

## RIVENDELL SALUKI

As Rivendell sees things, road and mountain bikes lost their versatility as they became more specific in their design and purpose. The Saluki, says Rivendell, "fills the blanks between mountain bikes, road bikes and city bikes—a country bike." The company describes this new category in five attributes: all day, any surface, any weather, any hill and any task.

The Saluki's odd wheel size, 650b, is not new. It's been around, according to Rivendell, for more than 60 years. A diameter between 26 inches and 700c, and different from the 650c used on smaller road bikes and some tri bikes, 650b allows Rivendell, in its opinion, to build a bike in a wide range of sizes, with clearance for fenders and tires as fat as 40mm, that fits, handles and looks right. To make the tire size as small an issue as possible, Rivendell offers two rim models and about five tire choices, all available through Rivendell or Quality Bicycle Products, the largest U.S. distributor to bike shops.

Riding the Saluki feels oddly familiar. The riding position is most like a comfort road bike. The relatively high bar gives great visibility and excellent long-term comfort. It's a bit like riding a mountain bike on the road, and a bit like riding a road bike off-road, save that it's far more capable in both situations. It's most like a 'cross bike, except that it will take bigger tires and fenders, and three bottles, and it can be racked up and loaded down for a multiday trip without becoming a whippy, wobbly mess. It's not a light bike, nor is it fast, but it's almost always in its element. It's quicker to list things it isn't ideal for: fast, competitive road riding; steep, rough singletrack; and supported rides—precisely the kind of riding many bikes are purposely designed and honed for, to the exclusion of everything else.—*Matt Phillips*

RICK CHOU; COURTESY



**PRICE:** \$2,750 **HITS:** Utility; beautiful design **MISS:** To some, the ideal of versatility has less appeal than it should **WEIGHT:** 25.0 lb. (56cm) **SIZES:** 47, 50, 52, 54, 56 (tested), 59, 60, 62cm **FRAME:** Lugged, brazed chromoly steel **FORK:** Lugged, brazed chromoly steel **COMPONENT HIGHLIGHTS:** (as tested) Shimano LX rear derailleur and hubs; Tiagra brake levers and front derailleur; Dura-Ace shifters; Sugino XD crank; Tektro Silver brakes; Velocity Synergy rims; Rivendell Fatty Rumpkin tires; Nitto bar; Technomic Deluxe stem; Mini front rack; Brooks B-17 saddle **CONTACT:** rivbike.com



## SCHWINN FASTBACK CX

If you think a 'cross bike is just a road bike with knobby tires, think again. Cyclocross demands better slow-speed steering (which requires a steeper head angle) and a taller bottom bracket shell (for better obstacle clearance). 'Crossers also want a short wheelbase for quicker handling. Taken to extremes, a fast-handling 'cross bike demands a lot more from a rider, reducing the margin for error.

Considering all that, the Fastback CX is a good compromise bike for the newbie 'crosser. The head angle is steep enough for sharp steering, even on singletrack, and a somewhat-short

**PRICE:** \$1,300 **HITS:** A rugged, intro-level CX bike with predictable handling **MISS:** You'll want to customize the gearing to get up steep ascents **WEIGHT:** 20.8 lb. (S) **SIZES:** S (tested), M, L, XL **FRAME:** N'Litened Gold Label superbutted cyclocross **FORK:** Schwinn alloy w/ chromoly steerer **COMPONENT HIGHLIGHTS:** (as tested) Shimano Tiagra front and 105 rear derailleurs; Tiagra shifters/levers; Truvativ Rouleur cranks, 50/36 chainrings; SRAM Road 9 cassette (12-26); Tektro 992AG cantilever brakes; Formula Xero CXR-330 wheelset w/ XSR-6 hubs; Ritchey Speedmax Pro 700x32c tires; SDG Bel Air SL saddle and 1-Beam post **CONTACT:** schwinnbike.com

wheelbase enables easy bunnyhops. But the chainstays are standard road length, so although this bike won't accelerate with lightning rapidity, it does feel solid on fast, wide corners. The bottom bracket could be a bit higher to prevent you from banging the crankarms in tight turns—but on the other hand, a lower bottom bracket feels safer on faster courses.

The Fastback CX comes with standard compact cranks and chainrings (50/36), which is a good bolt pattern for customizing your preferred gearing, but we think most riders would choose fewer teeth in both front cogs, and, in fact, most fully built cyclocross bikes come with smaller gearing than this. It's not a light rig, so those small gears would help on climbs. When racing season is over, you can turn the Fastback CX into a wet-season trainer, because it comes with standard braze-ons to hold fenders. And overall, this bike is a good value, with beefy parts—such as the Formula Xero CXR-330 wheelset and Ritchey oversize bar—that can withstand punishment.—*M.F.*