SOMA SAGA DISC

BY **PATRICK O'GRADY**

SPECIFICATIONS
SOMA SAGA DISC

Price: $2,400 (approximate value; Soma doesn't sell this model as a complete bike). Frameset: $569.99

Sizes available: 44cm, 47cm, 50cm, 52cm, 54cm, 56cm, 58cm, 60cm, 62cm

Size tested: 58cm

Weight: 27.8 lb., with fenders and dynamo headlight, but without pedals. Frame only: 5.15 lb.

TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

1. Seat tube: 55.5cm (center to top of seatpost clamp)
2. Top tube: 56cm (actual center to center; 58cm effective)
3. Head tube angle: 72°
4. Seat tube angle: 73°
5. Chainstays: 450mm
6. Standover height: 805mm
7. Bottom bracket drop: 80mm
8. Crank spindle height above ground: 286mm
9. Fork rake: 45mm
10. Wheelbase: 1055mm
11. Frame: Tange Prestige double-butted chromoly. Shift-cable stops (downtube cable routing); disc-cable guides (downtube); disc-brake mounts (left seatstay); three sets of bottle bosses; pump peg; spare spokes holders (left seat stay); rack and fender mounts; kickstand plate. Color: burnt orange
12. Fork: Tange Infinity flat crown. Rack and fender mounts at crown, dropouts, and mid-blade. Mini-rack mounts just above low-rider mounts. Disc-brake mount and cable guide (left blade).

➔WE HADN'T intended to review another Soma Saga quite so soon. I'd been there and done that for the August 2011 issue of *Adventure Cyclist*.

But when Soma Fabrications' latest adventure bike, the Wolverine, proved unavailable for a test ride, and Evan Baird of the Merry Sales Co. suggested that we look instead at a disc-brake edition of the company's touring bike, we said sure. Why not?

And I'm glad we did.

I've ridden rim-brake bikes and disc-brake bikes, but this was the first time I've had a chance to ride one model in both configurations.

The comparison wasn't quite apples to apples — the two Sagas differed as much in how they rolled as how they stopped — but at least we were in the same produce section. It felt like meeting up with an old friend who has "had some work done," as the saying goes. These Sagas look the same, only different.

Back in 2011, the rim-brake Saga was not yet for sale as a complete bike (it is now), but Soma's alter ego Merry Sales included some of the parts necessary for a full build when it sent the frameset for review, and I came up with the rest. Once assembled, the bike proved sturdy, steadfast, and a pleasure to ride, whether loaded or unloaded, and I liked it so much I kept it.

I'm tempted to keep the Saga Disc, too — because although the two bikes



13. Handlebar: Soma Highway One 6061 T6 aluminum, 31.8mm four-bolt clamp, 130mm drop, 75mm reach, 44cm center to center.

14. Tape: Soma Rumble Strip

15. Stem: IRD 100mm, 17-degree rise

16. Brake levers: Dia-Compe Gran Compe

17. Brakes: Avid BB7S-Road

18. Rotors: Avid HS1, 160mm

19. Shifters: Rivendell Silver friction bar-cons

20. Front derailer: Sun XCD

21. Rear derailer: Sun XCD

22. Crankset: IRD Defiant, 172.5mm, 46/30 teeth

23. Cassette: SRAM, 11-34 9-speed, 11,13,15,17,20,23,26,30,34

24. Bottom bracket: IRD Quad 75 118mm

25. Seat post: Soma Layback single-bolt, 27.2mm, with setback

26. Saddle: Soma Hishou with titanium rails

27. Headset: IRD Techno-Glide

28. Chain: SRAM PC-971

29. Rear hub: Suzue 12L disc, 135mm, 36-hole

30. Front hub: Shutter Precision Dynamo Hub PD-8 disc, 36-hole

31. Rims: IRD Timbre, 36-hole

32. Tires: Soma Cazadero, 700c x 42mm

33. Headlight: Ilumenox Vega SS-L125M, LED 6V

34. Fenders: Soma Rain Dog thermoplastic with rubber mudflaps

GEARING IN INCHES

	46	30
11	115.4	75.3
13	97.7	63.7
15	84.6	55.2
17	74.7	48.7
20	63.5	41.4
23	55.2	36.0
26	48.8	31.8
30	42.3	27.6
34	37.3	24.3

Contact: SOMA Fabrications, **somafab.com**

For online video, see adventurecycling.org/saga-disc



may look the same, only different, they are definitely "horses for courses," as the Brits put it.

Here's how I put it: The inexorable march of progress be damned, I remain a fan of rim brakes. A poor mechanic, I nonetheless can see myself resolving issues with a balky cantilever at roadside. But I don't bring that same confidence to straightening a bent rotor or jerry-rigging a broken caliper.

