

For the Heart

Choosing a bike is more than an empirical judgement, it's an affair of the heart. Intangible qualities like history, romance and soul are often more important than stiffness and weight. Grant Petersen, Bridgestone's former product

manager and the owner of Rivendell Bicycle Works, fusses endlessly over details such as head tube badges and ornate fork crowns, making him the perfect advocate for buying from the heart.

What if you can get just as much performance out of a \$375 frame as a \$1000 or \$2000 one? Does that mean a fine, handmade work of art you can ride is a waste of money?

Actually, a bicycle is less of a "waste," because it is much less inanimate than the kind of art you hang on the wall. It's more like a violin or a fly rod—you work with it, it responds to every move you make, even letting you know when you're doing something klutzy. And like any fine instrument, it inspires great performances and makes even your worst performances (or your most dreary rides) more bearable because it's there beneath you, looking beautiful.

I think it all comes down to what you want your bicycle to be. If your bike is merely a tool and you're after the most performance per dollar, then go for the mass-produced, TIG-welded, chrome-moly entry-level racing frame equipped with Shimano 105 STI, because year after year that's the value leader, no question about it.

But listen: If you've owned a few bikes by now and average just two and a half hours of riding per week during the next 10 years, you'll spend the equivalent of 54 24-hour days

riding your bike. You're a bicycle person, so what's wrong with indulging yourself in something that's as beautiful and well made as possible? What's wrong with supporting the effort of builders who have dedicated their lives to beautifying the bicycle? The art of the frame needs patrons just as much as any other art does, and if not you, then who?

We've all heard people say, "I'd be afraid to ride a bike that expensive—what if it got scratched?" All bicycles that are ridden properly get scratched; that's inevitable. But scratches, worn-off paint, amateurish touch-up jobs, even minor dents where they don't matter are just personalized badges of good, hard use. Fine bicycles age well, grow in sentimental value and maintain respectable resale value; cheap ones just get old and wind up in yard sales.

Judge a frame partly by the commitment that went into it, rather than by how much faster it'll make you go. You'll know when it's time to buy your dream bike, and when that time comes, get a bike built with more than just performance and value in mind.

—Grant Petersen

stiffness and resulted in a frame that weighed 4 pounds—tied with the EL-OS frame as the lightest in the test by almost ½ pound.

For the SLX frame to be the softest

seemed technically possible. While the rifling inside the down tube and seat tube was billed as the road to rigidity 10 years ago, an oversize tuberset with similarly thick tubing—like Thron—

should be stiffer.

But I picked Thron as the most shock absorbing. And I lumped Aelle, Cromor, Brain and EL-OS together. To be honest, I couldn't feel a difference be-

COMPANY	TOP TUBE	DOWN TUBE	SEAT TUBE	CHAINSTAY	SEATSTAY	TENSILE STRENGTH (N/MM ²)
AELLE						
Diameter (mm)	25.4	28.6	28.6	22.2	14.0	700
Thickness (mm)	.8	.8	.8	.9	.9	
Weight (g)	290	350	350	170	160	
CROMOR						
Diameter (mm)	25.4	28.6	28.6	22.2	14.0	800
Thickness (mm)	.9/.7/.9	1/.7/1	.9/.6	.8	.8	
Weight (g)	285	362	300	160	145	
THRON (optional oversize used)						
Diameter (mm)	28.6	31.7	28.6	29.5x18 (oval)	16.0	800
Thickness (mm)	.9/.6/.9	.8/.5/.8	.9/.6	.8	.8	
Weight (g)	300	310	300	180	165	
BRAIN						
Diameter (mm)	28.6	31.7	28.6	22.2	14.0	900
Thickness (mm)	.8/.6/.8	.8/.5/.8	.9/.6	.7	.6	
Weight (g)	275	310	300	130	105	
SLX						
Diameter (mm)	25.4	28.6	28.6	22.2	14.0	900
Thickness (mm)	.9/.6/.9	.9/.6/.9	.9/.6	.7	.6	
Weight (g)	260	340	310	130	105	
NEURON (optional oversize used)						
Diameter (mm)	28.6	31.7	28.6	29.9x16 (oval)	16.0	1200
Thickness (mm)	.7/.5/.7	.6-.8/.5/.6-.8	.8-1.0/.6	.8	.7	
Weight (g)	235	280	290	180	140	
EL-OS						
Diameter (mm)	28.6	31.7	28.6	29.9x16 (oval)	16.0	1200
Thickness (mm)	.7/.4/.7	.7/.4/.7	.8/.6	.6/.8	.7	
Weight (g)	220	250	290	170	140	