Dean Colonel

Rider: Brad Quartuccio
Height: 6'2"
Weight: 165lbs.
Inseam: 34"

The Dean name has been gracing titanium frames for as long as I can remember. I recall gazing at Dean frames back in the early nineties, hoping to someday save enough scratch to spring for a Colonel hardtail and get my pro racing career on the move. Since then I've made it out of grade school, and have realized that I am forever slow. Nonetheless, at an early age, that four color Dean logo was burned into my mind as a sign of quality.

The decision was easy when it came to getting a Dean test frame. Make it a Colonel please, with an eccentric bottom bracket (EBB) for singlespeed disc use. Seeing that "standard" geometry bikes fit me exceptionally well, I ordered up a large Colonel SS frame with a few spec changes based on my riding preferences. While I kept the 71/73 headtube/seatube angles, 16.75" chainstays and a 23.75" toptube, I chose the aforementioned EBB for singlespeed disc use, a slightly heavier downtube for a stiffer ride and a rigid disc fork suspension corrected to the length of a four inch travel fork.

At the heart of the $1350 Colonel SS frame is seamless 3/2.5 titanium tubing. The hype is real—titanium tubing delivers a comfortable, durable frame with a strength-to-weight ratio roughly twice that of 4130 chromoly. For singlespeed disc use, I'm a fan of an EBB shell. With this, chain tension is adjusted at the bottom bracket rather than at the rear axle, allowing a quick release skewer to be used and simplifying disc brake setup. The EBB option adds $50–100 to the price of the frame depending on whether a setscrew or expanding wedge, Bushnell-type shell is used. For simplicity, I chose the setscrew style, which has proven easy to adjust and has never slipped. The seatstays form a wishbone junction for a classic look and enhanced rear wheel tracking due to a stiffer rear end. Unfortunately, mud clearance is an issue as the chainstays leave little room for mud buildup once a 2.1" tire is mounted. New for this year are the modular dropouts, which allow either side to be replaced in the event of crash damage, and incorporate the disc mount into the non-drive side dropout. Various dropouts are available for $50 a pair, but due to the disc-specific singlespeed design of this particular frame, only the vertical dropouts with disc tabs are useful. These modular dropouts paired with the triple cable guides allow gears to be mounted on the frame if one chooses to, but that's not really in the cards for me. Personally, I'd rather not see cable bosses at all. Overall, the Dean Colonel SS frame as tested weighs in at 4lbs. 3oz.—not ultra light by any means, but not quite a porker when the 8oz. EBB is taken into consideration.

Unbeknownst to many, Dean makes a fine rigid fork. Using oversized 4130 chromoly blades, their $250 rigid mountain fork is available in custom lengths to fit various bike geometries. For this frame, Dean made an unusually long rigid fork with an axle to crown length of 17.9" so it could be swapped with the current crop of 4" travel suspension forks without adversely altering the frame geometry. The large blades and ample tire clearance make the fork look pretty badass, and complement the form of the frame. A nice detail is the forward facing dropouts for disc use, making wheel insertion easier by eliminating disc brake interference, and preventing quick release failure in the case of an improperly fastened axle. The fork weighs a respectable 2lbs. 6oz.

For the build, I used parts out of my personal componentry stash—180mm Truvativ cranks, Avid mechanical disc brakes, an eight year old Syncros headset, and oversized Titec bars and stem, rounded out with WTB/Spot disc wheels. It proved to be a predictable, comfortable build which allowed the frame to shine through without overshadowing it with fancy parts.

But how's it ride, Pokey? Great. Over the course of a few months I had the chance to ride in plenty of different situations—from short burns in the park behind the office to epic rides in the Tucson desert, the Dean Colonel pulled through. To garner first impressions of the frame, the first order of the test was to ride it on the same trails I've been riding for the past ten years. Out in Hartwood Acres I could clearly tell that the frame had a lively feel to it. Unlike aluminum frames which can feel dead and jarring over small chatter bumps, the titanium tubing seemed to help the bike float over obstacles. This ride quality is often times compared to that of high end steel, but in my opinion the Colonel has a bit more glide in its stride and dip in its hip than the steel frames I've ridden and owned in the past.

Out in the rocky landscape of Tucson, the Colonel proved to be an excellent technical riding machine as I picked my way through a wholly unfamiliar landscape unfettered by thoughts of the bike. Up and down the step-like trails, the rigid fork tracked as it should and the frame took the edge off without feeling noodly. Picking and holding a line has never been a problem on the Colonel.

For the 2004 Punk Bike Enduro I was able to steal the RockShox Reba we had in for review for a spell just to see how the Colonel dealt with suspension up front. No complaints here—I have only further praise for how the Colonel rides.

Where the Colonel truly shined was when the ride timer tipped from two to three hours, and then three to four. Rather than becoming punishing as rider fatigue set in, the Colonel maintained its crisp handling and soft feel even as my shoulders grew weary. All day comfort is the name of the game with titanium.

If it sounds like all praise, it is as far as the ride is concerned. The decals may be a bit cheap looking, and Dean has never been known as a frame builder with fast turnaround times, but the frame leaves little to be desired. This is quite possibly the overall best riding frame I've ever had the pleasure to swing a leg over. I recommend checking out Dean's offerings to anyone on the lookout for a mid-priced titanium frameset.

See page 70 for contact information.