

LINKING FACTOR

Santa Cruz use their twin linkage VPP suspension everywhere from the 216mm (8.5in) travel V10 DH bike to the 100mm (3.9in) Tallboy

READY TO ROLL

RockShox's Sektor fork is a cracking performer for the price and the quality Maxxis 3C tyres come set up tubeless from the start

CARBON COPY

The Bronson Carbon uses the same moulds as the flagship Carbon C but needs up to 280g more of the lower grade material to deliver the same stiffness

SANTA CRUZ BRONSON CARBON R AM +++++

£3,299 *New carbon Santa Cruz all-rounder drives a hard bargain*

SO GOOD

Stiff, lightweight, hard driving frame

Excellent value compared to the Carbon C

Sorted spec

NO GOOD

Rear shock needs careful tuning

Short wheelbase and high stiffness make it less stable in wide open corners or random rubble heaps

JARGON BUSTER

Tubeless

Tyre and rim combo with airtight edges and liquid sealant inside that can be inflated without an inner tube.

VPP

Virtual Pivot Point. Twin linkage system used by Santa Cruz and Intense to create a pivot point that shifts in space as the suspension moves

A full carbon Bronson bike for only £451 more than a flagship carbon Bronson frame sounds too good to be true. But the only obvious corner cutting on display here is its appetite for flat out enduro line choices.

The frame

According to Santa Cruz their new, cheaper carbon frames (confusingly called Carbon in the UK and Carbon C in the US) are made in the same premium composite factory as their top end carbon frames (now called Carbon C in the UK and Carbon CC in the US) using the same moulds but a lower grade of carbon fibre. That means they need to use more carbon to get the same stiffness but weights only increase by 250-280g depending on frame size. Seeing as the Bronson Carbon C is super light, that means the Carbon is still impressively light for a 150mm (5.9in) travel bike.

The two carbon bikes are geometrically and visually identical, and even the black/magenta or dark/lime green colour choices are the same. Apart from two alloy (rather than carbon) linkages, the grease injected, DIY serviceable VPP

suspension is the same too. As significant as the new carbon option is the fact that all Bronsons now get a new shock tune, whether it's on the Evolution series Fox Float CTD unit here or the £200 extra, Kashima coated Factory series version.

The kit

Another reason why Santa Cruz can drive such an aggressive bargain is that the new Bronson Carbon is only available in two complete bike formats – the £3,099 R AM tested here (with £200 KS LEV Integra seatpost upgrade) and the S AM with RockShox Pike RC fork and upgraded transmission for £3,999.

Despite its 32mm legs and simple internals, the RockShox Sektor kept pace with the much more expensive forks on the other bikes here. We didn't feel any pressing need to upgrade the Evolution series Fox shock to one of the Fox Factory or Cane Creek options either. The top quality, already tubeless Maxxis EXO Protection tyres deserve credit for adding subtle, controlled damping (as well as excellent grip) between bike and ground. The SRAM hubs have proved impressively durable too and the WTB rims are decent kit.

The Race Face cockpit kit is well proportioned, you get Santa Cruz's own grips and don't underestimate the consistent control levels of the Shimano Deore brakes either.

VPP bikes never feel great in the granny ring though and the Bronson is light enough to muscle a single-ring set-up with a standard cassette. That makes ditching the left-hand shifter, front mech and twin rings in favour of a narrow/wide ring a very tempting idea.

The ride

It's not just the lowest bike weight (13.58kg/29.94lb) and fast rolling Ardent rear tyre that make the Bronson big-gear ready. It's obvious straight away that Santa Cruz's stiffness claims aren't false because this is a serious powerhouse by any standards. The muscular monocoque (rather than tube bonded to tube) mainframe and rock solid, thick set rear stays have no hint of flex or softness whether you're stamping the pedals or straining on the bar.

The VPP suspension naturally stiffens under power to launch the Bronson forward whether you're sprinting out of a corner or grunting out the crux move on a technical **»**



**IT LOVES BEING FLICKED FROM CORNER TO
KICKER TO LIP TO DOWNSLOPE AT TRAIL
CENTRES OR KICKING UP ROOST OFF PISTE**

climb. Even with the Sektor fork it's equally precise and unflinching under steering or side loads too so you can make maximum use of the triple-compound rubber grip. It loves being flicked or flung from corner to berm to kicker to lip to downslope at trail centres or kicking up roost and launching boulder drops off piste. The punchy power delivery means maximum speed into every feature and the low weight helps you get the most airtime out of every situation. In other words, if you ride your

mountain bike like a big BMX you're going to love the Bronson.

As the shortest and stiffest bike here it does get rattled around more on big, rough sweeping turns and it's a bike that demands constant attention compared to the longer, lazier Orange. The VPP suspension carries speed well through big high-speed/flat-faced hits as long as you're off the power and the new shock tune removes the choke and clatter of the original damping, but careful pressure setting is needed to stop it blowing straight through its

travel without being too chattery off the top. 'Trail' mode is properly race firm, not just slightly stiffer, too. The fact the Bronson was the fastest Strava segment racer on test – on climbs and descents – proves it'll potentially reward with blisteringly fast all-round speed if you get it tuned right. >>>

MBUK

Still needs accurate suspension tuning, but a good value, laser accurate, premium label powerhouse all-rounder

