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ROAD BIKE

ACTION MAGAZINE

JANUARY 2022

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STORM
KING GP**



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WHEN “GP” STANDS STANDS FOR SOMETHING OTHER THAN “GRAN PRIX”

Sage Titanium and SRAM XPLR team with *Road Bike Action*

It was simply an offer too good to refuse. When Sage Titanium founder Dave Rosen let on that he would be on the early receiving end of a complete SRAM XPLR groupset, and that he would be happy to build a bike around the parts that we could exclusively test, well, we had no real choice but to offer an emphatic, “Yes!” After all, in addition to including some new drivetrain parts, the new XPLR component kit would also include a first-time ride on the much-rumored RockShox Rudy suspension fork and a Reverb wireless dropper seatpost.

The Oregon-based bike brand is led by David Rosen, who pours his heart and soul into the design of each American-made frame. This was the perfect opportunity for a custom titanium bike with altered geometry for the suspension, which is now going to be an option from Sage.





THE FRAME

The Storm King has been the go-to model for gravel riders in need of the most room for large tires, along with a frame geometry that inspires confidence across mixed surfaces. With the release of the new GP model (as in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest), Sage have modified their proven platform with geometry specifically suited to accommodate the 30–40mm suspension travel.

Our test bike was the very first version of the Storm King GP with a 44mm diameter head tube that is the same length as the regular 56cm version at 16cm. At 71.5 degrees on the GP, the head tube angle is .5 degrees slacker. Whether you choose the wireless or cable-actuated option, the frame is dropper-post-ready. Since most will choose a dropper for this bike, the seat tube angle has been changed to compensate for the zero offset that most droppers have (on our 56cm bike, it's 71 degrees).

As with the original, there is tire clearance for up to 50mm tires on a 700c tires rim or 2.4-inch rubber on a 650b wheel. To aid in the stability, the chainstays have been lengthened 5mm at 43cm with a wheelbase of 105.2cm. All the hoses and cables (if there were

any) are routed internally, and there are three bottle-cage mounts. The frame is both 1x and 2x compatible and for mechanical drivetrains as well.

THE PARTS

Currently, the stock GP lineup is SRAM XPLR-focused but the frame is compatible with nearly any drivetrain. The bike starts with the RockShox Rudy Ultimate fork with 30mm of travel. Also from Rockshox is the 27.2mm Reverb AXS wireless 75mm dropper post. The post is topped with a Sage Beccus saddle with Ti rails.

The SRAM Red XPLR drivetrain uses a 40t chainring paired with the new 10-44t cassette. The Red XPLR derailleur is 1x-specific and only pairs with the new 10-44t or existing 10-36t cassettes. Red AXS levers are paired with 160mm rotors to slow things down and wirelessly control the shifts and dropper.

For the cockpit, we have the Zipp Service Course 70 XPLR alloy bars and stem. The XPLR bars have a very slight flare and sweep in the drops. We also have the new Zipp 101 XPLR wheels that are a single-wall carbon construction and are based around the same technology that Zipp launched with the Moto wheels on the mountain

side. The hookless rims have a 27mm internal-width and are mounted with a set of Zipp G40 tires that now also carry the XPLR branding.

THE RIDE

As impressed as we were with the original Storm King, let's just start out by saying that the GP is no different. The frame construction and attention to detail are outstanding. There are a lot of options when it comes to gravel bikes these days, but titanium might be one of the best materials, as it almost perfectly balances durability, ride quality and even weight. On our first few rides, it was clear that Sage had gotten the concept of suspension and gravel translated correctly.

The Rudy fork is very supportive and extremely progressive in its short 30mm stroke. We had considered the 40mm version, but after feeling how quickly this ramps up, we are happy we went with the shorter version. This is balanced well with the slacker head tube angle and longer footprint. At high speeds and loose corners, the GP is easy to predict and navigate. The washboard effect still comes through at the handlebars, but nowhere near the vision-impairing level as it is with a rigid fork.

The Zipp 101 XPLR wheels are said



THE GEAR

Helmet: Abus Gamechanger
Jersey: Road Bike Action
Bib: Santini Gravel
Shoes: DMT KM1
Socks: Swiftwick
Glasses: Oakley Radar EV



The T47 bottom bracket is a welcomed touch for the made-in-the-USA titanium gravel frame.

The sculpted seat stays and chainstays leave room for large 50mm tires, as well as fenders.

to also help with compliance, but in all honesty, it is hard to tell. We can tell you that they do flex as they are advertised, and on more than a few aggressive corners we got the 40mm tires to rub the chainstay, and there is a lot of space there. With the wide 27mm internal width and large-volume 40mm tires at 30 psi, there are a lot of variables working in unison. Weighing in at over 1600 grams, they are heavy for such a shallow wheel and the hub engagement is just average.

For us, our GP is a little tall in the front, and on either paved or dirt roads we felt high. The added rise the suspension brings is not bad, but definitely higher than we've become accustomed to. With that said, the GP is targeting the rider that will likely be doing their fair share of more hardcore adventure riding. When we found ourselves on trail bike-worthy singletrack, the added front-end height was a blessing. It kept us from heading over the bars more than a few times.

We had a few instances when climbing really steep roads that the front got light, but the longer wheelbase helped minimize this. We didn't get a chance to ride the bike with 650b wheels and tires, but mixing 2.4-inch mountain bike-sized tires with the dropper and suspension gets pretty close to a hardtail mountain bike if you

ask us, just without the wide, flat bars.

THE VERDICT

While we don't frequently point our gravel bikes in the direction of technical singletrack trails, the GP does a good job welcoming us to try. Sure, the geometry chart won't match that of your road bike or even too many other gravel bikes, but it's all done with a specific purpose in mind, like the more

setback seat tube angle that helps compensate for the use of a dropper that has no setback in the post.

The Storm King GP isn't just for the senders, as the Rudy fork does a great job managing small bumps, too. As we all know, gravel technology is continuing to evolve, and we can't help but think back to the time when mountain bikers argued over whether you need suspension. And these days, no flat-bar rider can go without it! Of course, suspension on gravel will never see such wide use, but as the category widens and gets further refined, there's no reason not to appreciate the added comfort, safety and control.

Sage currently offers a few different options when purchasing a Storm King GP. The first is a frame only that will set you back \$4300. They also offer a frameset with the option between the Rudy 40mm or 30mm, as well as a headset choice and dropper post configuration for \$5100. Complete bikes start at \$8200, but Sage has a-la-carte-style menus that allow you to customize your build and budget. The best part? All the frames are made here in the USA. ■

PUNCH LINES

- Suspension-corrected geometry
- Made in the U.S.
- Stable and fun

STATS

Price: \$12,800, \$4300 (frame)

Weight: 22.68 pounds

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

www.sagetitanium.com

