



The Pinhoti III draws on nearly four decades of Litespeed experience in designing titanium frames.

LITESPEED PINHOTI III

The Tennessee way is always a unique way

In addition to Litespeed being one of America's most notable titanium frame builders, it's safe to say that over the course of nearly four decades that we've been testing bikes, when it comes to titanium mountain bikes, we've tested more models from the Tennessee-based brand than any other—and that's for a good reason. When it comes to chasing new designs and tube technology, no other titanium builder has been as creative and prolific over the years. Whether it's been their hardtails or wide range of full-suspension bikes, round or multi-shaped tubes, standard 3AL/2.5V or the more exotic (and expensive) 6Al/4V tubing, Litespeed has never wavered in their commitment to provide as many creative touches as possible. And just by chance, the latest incarnation of their Pinhoti III hardtail is proof of that. Beyond the bike itself, between payment plans and even home delivery, Litespeed has also gone further than most to get the bikes to you.

TECH

Just as you'll find on other bikes, the Pinhoti line is named after a particularly challenging singletrack trail. This one is located near their Chattanooga factory. Starting off the effort to make each frame stand out from the crowd, each frame starts with an actual head badge (versus a decal) and is available with etched graphics in a variety of colors.

As is standard Litespeed practice, the 3AL/2.5V frame is cold-worked into shape and uses an oversized downtube to help stiffen up the front end along with a head tube that is both oversized and internally butted. The Pinhoti boasts Boost rear-wheel spacing

and tire clearance for up to a 3.0x27.5-inch or 2.5x29-inch rear. Helping in the overall clearance (and aesthetic) game are the asymmetric dropped chainstay and new CNC-machined titanium chainstay yoke. A most sensible frame asset is the dropper-post cable port, which is ready and willing when you are!

The effective seat angle of the slightly curved seat tube is 74 degrees, mated to a forgiving 67.5-degree head angle. With a claimed frame weight of 1695 grams (for a medium frame), Litespeed is claiming a 95-gram weight savings over the previous version.

COMPONENTS

Starting at \$2395 for a frame only, it's not the least expensive hardtail, but for a handcrafted U.S.-made titanium frame, that's quite a buy in our books. Not only that, there's an option to build a complete bike with the choices they have on their site, or a discerning rider can buy a frame to make it their own. The Litespeed we received to test features a mixture of value and high-end parts. This Pinhoti III build has a bump in the price of just over \$1000 extra for the Spineroy MX 30 carbon wheelset upgrade. This particular build comes with a 130mm-travel Fox Factory 34 fork, and Shimano's XT drivetrain and brakes. It also gets some Race Face goodies with their Aeffect R35 alloy handlebar at 780mm width, Aeffect 35 70mm stem, and the Aeffect dropper with 125mm of travel. From value-driven to lavish spending plans for a titanium hardtail, Litespeed has a little bit for everyone when it comes to build options.

The short rear end of the Litespeed lends itself to being whipped through corners at high speed.



The Litespeed Pinhoti III impressed our riders with its comfort, traction and impressively smooth ride.



In the case of the Pinhoti III, its eager climbing nature follows suit when pointed down. While its compliance is helpful for handling, the short rear end lends itself to being easily snapped through tight corners while holding speed. Even with 130mm travel, we experienced a velvety ride, and were a bit surprised by how well the frame can handle rugged descents. It proved itself to be a bike we could hop on to go confidently out for an adventure, tame fast, flowing cross-country singletrack, catch the jumps at the local park, grab a burrito, beat a full-suspension bike down a ridgeline, and do it all again the next day. The Pinhoti III likes to play, highlighting the fact that there is a titanium hardtail to match just about any riding style.

ON THE TRAIL

The Pinhoti has a lot going for it, but its greatest attribute is an extremely smooth ride. Everybody who rode it remarked how forgiving it felt. Not in a bad way by any means, just a different experience on the trail. What this translated to was traction, comfort, and confidence. Part of the feeling was due to high-volume tires and the unique Spinerger carbon wheels with PBO fiber spokes that further aided in vibration reduction. It also happens to have the smallest-diameter rear stays of the group. What's more, it's a natural-born climber, so getting to the top of the trail on board the Pinhoti III is as efficient and comfortable as can be.

