



SEE THE ALL-NEW **FOX RACING SHOX** WEBSITE

[HOME](#) [ARTICLES](#) [VIDEOS](#) [BROCARD](#) [BUY'N SELL](#) [THE BOARD](#) [PHOTO GALLERY](#) [NSMB TEAM](#) [STORE](#) [SEARCH](#) [LINKS](#)

NSMB.com > Gear > REVIEW - Santa Cruz Driver 8

Words by Connor Macleod. Photos by Derek Dix.
Date: 2009-06-01

Over the past few months, I have had the chance to get to know the **Santa Cruz Driver 8**. While the Driver 8 was created 1400km away in Santa Cruz, California, it felt right at home here on the North Shore. The Driver 8 is an all-new creation from Santa Cruz Bicycles, and shares some similarities from its brothers including the impressive VPP suspension and build quality we have come to expect from Santa Cruz Bicycles. The Driver 8's claim to fame is its versatility, durability and ability to delight. As a test pilot, it was my job to see whether the Driver 8 was able to live up to its high expectations.



The Santa Cruz Driver 8 in all its glory, before it gets a beat down in the forest.

Off the showroom floor, the Driver 8 delights with great lines, welds, parts and finishing touches you won't find on other bikes. As mentioned in the Gear Shots article, the bike is visually appealing with a handful of eye-catching high-end parts. With so many options on the market today, finding a bike with "wow-factor" is harder than you would expect. Well, the Driver 8 is one of the few bikes that possess the sought-after wow. Having a good looking bike seems to immediately instill a sense of confidence – you know when they look fast standing still.





It doesn't get much more picturesque than this. Does this end happily? Stay tuned...

When I wrote the Gear Shot for the Driver 8, I had only logged a couple weeks behind the bike. Nevertheless, I was impressed and eager to see what the Driver 8 could do. I was curious to see what others thought of the Driver 8, so I checked out the infamous nsmb.com forums. Like I said before, cyclists are a tough crowd to please, especially the nsmb forum users. Reactions varied from excitement and anticipation to weight weenies whining about nuts and bolts. While the Driver 8 wasn't given the chance to "pwn" the "133t newbs" on A-line, I still kicked the tires and bounced the suspension. "For those about to ride, I reviewed you – the Santa Cruz Driver 8"

First and foremost, the Driver 8 is a freeride bike. For me, freeride encompasses everything cycling offers: outdoors, adventure, excitement, trails, challenges and good times spent with friends. To date, the Driver 8 has exceeded every one of those requests. Adding to its freeride ability is its 7" of up and down seat adjustment, burly yet refined 1.5" head tube and a set of grease ported pivots even I could maintain.



The grease port makes it easy to service the pivots, even if you're more skilled on the trails than with a wrench.

Unlike some full-on DH bikes, Santa Cruz kept pedaling ability in mind with the Driver 8. With the seat up and the fork locked out, you are able to pedal the 42lb Driver 8 without too much heartache. The second-generation VPP suspension platform does a great job reducing pedal bob. My test bike came equipped with a 38T Gamut guide, which I would like to see replaced with a 34T ring for better pedaling and versatility.



The Gamut chainguide had a bigger chainring than the terrain called for.

The Driver 8 features second gen VPP suspension technology, which means you'll have more fun period. The revised suspension has a flatter shock rate which means a less dramatic falling rate at the beginning of travel, and less of a rising rate near bottom-out. The instant center of the rear suspension now sits lower than before, and the new design has less chain growth than the old one, resulting in less chain slap and other good stuff. These changes make the bike pedal even better; provide even more stability, while making for a livelier and more responsive suspension platform.

Cypress Mountain, the furthest west of the three North Shore mountains, offers some of the most challenging terrain you can throw at a bike. When you find a bike that can handle Cypress with ease, you hold onto it. In fact, you cherish it. The Driver 8 did exactly that – too bad I have to hand it back to the good folks at Santa Cruz Bicycles.

The bike's combination of low standover height, slightly steeper head tube angles, low bottom bracket and second generation VPP travel add up to a Shore powerhouse. I always felt confident when aboard the Driver 8, whether it was coming into a steep off-camber rock section on 5th Horseman, or threading the needle down Firehose.



