



Ellsworth EVOLUTION CONVERT | \$6,500 (FLOAT X2 UPGRADE: \$150)

REMEMBER THAT SCENE IN PULP FICTION WHEN BRUCE WILIS's girlfriend says she wishes she had a pot belly? Watch it again if you don't. Actually, watch it again anyway. She says something pretty profound: "It's unfortunate what we find pleasing to the touch and pleasing to the eye is seldom the same."

Whether the new Ellsworth Evolution Convert is pleasing to the eye is the subject of some debate around the *Bike* mag office. But it is very pleasing to the touch. As its name suggests, the Convert is compatible with both 29 and 27.5+ wheels, and I chose to ride it in its wagon-wheeled form. It's built around 140 millimeters of travel front and rear, but it has the chassis of a bike with much more squish. You rarely see Fox Float 36 forks or Float X2 shocks on any bike south of enduro. And you'd just as rarely see a 1226-millimeter wheelbase (for the large) or a 66-degree head angle. And of course, it has the long reach and short stays that you'd expect to see in a 2018 model.

It's also nice to see a threaded bottom bracket and built-in carbon internal cable housing tubes. Ellsworth's hex-taper rear axle wedges tightly into both dropouts for extra bite, but the two-piece system makes removing your rear wheel a little cumbersome. The similar upper shock pivot pin also wedges into the rocker link for some bonus stiffness.

We opted for the full XT build, which goes for \$6,500, plus

our upgrade to the Float X2 shock. And at the moment, the only 12-speed option goes for \$8,000. Ellsworths have never been cheap, but they've also never been in a race to the bottom. They've always been out to offer something no one else does, and the Evolution is no exception.

Ellsworth's long rocker link has always been iconic to the brand, but it's not an aesthetic choice. On a short rocker arm, the angles at which the linkage members meet will change drastically throughout the stroke, and the leverage curve will follow suit. A long rocker arm makes it easier to tune a straighter leverage curve and a more predictable feel throughout the travel. And Ellsworth makes some lofty claims about the rest of the linkage.

Since the beginning, they've used a four-bar design that, throughout the stroke, will naturally track the instant center along the imaginary line that extends past the load-bearing length of the chain. In other words, no squat, no kickback. But for any design, this is impossible to achieve in every gear because that imaginary line will often point above or below your instant center. The goal is to get close, and the Evolution gets close.

I've ridden bikes with no detectable pedal feedback before, so I wasn't expecting anything revolutionary on the Evolution. Indeed, its suspension proved to be indifferent to pedal input, but then it went a step further. I expected the flat, moderately progressive leverage



curve to only appeal on the descents. But that predictability was remarkably helpful on the uphill. On steep, high-torque climbs when I was mashing deep in the travel, it remained just as active and efficient as when lazily trolling up stutter bumps on a 3-percent traverse. In either case, the bike behaves best when clipped in. Members of the flat-pedal society can expect the requisite bounce.

I've gotten spoiled by some of the more extreme seat angles of the day, so I slid my saddle a bit forward of the Evolution's resting 74 degrees. That suited me perfectly because, as I always do when I'm between sizes, I went for the XL. And tall riders take notice. The stack height on the large size is just slightly above par with its peers, but it jumps significantly at XL. Leggy riders around 6-foot-4-inches won't need a pile of spacers to get comfy.

The rangy wheelbase and stout build gave this mid-travel all-rounder a strong enduro flavor. On terrain that was barely passable on a traditional 140/140 29er, I was able and eager to get faster and looser. For getting *too* fast and loose, bikes like the Yeti 5.5 or Pivot Switchblade deal by adding some fork travel. But the Evolution relies on its do-it-all geometry, which offers a similar stack height to its mismatched-travel peers. The trustworthiness of the Fox 36 paired well with the responsiveness offered by the moderate travel. That moderation helped keep the Evolution spry and manageable in the turns, despite its length.

Lateral stiffness is hard to quantify. My favorite method is skidding. Given a reasonable tire and

wheel combo, if I can stab it into a catch berm predictably without chatter or hesitation, it's stiff enough. The Evolution is stiff enough.

And I had my doubts. I remember the days of long rocker plates, I rode old Konas, old Treks and old Ellsworths, and they were noodly compared to today's bikes. Ellsworth adapted and improved, but stuck to their guns. Those plates are partly responsible for the Evolution's ability to hang with the big bikes. Not because it feels like it has more than 140 millimeters of travel, but because it uses those millimeters so elegantly. You can tune it to bash, but out of the box, it floats. —Travis Engel

ELLSWORTH'S TWO CENTS: Performance is beauty to me. Efficiency of pedal power delivered with uncompromised suspension function is performance I pursue in every bike frame I've designed in the last quarter century. An enduro bike benefits from pedal efficiency and fully active suspension too. Fast acceleration, climbing to the next decent and being able to pedal and accelerate through chunder with no pedal kickback, squat or rise (anti-squat) is performance that will make any rider go further faster with more control—that is my design intent.

As to the long rocker critique, find me one other suspended performance product, two or four wheels, that benefits from compact linkages and semi-active suspension designs—there are none. A functional linkage component, i.e. a rocker arm, is a part of the quantifiable kinematic performance analysis of the full linkage. For 25 years, I've been proud to develop and produce benchmark full-suspension bicycles worldwide. This is beauty I'm proud of. Away from marketing and critique of jealous competitors, I invite you to ride and know this for yourself: solitude on an epic trail reveals much truth. —Tony Ellsworth, founder and VP of product development