

### FULLY SUSSSED

The lower suspension link has been moved up above the BB to avoid rock strikes. The upper link now pivots in the 'armpit' of the front end to increase stiffness

### TOP DRAWER

The S AM has all the kit you need to make the most of the Bronson's aggressively dynamic ride, at an impressive price for a premium brand

### CUT-PRICE CARBON

The Bronson C uses a cheaper, heavier carbon mix than the CC but shares the same frame features

# SANTA CRUZ BRONSON II C S AM



**FRAME** C-level carbon fibre, 150mm (5.9in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RC Solo Air, 150mm (5.9in) travel **SHOCK** Fox Float EVOL Performance **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM GX w/ Race Face /effect cranks (1x11) **WHEELSET** Easton AR28 rims on SRAM MTH Boost hubs, Maxxis Minion DHR II 3C Maxx Terra EXO TR 27.5x2.3in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano SLX **BAR/STEM** Race Face Ride, 760/Race Face Turbine, 70mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/WTB Volt Race **WEIGHT** 13.4kg (29.6lb), large size without pedals **PRICE** £3,999 (complete bike) **CONTACT** Santa Cruz UK [www.santacruz bikes.co.uk](http://www.santacruz bikes.co.uk)

### SO GOOD

Addictively aggressive pump-and-play ride

Revamped frame is stiffer and more stable at speed

Suspension is impressively consistent, controlled and easy to set up

Good value for a premium brand

### NO GOOD

Firm and fast suspension feel tends to slide tyres earlier than soft and smooth shocks

Relatively heavy for a carbon trail bike



### JARGON BUSTER

**VPP** Virtual Pivot Point – Patented twin-linkage suspension system that Santa Cruz share (generally in a slightly different format) with Intense Cycles.

**S**anta Cruz have radically overhauled their Bronson all-rounder to create an addictively aggressive, adrenaline fuelled trail weapon that we couldn't get enough of.

## The frame

It's obvious at first glance that the revamped frame is longer, lower and slacker. The VPP linkages have been repositioned too, so the suspension doesn't stiffen as much under pedalling, and the rear end has the latest extra-wide Boost spacing.

The top-end CC carbon frame is available on its own (£2,799) or as a full build (£4,999), while the cheaper C-level version tested here only comes on complete bikes. It's heavy for carbon at 3.16kg (6.95lb) but equally stiff and strong as the premium version.

## The kit

Santa Cruz have added a well-matched component collection to wring maximum trail-ripping fun out of this relatively affordable and competitively priced bike. The mid-range RockShox Pike fork and Fox shock take everything you'd hope in their stride without stumbling and surprised us with how

well they coped when the addictively aggressive character of the Bronson put us the wrong side of the sensible and saveable line. The frame reach is now long enough to fit a properly short stem without compromising breathing space too, though we found the standard issue 70mm stem placed the front really well, particularly when we were powering up techy climbs ready to rip back down.

The only thing we'd definitely change is the Maxxis Minion DHR II rear tyre, which regularly spat its traction dummy well before we expected if we pressed the pedals hard on climbs or leaned on it too heavily through corners. Switching to a Maxxis Ardent semi-slick (standard spec on Santa Cruz's shorter-travel 5010) didn't reduce grip noticeably but put an extra gear into our legs whenever we had the chance to light it up.

Interestingly, despite an almost identical spec (minus piggyback shock and chain device), the Bronson C S AM is £600 cheaper than the equivalent Santa Cruz Nomad.

## The ride

Despite only 200g and 15mm of travel separating the Nomad and Bronson,

the ride feel is significantly different. If you're an aggressive rider who likes to exploit every possible trail feature to breed speed it's a very positive difference too. The Bronson has always been a tight feeling, naturally dynamic bike that loves to pump and drive forwards and rip tyres sideways through corners, and despite being significantly longer the mainframe feels just as stiff – if not stiffer – than before. Whether it's the repackaged linkage, a stiffer swingarm lay-up, the wider Boost wheel or a combination of all three, the back end is equally unyielding.

While the suspension-stiffening effect of pedalling is lessened by the new VPP layout, you can still feel the bike brace and the rear tyre bite with muscular intent as soon as you stamp on the pedals. This all creates a ferociously aggressive trail character that's gagging to be slid through every corner on the edge of its vividly communicated traction and then punched towards the next thrill section as hard as possible.

The old Bronson was similarly rabid in feel. The big difference with the new bike is that it's much better equipped to deal with the consequences of flinging yourself down the trail at full



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gas. The slacker head angle and extra length in the front end make it much more surefooted and stable, whether you're fighting to keep the front wheel straight through a rock garden or trying to grind the ends off the Santa Cruz grips through a slingshot berm.

The reconfigured suspension also has a much more forgiving response to the mid-sized or flat-faced hits that used to choke the old bike. That doesn't mean it's now a wallowy mess though – it's still a bike that definitely prefers to skim tops and pump downsides than just plough through

stuff lazily. The difference is that if you do get out of rhythm with the trail or blindsided by one impact too many, it'll provide the correct speed sustaining, balance maintaining answer for you rather than teaching you a lesson.

Because it's naturally firmer in feel under power and progressive enough to stay relatively high and predictably poised in corners, you can run less pressure and more sag than you'd expect without introducing wallow. The EVOL shock doesn't need muting with the compression damping lever just to get decent pedal response either. That

means the soft/medium/firm modes are now what they should be – a tool for tuning dynamic bike feel rather than a crutch to prop up poor pedalling performance. The downside of the firmer suspension feel is noticeably more tyre slide in corners, but if you value punchy power and playful pop it's certainly worth it. **guy** >>

**MBUK**

If you like your trail bikes tough, tight, punchy and infectious playful, then the Bronson II is a standout machine