Picking tight lines was a piece of cake on the Driver 8. Wet rocks and roots weren't much of an impediment.

This was my first taste of VPP suspension technology and while patent stands for Virtual Pivot Point I thought of a better acronym – Very Phenomenal Performance. The suspension is a work of art, so much so that I would glimpse down to see it work its magic in motion. The Driver 8 and its VPP was always consistent and predictable, allowing the rider to focus on the next corner rather than how it will react in the current one.

Unlike a full DH rig, the Driver 8 likes to pop and jump its way down the trail. In the air, the bike feels stable and balanced and on the ground it feels light and agile, allowing you to snipe some tight lines that buddy on the Team DH may avoid. This leads me to my next thought.



Ripping through the ferns at high speed was a blast on the Driver.

Can the Driver 8 downhill? This was the most-asked question during my time testing. With eight years downhill racing experience, I know a downhill bike when I see one. The Driver 8 is not a dedicated DH race bike. That's why the V10 exists, and is one of the most winning DH bikes today. However, that still doesn't answer the question – can the Driver 8 downhill? It was my goal to push this bike to the limit to see what it's got.

The Driver 8 had its first rip between the tape at the Cumberland DH, the second stop on the Island Cup DH series. The top of the course was wide open pedally singletrack with some fun corners leading into the "Fort William" step down. After that, it headed back into the trees for "Schladming" and a set of bermed corners and fast banked trail. The bike pedals surprisingly well and the rear wheel stays glued to the ground. When it's time to double up sections, it lifts off the ground with ease and feels more like a 4X bike than an 8" rig. The bike loves berms and exit speed, which got me thinking about the Whistler Bike Park and how this bike will be the ideal park bike.



Anywhere, any time on the Driver 8. Fast or slow, the bike was up for the challenge.

The effortless ride diminished as I entered the rough steep treed section as head angles steepened and endless travel was swallowed up by pits and chunder. This is when you know you are working harder than your friend on the race-ready Orange 224. Despite the arm pump and close calls, it's hard to wipe the smile off your face when navigating the Driver 8 – it just refuses to quit, coming up just short of a podium finish. The Driver 8 was green with envy, sitting in 4th place in Expert Men.

To further investigate its racing ability, I dragged the Driver 8 over to the Sunshine Coast, B.C, for the fifth annual Rat Race. This was another fast, pedally, bermed track with some fun jumps, all of which worked in the Driver 8's favour. After a handful of race-paced shuttles, the suspension components began to show some weaknesses. The RockShox Totem started losing oil and eventually the seals went. Adding to the excitement, the Rock Shox Vivid 5.1 rear shock started speaking to me in some foreign language and eventually lost rebound dampening.

So there I was at the top of the track, about to drop in aboard the Driver 8, to see how a non-DH specific bike could compete with blown suspension. The results? Impressive. The bike handled the track beautifully albeit a little rough as a result of the "sick" suspension components. It still railed the corners and hummed over the jumps and drops like day one. In the end, the Driver 8 proved it can race with the best of them, placing 3rd in Elite Men.



Steep and tight lines weren't a problem for the Driver 8 and the pilot.

To answer the question, "Can the Driver 8 downhill?" The answer is, yes. For most of us, winning elite men's DH is not the objective, it's about a great weekend with your friends enjoying the sport we love and having a crack at beating your buddies for beers after the race. Adding the Driver 8 to your arsenal will do just that, and you will have more fun in the process.

The head angle on the bike measures 66.5° - only half a degree steeper than the V10, and rode exactly how I wanted – balanced and predictable. The Large Driver 8 has a 46.0" wheelbase, which always felt stable and nimble. Thanks to the curving hydraformed tubing, the cockpit feels roomy with a stand over height of 30.2", should provide plenty of room for limb swinging down A-Line. The top tube on the Large registered a 24.4", which always felt comfortable and natural. The all important bottom bracket height rode like a magic carpet narrowly hovering over the earth at 14.6", the rest was covered thanks to the folks at Gamut chain guides and all their rock smashing ability. I was impressed at how fine tuned the numbers and angles were on the Driver 8, I don't think a CGA could run better numbers.

