

bomb proof

Easton's hoops go the distance

EASTON HAVEN **$850 /** EASTONCYCLING.COM/MOUNTAIN

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN ANY BIKE WITH FIVE inches or more was considered "freeride" and, by definition, was *supposed* to be a heavy pig. Those days, of course, are dead and gone. Enter the Haven: an ultralight wheelset specifically designed for aggressive riding. I spent the better part of spring training for Squamish's Test of Metal race aboard these 1,650-gram hoops in conditions that were invariably crappy. Somehow, the wheels came out the back end of that event looking pristine and never developing a wobble, busted spoke or dead freehub.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Here's a bit of background: The wheels sport unique threaded eyelets that evenly distribute stress on the rim and allow Easton to use less material in the spoke bed. Each sexy-looking rim tips the scale at just 470 grams (including eyelets).

The Havens are also surprisingly stout, thanks to the deeply triangulated shape and their wide profile (21 millimeters when measured internally, 26 millimeters when measured from edge to edge). The wide rim better supports the larger-volume tires that are best suited to aggressive riding. In short, you can run up to 2.5-inch meats on the Havens without the tire getting squirmy and unpredictable. While we're on the subject of tire choices, the Haven rim is 100-percent UST compatible, which means you can go tubeless without adding a rim strip and dumping a bunch of sealant into your tires (which invariably adds rotational weight to your rig and results in trailside repair scenarios involving the spooging of disgusting sealant goo).

Having laced a few wheels of my own, I tend to approach today's crop of highfalutin, lightweight wheelsets with no small amount of dread: unique spokes that my local bike shop has never even heard of, impossible-to-find spoke wrenches, low-spoke-count wheels that are, frankly, a bitch to true…. I've got my reasons.

In that respect, the Havens are a breath of fresh air. They build up and true like any ordinary wheelset—each wheel supports 24 double-butted, straight-pull spokes, which are readily available. An added bonus? The Havens use only one length of spoke, so that would simplify ordering replacements. As for truing, a standard-issue Park SW-2 wrench would get 'er done. You'll notice I keep using the word "would" here, because I've yet to true these wheels. Despite my riding them like an angry gorilla, they keep rolling straight.

While some wheels can feel flexy at this weight, the Haven's ride quality is excellent. A variety of factors add up to make that a reality: the through-axle front hub, the highly and evenly tensioned, three-cross spokes, the wide, triangulated rim. The key takeaway here is that the wheels track beautifully in harsh conditions. The Haven's lack of rotational weight means that if you aren't accelerating quickly, it's probably a matter of Big Macs and no fault of the wheels.

If long-term bling matters to you (you know who you are), you'll be pleased to know that the pimpy gold finish and water-transfer decals also hold up surprisingly well. I did a bit of scrubbing with Simple Green and a toothbrush, then hosed these suckers down and they came out looking new. More importantly, the freehub body also emerged unmangled, and I'm a champ at gouging those suckers up. In short, I'm impressed.

What's not to like? Well, you may not be able to stomach coughing up $850 for a wheelset; that's certainly understandable, but then again, there are plenty of wheelsets out there selling for three or four times that amount. My primary complaint: As of press time, the Havens are still only available with a 9-millimeter QR/15QR front hub (it's a convertible package), which skews them toward trail riding and leaves me wishing that an all-mountain version (with a 20-millimeter through-axle hub) was here for the taking as well. Make it so. —Vernon Felton

PHOTO: ANTHONY SMITH