build weighed in at just 30.4 pounds, which slimmmed down to 29.2 once I removed the Soma Lucas front rack and Shimano SPD pedals I was using. For a touring bike, the Jawbone climbs well. With high-volume 29in. tires, it felt playful on paved and unpaved climbs alike. It doesn’t accelerate quickly, but unless you’re talking ultra-high-end custom builds, few full-steel 29er bikes will. But once you get it going, the Jawbone is an enjoyable uphill ride. The bike’s relatively light weight and its comfortable tubing, coupled with Soma’s relaxed, upright geometry, make light, pleasant work of long climbs. You might not go fast, but you’ll have fun.

In terms of geometry, the Jawbone is fairly standard for a gravel bike of its class, comparable to bikes like the State All-Road 4130, the Kona Sutra, and the All-City Gorilla Monsoon, though a few things stand out. At 594mm for the 54cm frame I tested, the Jawbone’s stack is high, but not so high that you couldn’t build it with a fair amount of saddle-to-bar drop if you chose. On the other hand, the bike’s reach is agreeably short, offering a fairly upright position that allows you to open your chest. The short reach makes the bike comfortable, and riding it feels more like walking than running in terms of both cardiovascular discomfort and the machine’s natural speed. One potential downside of the relatively short reach is the potential for toe overlap, if that’s something that bothers you. Another interesting feature of the Jawbone’s geometry is its adjustable wheelbase. The bike’s horizontal dropouts allow you to adjust the chainstay length from 455mm, the longest, most stable setting, to 435mm, potentially fine-tuning its stability and acceleration for the ride you’re setting out on.

While the Jawbone’s longer wheelbase, stiffer tubing, and sloping top tube make it more trail-ready than the Wolverine, it’s not quite a dropbar mountain bike. Soma describes it as a “gravel bike that can fit mountain bike tires,” and that classification is borne out by some of their design choices: eschewing dropper post routing, for example. The Jawbone isn’t compatible with most aftermarket suspension forks, either, and Soma cautions against trying to fit it even with a 40mm travel gravel fork. The Jawbone is definitely a sturdy bike, and it can handle gravel roads and light singletrack, but it’s not built for anything much rowdier than that.

When ridden unloaded, the Jawbone was comfortable and pleasant to ride on uphills and flats, but less stable and confidence-inspiring on descents than I had expected. Part of this likely has to do with the bike’s relatively high bottom bracket height. With 29er wheels and 2.25in. tires, I was sitting high above the ground. But it also has to do with the steering on the Jawbone, which, while not especially twitchy, wasn’t planted either. A bike with fast steering unloaded will feel perfect when the front end is loaded up, but a bike with slow steering will feel sluggish once you put some weight on the front end. A quick test confirmed this: when I strapped a six-pack of La Croix to the front rack and loaded up my rear seatbag, the steering settled into a comfortable middle ground.

Like the bottom bracket height, which is designed to accommodate a range of wheel/tire combos from 650b x 47mm to 29 x 2.25in., the skittish unloaded steering of the bike has to do with the fact that the Jawbone is designed as a true do-it-all machine, for touring and day riding, big wheels and small, on dirt and pavement alike. Any jack-of-all-trades will be a master of none, but the Jawbone definitely skew toward a specific kind of riding. The ideal environment for the bike might be the Tour Divide: a long-distance route, not especially technical, where riders are carrying their own gear over thousands of miles of dirt roads. If the Jawbone could do something like that — and I have no doubt it could — then it makes sense that it would be good, but not great, on day rides. On the other hand, if you’re looking for a faster gravel machine oriented towards lighter loads and gentle dirt roads, the Wolverine might be your best bet.

Finally, about the build. My Jawbone came built up with a wide-range 2x Shimano GRX groupset, which allowed me to carry my momentum on the flats and downhills and still spin up steep, rocky slopes. The hydraulic disc brakes performed far better than rim brakes or mechanical discs would have fared in the same conditions, especially once things got wet. The wheels felt relatively responsive, which is saying something considering they were clad in huge mountain bike tires. On the other hand, the stiffness at the rear end wasn’t quite what I would have liked, especially when I was standing up and applying heavy torque. Personally, if I was going to build up the Jawbone B-Type as a geared gravel bike with a standard, external derailier, I would probably shell out for the thru-axle dropout inserts, which would allow you to run a more modern wheelset and add some stiffness to the back end. If you were going for a more off-road specific build, a wide-range 1x groupset would offer more simplicity and fewer parts to break. And for a world-touring machine, I could easily see the Jawbone built up with a retro bar-end shifter setup, which would allow you to run a mountain-bike rear derailier for a huge gear range without the fussiness of indexing or brifters.

The Jawbone is a bike that, 10 years ago, would have been radical: with huge tire clearance and dropbar-specific geometry, its design is a result of the bigger-tires arms race that’s been going on among gravel bike manufacturers over the last decade. The problem with making and selling adventure-touring bikes like this one is that, ultimately, the market for them is pretty small. The number of people who take out their bikes for an afternoon gravel ride or a morning singletrack spin will always be far greater than the number of people who do the kind of multiday adventure rides that the Jawbone is built for. But whether you’re a member of the former or the latter camp — or if you, like most of us, do a little bit of both — the Jawbone is a solid middle-of-the-road purchase, good for riders with limited garage space or folks who want one bike that can do it all. It’ll be a reliable companion for spins around your local trails, and it’ll really shine when you have a chance to sink your teeth into a big, multiday ride.

Cody Siler is a writer, cyclist, and guide based in Oakland, California. He likes long rides, quiet roads, and sleeping on the ground.