LITESPEED PINHOTI III

www.litespeed.com

Price	\$5,570 (as tested), \$2,350 (frame)
Weight	26.1 pounds (without pedals)
Sizes	X-small, small, medium, large (tested), XL
Fork	Fox Factory Float 34, 130mm travel
Drivetrain	Shimano XT 12-speed
Wheelset	29" Spinerger MXX 30, Spinerger hubs
Tires	Maxxis Rekon (29x2.6") (f), (29x2.4") (r)

GEOMETRY

Head tube angle	67.5°
Reach	460mm (18.1")
Stack	657.9mm (25.9")
Effective seat tube angle	74°
Bottom bracket height	57.2mm (2.25")
Chainstay length	429mm (16.9")
Wheelbase	1178.56mm (46.4")

BIKE TEST / TITANIUM ROUNDUP

However you stack them up, one thing you notice about Ti bikes is how light and strong they are. Combine that with how impressive the ride quality is, and you can understand why they've never gone completely out of fashion.



HOW THEY STACK UP

The Optimator was in a class of its own as the only true cross-country race bike of the group. Not even the fully rigid Black Sheep could keep it in sight on the climbs. And, as terrain tightened up, the more nimble Sage simply walked away from its wagon-wheeled competitor. This is the perfect bike for somebody who wants an ultra-efficient and comfortable bike for fast-paced, long-distance riding and racing. Even though it's a race bike, the wrecking

crew had a blast on this bike, even in trail-riding situations. It turns out that going really fast on an efficient bike like the Optimator is really, really fun.

Of this group of bikes, the Alchemy was closest to the Moots and Litespeed on paper but had a very different feel out on the trail. It felt the stiffest of the group when riding, and also felt the most at home on faster and more technical trails. Its long reach, slack head angle and short stem

make it easy to keep your weight centered while picking your way down super-steep sections of trail. Because of the frame stiffness, it didn't have the smoothness of the Litespeed or liveliness of the Moots, but it is still a very pleasant-riding frame overall. The aggressive Maxxis Minion tire combo is a spot-on spec for the bike's intent, but they didn't roll quite as fast as the higher-volume Maxxis Recons on the others.

The Moots Womble is most similar to



the Pinhoti III from Litespeed. They are different, though—0.3 of a degree on the head tube angle, 5mm difference in chainstay length, 1 degree of seat tube angle and reach differing by 10mm. They also have a totally different feeling on the trail. For us, the Womble has a more predictable balance and response to rider input. On paper, the Litespeed is steeper, yet we felt like the Moots had a snappier, more “XC feel,” if you will. Bottom line, this one stole the hearts of all our test riders for its ride quality and the overall feel it brought to any scenario on the trail. Fun is an understatement for this extravagant titanium hardtail.



Gooseberry Mesa's sometimes choppy surfaces really highlighted these titanium hardtails' resilient ride qualities.



The Black Sheep's 32" wheels roll over chunky uneven surfaces better than all but its 36" wheel big brother.



Alchemy's Argos is the kind of bike that will have you popping off of the smallest trail features.

BIKE TEST / TITANIUM ROUNDUP

The dry and rocky terrain of Southwestern Utah proved to be an amazing test location for our five titanium hardtails.



The Litespeed is not the brawler that the Alchemy is. It's most similar to the Moots but with a different ride feel and quality. We touched upon compliance a lot with the Litespeed, and overall, the entire wrecking crew believed (and felt) it had the most. Some of our riders even felt more comfortable aboard the Litespeed than the Moots on steeper sections or rock rolls. It could have been the extra smoothness, higher volume tires or something else, but there was just a sense of confidence that the Litespeed inspired in certain situations on the trail. Both bikes have great cornering and handling, and each has its own compliance flavor, with the Moots the more lively feeling of the two. When all is said and done, Litespeed easily takes the cake for the best value of this group.

To be fair, the Black Sheep stands in a world of its own from the others in our collection. The big hoops have the drawback of oversized unicycle rim weight. This can be a tough bike to ride because of the big, heavy wheels, which are made extra heavy because unicycle rims are designed to support the full weight of the rider on one wheel—and so are the tires. The front wheel weighs 6.9 pounds; that's a lot, especially when you're single-speeding. Of course, there are the benefits of traction and momentum that we mentioned in the review as well. The bottom line here is that 32-inch wheels are not for everyone; however, they are wonderful for a select few. One of those select few happens to be a long-time wrecking crew member who fell in love with both Black Sheep bikes that we've tested. He put his money where his mouth is and ordered a custom 36-inch-wheel version but without the rear-stay couplers because of the creaking. □



The titanium frames soak up the harsh chatter of a broken rock surface with ease.

The Moots Womble took to Hurricane's more technical trails like a fish to water.



The Sage Optimator was in a class of its own as the only true cross-country race bike of the group.

