

BIKETEST

SAGE BARLOW

What a small-batch titanium graveler brings



It's true that while titanium frames were once found in the catalogs of many of the biggest bike brands, they have largely been replaced by carbon alternatives. However, equally true is that there are actually more builders offering titanium frames than one might think.

Lighter than steel, more compliant than aluminum and with greater impact resistance than carbon, a titanium frame brings with it plenty of perks, especially when it comes to building a gravel bike.

Portland-based Sage Cycles is a small-batch frame design shop that is bringing some unique qualities to the market of titanium gravel bikes.

THE FRAME

Sage is in their third year and continues growing their line with the Barlow, a bike that falls under the gravel banner. Even though Sage already has the PDXCX 'cross bike in their three-bike lineup, company owner David Rosen wanted something a little more oriented to

all-around riding than what he currently had. "The goal for the Barlow was to design a bike that I could take out on group rides, and be equally at home riding on the pavement as off. It's a tall order, because if you make a bike too general, it doesn't do well anywhere".

Merging the two types of riding is what gravel or adventure riding champions, yet there are still multiple schools of thought in how to achieve a balanced bike. "I was

looking for the stretched fit of a road bike with [steeper] head- and seat-tube angles closer to a cyclocross bike. I based geometry around Enve's GRD fork that has an axle-to-crown height that splits the difference between road and 'cross forks. The chainstays are short with a low bottom bracket for a quick-accelerating bike that stays straight at speed."

Sage's U.S.-made frame uses an oversized 44mm diameter head tube complete with a Chris King Inset headset. The 44mm head tube is a popular choice with metal frame builders because of the stiffness it provides, especially when considering the additional force a front disc brake creates. As far as the main tubes go, an ovalized top tube and bi-ovalized downtube are used to improve torsional stiffness. Round tubes do well against lateral load, such as pedaling forces, but under torsional load they can twist, so the oval shape helps resist twisting and thus provides a more efficient ride.

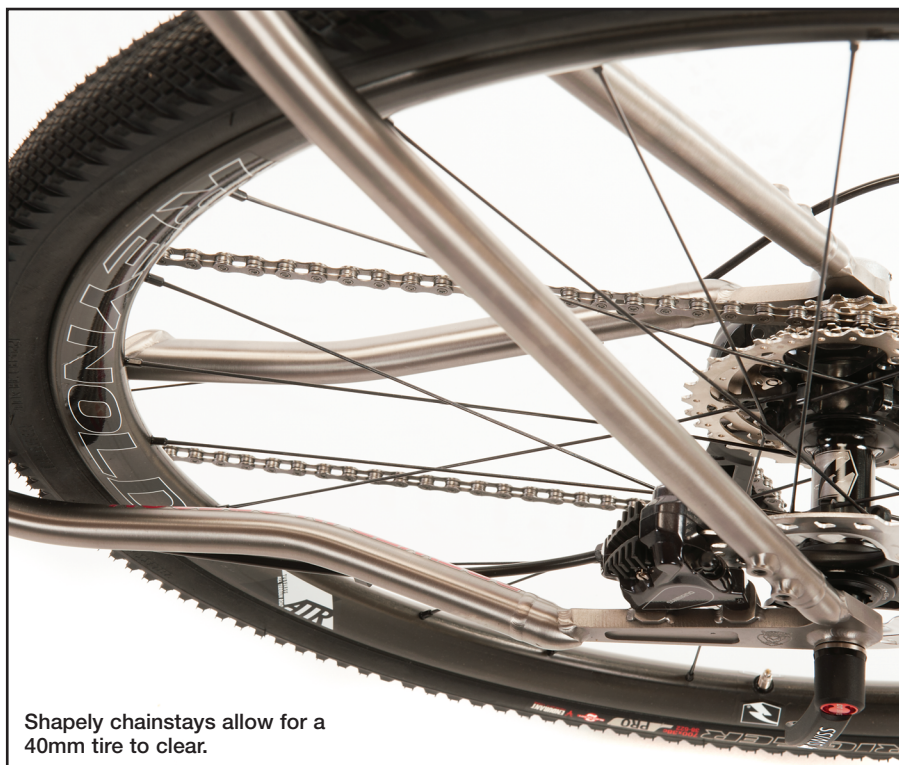
The chainstays get quite shapely in order to achieve the impressive clearance for a 40mm tire while still clearing a road crank's narrow Q-factor. There is also adequate clearance to run a standard chainring set (53/39), just in case you need the Barlow to double as your weekend criterium race bike too. In addition to any custom geometry you can dream up, Sage offers the Barlow in seven stock sizes.

THE PARTS

Sage built up our test model with a Shimano Ultegra drivetrain, Reynolds ATR carbon wheels and a 3T cockpit. The frame itself sells for \$2,746, and the Enve fork is an additional \$700. The complete build of our test bike ran just north of \$7000. Sage's website allows you to pick and choose every part on the bike, with options ranging between Shimano and SRAM in all of their component lines. As you select each item, it calculates the weight of the entire bike as a handy reference.

THE RIDE

Our time on the Barlow consisted of a fairly even amount of time split between pavement and dirt, with the



Shapely chainstays allow for a 40mm tire to clear.

typical ride leaving from the RBA office, riding 10 miles of pavement until we got to dirt forestry roads that we would spend an hour on before returning back to work. On the road, the Barlow feels very much like an endurance road bike, albeit with 38mm-wide tires.

The Barlow's chainstay length and overall wheelbase keep it from being overly stretched and compromising a performance feel, although it will not be confused with a straight-up road-race geometry. In the dirt, the Barlow is easy-riding and well capable of more than just dirt roads, especially when running 38 or 40mm tires.

THE VERDICT

If there's one thing we like about small-batch bike brands, it's that they often bring a different take on the same thing—and by same thing, we mean the bicycle. Sage's approach to making a great riding bike, regardless of what terrain and road surface you choose to take it on, isn't entirely unique to them. But in doing it with small, unique touches and customization options that aren't available from the bigger brands, it is quite appealing. Although the weight weenies might not be won over by a bike that weighs close to 20 pounds, the ride of titanium and its application in gravel makes it a durable bike with resilience to years of abuse. ■



A 44mm head tube with ENVE GRD fork provide solid handling.

PUNCH LINES

- Ample tire clearance for added versatility
- Made in America
- Custom and stock sizes

STATS

Price: \$2749 (frame), \$7085 (as tested)

Weight: 19.8 pounds

Sizes: 50, 52, 54, 56 (tested), 58, 60, 62cm

www.sagetitanium.com