Plus I generally travel light over short distances, am the furthest thing possible from an aggressive descender, and have always been confident about my ability to bring a bike to a halt with Stone Age stoppers, even if I have to drag my feet like Fred Flintstone. For a casual tourist like me, the rim-brake Saga probably makes the most sense.

But, for a serious traveler, carrying heavy weight over uncertain terrain for the better part of quite some time, the Saga Disc might be a smarter choice. You can go from 60 to zero with the squeeze of two fingers — well, maybe four — and, unlike me, a Soma Disc owner will be right in step with the rest of the bicycle industry, which is busily consigning the rim brake to the parts bin of history.

The 2015 Soma Saga Disc is not yet available as a complete bike, although Stan Pun at Merry says it may be next year. In the meantime, customers are free to decorate their $570 framesets as they please. Pun was kind enough to ship me a complete machine this time around with assembly by American Cyclery in San Francisco and finishing touches by the Bike Coop in Albuquerque. And the component choices we settled on certainly make my $2,400 review model a one-of-a-kind ride.

"This is a very unique build with parts you'll probably not find on any production bike anywhere," Pun said. And he wasn't kidding. The caramel-

colored frame is still Tange Prestige up front, with 31.8mm butted down and top tubes to stiffen the front triangle, longer chainstays, and lower bottom bracket, and a matching flat-crown Tange Infinity fork, but almost everything else is different.

There are the brakes, of course — Avid BB7S-Road mechanical discs controlled by Dia-Compe Gran Compe levers. The drivetrain is likewise a hodgepodge with a striking old-school look that blends an IRD Defiant crank with 46/30 chainrings, SunXCD derailers (designed by former SunTour execs), and a chain and 11-34 cassette from SRAM.

The wheels sprout from Suzue and Shutter Precision disc hubs to 36-hole IRD Timbre 29er cross-country racing rims wearing 700c x 42 Soma Cazadero all-terrain tires. And Pun topped it all off with some Soma Rain Dog fenders with mudflaps and a tiny Ilumenox Vega headlight powered by that front hub from SP, a Taiwanese camera-shutter manufacturer now in the dynamo business.

The one constant in the two builds: silver friction bar-end shifters from Rivendell. Hey, they work, and you get used to them.

I rode the Saga Disc around hilly, windy Albuquerque, from the foothills of the Sandia Mountains to the Rio Grande and all points in between, and I never missed the traditional triple-ring touring setup on my own Saga, which is only a pound and a half lighter. The SunXCD derailers worked flawlessly with the Silver shifters, SRAM cassette, and IRD crank, and Pun told me that Randonee riders who like this unusual chainring combo report they can stay in the 46-tooth ring most of the time while reserving the 30-tooth ring "for more challenging hills." My experience mirrored theirs.

Like its predecessor, the Saga Disc has three sets of bottle-cage bosses, a spare spokes holder, a pump peg, and a flat chainstay plate suitable for a double kickstand. Soma also has enhanced the Saga's fork with a pair of mounts for a mini-rack like the Soma Champs-Élysées ($119.99) if that's how you roll.

When it came time to load the bike up for travel, the Tubus Ergo and Cargo Classic racks swapped right over from old Saga to new. If you like a low-rider rack, you may need a spacer to clear the front brake caliper, depending upon which racks and brakes you choose.

Speaking of which, braking with the Avid BB7S-Road mechanical discs was greatly improved (surprise, surprise) over my own bike's IRD Cafam cantilevers with their SM Yokozuna pads. And, while I didn't notice any fork flex, even when white-knuckling the levers in one blind corner that ended abruptly at a stop sign, future Saga Discs may have a more ovalized left leg or even a unicrown fork "to stiffen things up," said Pun.

What I did notice was the same level of all-day comfort I enjoyed while riding my own Saga. I rode both bikes during this review, sometimes in back-to-back sessions, and found that regardless of how you trick it out, Soma's touring frameset is a real kilometer gobbler, a trustworthy, predictable ride that gives its pilot the confidence and liberty to enjoy the scenery as it unfolds.

In the final analysis, it's immaterial how you stop your Saga. Why would you want to? AC

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SOMA ACCESSORIES

- The Cazadero tire ($69.99). Made in Japan by Panaracer, the Cazaderos rolled smoothly and quietly on heavy chip-seal at 60PSI while negotiating swoopy, sandy trails with ease at 40. The only real issue was squeezing those fat boys under the Soma Rain Dog thermoplastic fenders ($45.99). But Merry Sales's Stan Pun warned me about that going in, so it came as no surprise.

- The comfy Highway One handlebar ($46.99), with 130mm of drop, 75mm of reach, and plenty of bar top for bags, bells, and whistles. I bought one to replace the Nitto B135 Randonneur on my own Saga and love it.

- And, last but not least, the equally cushy Soma Hishou titanium-railed saddle ($79.99), an homage to my seat of choice, the Selle Italia Flite. "Hishou" is Japanese for "flight," according to Google.

