



ROAD BIKES

MOUNTAIN BIKES

GETTING STARTED



NOVARA Big Buzz \$799 rei.com

MARIN Northside Trail \$590 rei.com

- Lowdown** Usually, better handling means less speed. The Novara's quick, pothole-dodging handling makes it far more comfortable than a traditional road bike, but the high-pressure tires move fast so little speed is lost.
- Best for** Anyone for whom the mere sight of the hard-to-reach, downward-curving handlebars on most road bikes is enough to cause lower back spasms.
- Key feature** The flat bar keeps your head up and your back intact.

- Lowdown** Designed to suffer years of abuse, the Marin is built more solidly than bikes twice its price.
- Best for** All riders. Full-suspension bikes (with front and rear shocks) have infiltrated this price range, but such complexity usually means some sacrifices—cheaper gears, less durable tires. Not on this one.
- Key feature** The front-suspension fork delivers a full five inches of give, complementing the powerful Hayes disk brakes.

S Novara is the house brand of Seattle outdoor retailer REI, and the price of this bike undercuts most comparable road bikes'.

S The budget Northside Trail is trickle-down done right: Five years ago you would have spent twice as much to get this sort of trail-eating ride.

GETTING SERIOUS



LEMOND Croix de Fer \$1,350 lemondbikes.com

CANNONDALE Prophet 600 \$1,600 cannondale.com

- Lowdown** Designer and three-time Tour de France winner Greg LeMond chose a frame of steel, long prized for its supple ride. (Most competitors use aluminum, which is lighter and works for most people but does little to absorb road vibration.)
- Best for** Bikers seeking a smooth, fast ride on all types of terrain.
- Key feature** You shift the Shimano 105-series gears using easy-to-reach handlebar-mounted brake/shift levers, a revelation whether you're racing across France or to the next doughnut shop.

- Lowdown** It's designed for freeriding, the mountain biking trend that entails gut-churning jumps and rock-strewn descents.
- Best for** Aggressive riders. Nearly six inches of bounce, or suspension travel, in both the front and the rear of the bike provide ample cushion on any terrain, and the bike's Avid disk brakes stop on a dime (or a twig).
- Key feature** The acclaimed one-legged Lefty fork (the front fork stays on one side of the front tire instead of straddling it) weighs far less than conventional frames. Wins style points too.

S The bike seemed to hover over frost-cracked pavement. After 40 miles, my upper body felt fresher than it would have after a comparable ride on my own bike—which cost four times as much.

S The Prophet is the most expensive bike I tested, but it feels indestructible and offers a truly superior ride.