

salsa fargo

a new breed
of touring
bike?



Good touring bikes have always been able to handle the rough stuff, whether it's cavernous potholes or remote dirt roads, but they've never been designed for *real* mountain biking. Mountain bikes, as you might guess, are in fact designed for mountain biking. With their stout frames, high bottom brackets, and meaty tires, they handle trails and rough, rocky roads with aplomb. In the good old days of the 1980s and early 1990s, mountain bikes made great touring rigs, with their steel frames, strong wheels, and rack eyelets (these bikes are still good options, if you can find them). Today's mountain bikes are typically made of aluminum or carbon fiber, lack rack eyelets, and come with things like hydraulic disc brakes and air-sprung rear suspension. They perform amazingly well on technical terrain, but their complexity and single-purpose design leaves them less suitable for all but the most rugged long-distance tours.

As more and more mountain bikers experiment with off-road touring, the question is what should they ride?

The crew at Salsa Cycles has come out with their answer: the Fargo.

As Salsa's Jason Boucher puts it, "The design intent of the bike was to create the category of 'adventure touring,' which we see as any combination of pavement, gravel, and trail."

Or, put another way, if bikes reproduced like humans, it's what you'd end up with if a mountain bike hit the sack with a touring bike. Salsa calls the Fargo an "adventure touring 29er mountain bike." We call it a

welcome addition to the bike market.

Like most touring bikes, it features drop bars, a long-ish load-friendly wheelbase, and a plethora of eyelets for racks and fenders. Unlike touring bikes, it's, well, a mountain bike. I've been riding one for several months and can report that it handles the rough stuff, including rocky singletrack trails, with ease. The Fargo's steel frame accepts mountain-bike tires up to 2.4 inches wide and its disc brakes deliver one-finger stopping power, whether loaded for touring or careening down a local trail. The bottom bracket is higher than a traditional tourer but low for a mountain bike, striking a nice balance between loaded stability and off-road agility.

The choice of big wheels — 29ers in mountain-bike parlance, but essentially stronger versions of 700C rims — is a good one. They're more stable, more comfortable, and roll over rough surfaces and obstacles better than traditional 26-inch mountain-bike wheels, making them perfect for a rough-stuff touring bike. The primary downside to 29ers is the availability of replacement parts outside of North America. If you're heading to South America or the Himalayas, 26-inch wheels are more readily available and might be a better option.

A few other eccentricities may limit the bike's appeal to some riders. While disc brakes, especially mechanical discs, are perfect for this bike, Salsa, in an effort to craft a bicycle with clean, classic lines, chose not to include mounts for rim brakes on the frame and fork. So if you don't want

disc brakes, you're out of luck. Ditto if you want a shock. The bike is not suspension corrected, so a front shock will raise the front end and throw the geometry seriously out of whack. If you want a shock, this is not your bike. It's worth noting that 29er wheels with meaty tires will approximate the vibration-reduction, bump-swallowing effect of front suspension (at least on non-huge obstacles).

A few other nice touches for touring include disc-brake mounts that don't interfere with rack struts; a whopping *six* water bottle mounts, including one on each fork blade; fork eyelets for low-rider racks; a pump peg on the headtube; and a top tube that slopes dramatically downward, making for easier mounting and dismounting when loaded. In other words, this bike was designed for touring from top to bottom.

If you're looking for a paved-road touring bike, you can find more efficient options, though the Fargo can do that. If you're looking for a serious mountain bike, there are plenty of better choices, though the Fargo can do that, too. But if you're looking for one bike that can do everything reasonably well *and* that can take you and your camp gear to just about any beautiful boondock you can imagine, then the Fargo might just be your bike.

Salsa is selling the Fargo complete with a Shimano XT mountain-bike drivetrain, Avid mechanical disc brakes, and bar-end shifters for \$2,000. It's also available as a frameset for \$650.

—Aaron Teasdale