

THRASH TESTS

HOSS STALLION KNICKERS

Hoss Technical Gear continues to expand their line of mountain-bike-specific riding apparel. Their latest offering is the \$69.95 Ponderosa Knickers.

Features: Ponderosa Knickers have a below-the-knee board-short cut. The knickers are made from an eight-panel microfiber polyester outer shell and a polyester/Spandex liner with a CoolMax chamois. There are adjustable bungee cord closures on the legs. The Knickers have six pockets, all secured either with a zipper or Velcro closures. The Knickers are held in place with a partial elastic waistband in combination with a secure belt and buckle. A rear stretch panel finishes off the short. The Ponderosa Knickers are available in small through XXX-large sizes. Colors are black, gray or beige. You can get more information by calling Hoss Technical gear, (800) 615-0899.

MBA Rating: ★★★★★ Not always fans of baggy shorts and definitely leery of knickers (because of the extra material, weight and snag-a-bility), the Ponderosa Knickers blew the wrecking crew away. Slip them on. They fit unbelievably well. The term "tailor-made" comes to mind. Hoss Technical Gear did their homework when designing the pattern. Even the pockets are positioned where they do their work without rider interference. The materials used (both for the outer and inner) add to the Ponderosa Knickers' comfort. Think soft and light (even after repeated washings). The biggest surprise came on the trail. We never snagged the knickers (on the bike or bushes) and they never got in the way while mounting or dismounting (something that can't be said about many baggy shorts). The extra length over the knees was welcomed on tight trails where foliage is constantly looking to rip flesh, and that added coverage was also welcome on cold rides. Riding in super hot conditions might encourage you to switch to a short like the Ponderosa Short, but we even see an advantage to the Knickers in these conditions for keeping sun off your body. We are giving the Ponderosa Knickers the full five-star rating because it is hard to imagine a rider who wouldn't enjoy these.

Thrash test rating:

- ★★★★★ Perfection
- ★★★★☆ Delivers above average value and performance
- ★★★☆☆ Recommended for intended application
- ★★☆☆☆ Shows potential but has drawbacks
- ★☆☆☆☆ Save your hard-earned bucks



SPECIALIZED XC LOCKING GRIP

The past few Specialized test bikes we've reviewed were equipped with a Specialized locking grip. Turns out you don't have to buy a new Specialized bike to get a set. They are called the Specialized XC Locking Grips, and a pair sells for \$27 from any Specialized dealer.

Features: New for 2008, the XC Locking Grip is a low-profile grip design (its diameter is 1.14 inches) that uses a single locking clamp to secure it to the bar. The 4.7-inch-long grip features a dual-density compound with the softer density on the outside and the firmer density at the core. A pair of the XC Locking Grips weighs 2.6 ounces (with mounting hardware) and is available in white, black and khaki. Specialized, (877) 808-8154.

MBA Rating: ★★★★★ The ease of sliding the grip on to the bar and locking it (rather than blistering a hand trying to squeeze it on), earns these grips an automatic star before

we ever hit the trail. The grips never rotated once the lock ring was tightened. These grips have such a nice feel that you are tempted to ride without gloves (not a good idea). The soft outer compound offers good grip without ever feeling gummy or sticky. Although Specialized pushes the XC Locking Grips for cross-country use, they found their way onto our downhill and mountaincross bikes because of their great feel and ease of installation. A really nice grip, even if your bike doesn't have a Specialized S on the head tube.

FSA XC-300 SL WHEELSET

Full Speed Ahead built their reputation by producing quality components like bottom brackets, headsets and cranksets that offered mountain bikers tremendous value. Their foray into mountain bike wheels combines their component know-how with innovative wheel building skills. The \$449.99 FSA XC-300 SL wheelset is their offering for the lighter side of trail riding.

Features: The XC-300 SL's hubs feature radiused spoke holes, custom dirt shields, and ABEC 5 bearings. Disc-specific rims are made from 6061/T6 aluminum. Disc-specific sealed hubs are designed with medium flanges. Double butted stainless spokes are used, and Scatto Quick Releases are standard equipment. Our front wheel with quick release weighed one pound, 14 ounces. The rear came in at two pounds, four ounces. You can get more information by calling FSA at (425) 488-8653.

MBA Rating: ★★★★★ We have had the XC-300 SL wheelset in operation on a number of cross-country bikes for well over six months. To our amazement, the only sign of usage (other than dirt and mud) is a rear wheel that barely went out of true and was corrected with a few turns of a spoke wrench. Now a little confession. We pushed the envelope by slapping the wheelset on a trailbike for some of our testing. It even survived a Super D race. While FSA clearly states the XC-300 SL is for cross-country racing, if you are easy on wheels, know how to land small jumps and pick smart lines, these wheels could be pressed into service for trail riders who want light weight and fast acceleration. We also have to mention the quick release skewers (an afterthought on many wheelsets) because their operation is smooth, secure, consistent, and they look beautiful. The XC-300 SL wheelset has proved to be fast, durable and hassle free. Add to this their sub-\$500 price tag and you've got a sweet set of hoops.

