

Budget Bikes

8 Affordable Best Buys That Won't Break The Bank*

BY THE BICYCLING STAFF

BRIDGESTONE

MB-5 TRAILBLAZER

So-called "price-point" bikes are anathema to Bridgestone USA's product designer, Grant Petersen. In fact, if you were to ask, "What's the Shimano 400LX bike in your line?" it would be tantamount to insulting his family.

Petersen, the industry's leading iconoclast, prides himself on his group-busting philosophy. "To get the best of everything on a mountain bike, you have to mix parts," he says. Thus, the \$440-\$480 MB-5 Trailblazer has a cornucopia of Shimano, SR, and Ritchey components.

Petersen fights the good fight on several other fronts as well. He *loathes* under-bar shift levers, claiming they're heavier and less reliable than conventional above-bar shifters. Consequently, no bike in Bridgestone's line has them. (Every other flat-bar bike in our test group did.) He also strives to reduce crank width, a measurement he calls "Q Factor" (taken from the outside of one pedal mounting hole to the other). Thus, the MB-5 has low-profile Shimano 500LX cranks and a short bottom bracket axle. "This means you pedal more like an athlete and less like a duck," Petersen promises. And unlike most other bikes in this price range, the MB-5 has round alloy chainrings rather than Biopace steel ones. Ironically, almost all these '91 Bridgestone features were common 5 years ago. Thus, what was conventional has become unconventional.

It's strong philosophical stuff, but what does it mean on the trail? Plenty. From its rangy, 59.5-cm top tube on our 55-cm test bike and low-rise 12-cm stem to its wide, Ritchey Megabite 26x2.1-inch tires, the MB-5 has the feel of a much more expensive bike. It makes none of the usual concessions to novices such as supplying an overly upright position or wide gel saddle—things that feel good initially but can become sore points.

One of the few things separating the MB-5 from its more expensive brethren (there are 5 pricier Bridgestone models) is its weight—a hefty 28.8 pounds for ours. While that's enough to be noticeable uphill, it's similar or slightly less than other bikes in the same category.

THUMBNAIL



above-bar shifters

long top tube and stem

stainless steel Wheelsmith spokes

round chainrings (including 24T)

savvy component mix



dreary paint scheme

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Other strong points include 32-hole Ritchey Vantage S rims with presta valves, grippy SR MTP-170 Low Fat ped with clips and straps, and 2 sets of water bottle braze-ons.

The MB-5 is not a bike that will arrest your attention or show room floor. (It comes in gray/black or dark green.) No its features necessarily be apparent on a quick test ride. How due to its sage component choices and mature design, the L is a mountain bike you can grow with.

—Geoff Dr



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Country of Origin: Taiwan

Suggested Retail Price: \$440-\$480

Sizes Available: 42, 46, 49, 52, 55 (tested), 58 cm (center-to-top of seat tube)

Weight: 28.8 lbs.

Frame: Tange double-butted chrome-moly steel, unicrown fork

Wheelbase 41.5 in.; 105.4 cm

Top tube 23.4 in.; 59.5 cm

Head angle 72 degrees

Seat angle 73 degrees

Chainstays 16.7 in.; 42.5 cm

Bottom bracket height 11.4 in.; 29 cm

Fork rake 1.57 in.; 4 cm

Trail 2.57 in.; 6.5 cm

Wheels: Shimano Exage hubs, Ritchey Vantage Sport rims, 32 Wheelsmith 14-gauge stainless steel spokes, Ritchey Megabite 26x2.1-inch tires

Drivetrain: Shimano Exage 500LX crankset with 24/36/46-tooth round chainrings (steel inner) and 175-mm crankarms, Shimano Exage 400LX derailleurs and thumbshifters, Shimano Hyperglide chain, Shimano Hyperglide 12-28T 7-speed cassette

Components: SR MTP-170 Low Fat pedals with Specialized toe clips and straps, steel headset, Avocet Touring saddle, Kalloy one-bolt seatpost, Hsin Lung 56-cm aluminum alloy handlebar, Hsin Lung 12-cm stem, Ritchey True grips, Shimano Exage 500LX cantilever brakes

*promise void in Texas and New England