For those who like to spend more time in the air than the ground, I spent an afternoon in front of the lens with Derek Dix testing the Driver 8's freehucking ability. The bike does a great job instilling confidence, even in the rustiest pilots. The VPP suspension is always supple and forgiving, allowing you to snipe some nasty old trannies with confidence. In the air, the bike is balanced and predictable, which is nice when you decide to get creative midflight. All in all, this bike can freechuck with the best of them and is truly a blast to ride.



Freeriding your thing? The Driver 8 might be just what the doctor ordered.

One other thing worth mentioning is how maintenance free this bike is. It's kind of like the new hybrid cars with regenerative braking, where it charges the battery when you brake. I think the Driver 8 fixes itself when you ride. Joking aside, the bike is built to handle abuse from shuttles, bike parks and stunts.

After discussing the RockShox suspension trouble with Scott at Steed Cycles, we got to the bottom of it. At 6'3" and 185lbs, I'm a bigger guy – that's why I'm riding the large Driver 8, which fits great. As a result, I had cranked up the compression and preload in an effort to stiffen up the stock setup.



The RockShox Vivid shock started out fine, but developed a few problems along the way.

Suspension has evolved dramatically in the past couple years and with so much technology and adjustability, it's important to spend the time to customize it to your weight and riding style. For most of us, just understanding what all the knobs do is enough, but, all the twisting, clicking and pumping won't get you the performance that James at Suspension Werx in North Vancouver can achieve. James worked his magic on the Driver 8's suspension, customizing it for my needs and the results were night and day. If you haven't experienced professionally tuned suspension, go see James!

So, is the Driver 8 versatile? Yes. The bike proved it can race DH, rip technical single track, pedal up, shuttle up, huck, jump, play, and of course cuttie! Durable? Very. In the three months of testing, the bike spent a total of zero hours in the stand, the linkage stayed tight and smooth thanks to sealed bearings, the DT Swiss wheelset stayed true, Avid Elixirs were amazing, SRAM drive train stayed crisp and tight. The bike is truly a set-it-and-forget-it machine. Ability to delight? Charming. The Driver 8 is the most fun you can have on two wheels: it puts the "free" in "freeride" and the "play" in "playtime". If you are looking for a new rig this summer to hit the Shore, Whistler and the odd BC Cup, the Driver 8 awaits you – in style.



Cool, through and through. Driver 8 test complete.

Spec on the test bike was as follows:

REAR DER. Sram XO
SHIFTERS Sram XO
CRANKSET TruVativ Holzfeller 38 tooth.
BOTTOM BRACKET TruVativ Howitzer Team
CASSETTE Shimano HG 80, 11-32
CHAIN Shimano HG 73 (XT)
BRAKES Avid Elixir CR w/ 203mm front 185mm rear rotors
BRAKE LEVERS Avid Elixir Carbon
BARS Easton Havoc Lo 31.8mm
STEM Thompson Elite 1.5"
GRIPS Lizard Skin Peaty lock on
HEADSET Chris King 1.5"
SEAT POST Thomson Elite
SADDLE WTB Silverado Team
WHEELS DT FR 6.1D rims laced to DT 340 rear hub & Chub front hub w/DT 14 gauge spokes, brass nipples (20mm front hub)
TIRES Kenda Nevegal 2.5 wire
TUBES Kenda DH
FORK Rock Shox Totem

Pros

- VPP suspension platform
- True versatility
- Low maintenance and durability
- Balanced and stable
- Build quality and attention to detail
- Performance build kit
- Paint job

Cons

- Overall bike weight
- It's not free

So there you have it. Questions about the Driver 8? Think that Santa Cruz has a winner.

on its hands? Take your thoughts [to the boards](#).

[Bookmark this on Delicious](#) | [Stumble this!](#) | [Tweet this!](#)

*Available now—
DH and All-Mountain*



[HOME](#) | [NEWS](#) | [BUY'N SELL](#) | [THE BOARD](#) | [PHOTO GALLERY](#) | [ADVERTISE](#) | [SUBMIT](#) | [LEGAL](#) | [PRIVACY](#) | [ABOUT](#) | [CONTACT](#)

Copyright 2003-2010 © All rights reserved.

Accelerated by our
freeriding friends at 