



AMERICAN CLASSIC 29ER WHEELS

Weight w/o skewers: 745g front/ 855g rear

Price: \$600

Intended use: Cross Country

Braking: Disc Only

Tubeless compatible: No

Spokes: 32 Sandvik stainless, 14/15 gauge

Nipple material: Aluminum

Axle type: Skewer

I was interested in these wheels as a way to speed up my climbing, which has been perceptibly slower and less snappy with big wheels than with small. Yes, the added rotating mass makes big wheels harder to accelerate.

American Classic's disc-ready wheels might be the ticket, as they are quite light, a reported 1650 per set without skewers. While all the components are made in Taiwan, they are designed by Bill Shook and assembled in Tampa, Florida.

American Classic starts with their own patented deep section rim (420g), which has thick walls where it needs to (around the spoke bed and tire bead), and thinner walls everywhere else.

The aluminum nipples are also of a proprietary design, as they are threaded 2mm deeper inside the rim. With 2mm longer spokes as well, there is added material inside the rim to support the spokes. Bill claims to have had zero spoke breakage with this design. The American Classic-designed Sandvik spokes are laced in a three cross pattern.

The hub is of high flange variety, with a 6-pawl mechanism that is cool, as each pawl has two tips for 12 points of engagement with the 24 ratchet teeth. It's also easily serviceable. The whole package is held to the bike with American Classic skewers, designed to make wheel removal easy with their long throw.

The proof of this pudding was in the ride. Yes, these wheels accelerate faster, and I liked that. I needed that. I enjoyed that. And for cross-country racing, they would be a big asset. They've held up great for 300 miles, some of it jumping off some smaller ledges, heavy g-outs, and the like. And they never felt flexy or weak. Then I came across a PDF on the American Classic web site indicating a maximum rider weight of 235lbs. If that's true I can't bring water or tools with me. A phone call, and Bill assured me that the weight limits are conservative and that I would be fine. While I consider weight limits to be a type of warranty disclaimer, this could still be an area of concern for many heavier riders.

And pushed these wheels were. I loaned my bike to Adam, another Clydesdale, although much closer to 200 lbs. than me. He took my bike and promptly hucked himself off a three foot drop, nearly removing the tire from the rim. A rim that remained perfect under my own extreme load over a significant test period is now out of true by a millimeter or so by a guy who doesn't know any better. If you want to do any heavy duty stuff like that, you'll need some fat tires, wide rims and maybe even 36 spokes to make a 29er wheel strong enough for all-free-mountain riding.

There are a couple of issues worth mentioning. One is the softness of the aluminum cassette body, which can make it difficult to remove the cassette for service. This is simply the price of admission to a truly light wheelset. If you don't like it, get something with a steel body. The other is the long throw cam on the quick release. The same property that makes wheel removal easier causes difficulty in precise adjustment. Grease on the cam is recommended.

All told, this is a well-engineered set of wheels. If you understand that these are for XC and use them as such, they are fast as all get-go. —Maurice Tierney