

Bike Review: GT Sanction 2.0

By MBT Staff

All Mountain's Never Been So Inclusive

Defining New School

Perhaps the most over-used term of the past decade would have to be “old-school” in referring to any process with a rich heritage. In that line of thinking, what exactly is “new school” and why doesn’t anybody ever say it? Not to worry if rhetoric doesn’t happen to be your strong suit, your friends at MBT are here to tell you all about new school through the GT Sanction 2.0.

In the world of mountain biking new school technology comes in the form of long-travel suspension, lightweight chassis, and the ability to pedal the bike to the summit before descending. In other words, riders today want a bike that comes pretty close to the downhill performance of a true shuttle-runner while maintaining the pedal-friendly habits of yesteryears trail machinery. The Southern Californian design team at GT understands this concept better than most and unleashed not one but two separate models aimed at accomplishing this very goal: The Force and the Sanction.

We’ll be honest; it was a difficult decision for the MBT camp to decide upon which camp we considered ourselves a part of after taking a look at GT’s impressive line. Both bikes offer 6 inches of suspension travel and the benefit of the proven iDrive system (now shortened to ID). If you find yourself in a similar decision-making dilemma, think of the Force as an aggressive trail bike and the Sanction as one of the lightest big-hit capable bikes on the market. Interestingly, the frames themselves are nearly identical in terms of material and weights so it is the component specs that make all of the difference between the two lines. We selected the middle-tier Sanction 2.0 (at \$2299- it sits right in between the \$1799 Sanction 3.0 and the \$3299 Sanction 1.0).

Specs

Our test model came equipped as follows:

Squish in the form of a Marzocchi Bomber 5.5 fork, 160mm travel in the front and a Fox DHX Air 3.0 shock in the rear. 18-Speed drive train with SRAM X-9 rear derailleur and Shimano LX front derailleur; shifters of the SRAM X-7 variety. Shimano Hone cranks and dual-ring (22/32) with bash-guard. Braking is accomplished via Avid Juicy 5 hydraulic discs front and rear. Ritchey components make a majority of the connections while WTB provides the Pure V race saddle. DT Swiss X430 rims wrapped in Kenda Nevegal 2.3" rubber get the power to the terra firma and yes; GT includes those Crank Brothers Acid pedals shown in the review.

Suffice to say, for \$2200, we were quite impressed!

We know, enough about the design details already... You want to know what it's like to spin those cranks. We'll be coming to that in just a moment (impatient readers may want to skip ahead). The Sanction features an aluminium 6061 monocoque frame with absolutely gorgeous swoops and curves. The main and bottom bracket pivots are heavy duty and sealed. The i-link itself is forged and those modular dropouts are designed to work in conjunction with a 12mm Maxle. All told our Large test bike tipped the scales as just a tad over 35 pounds.

The Test

Mounting up into the saddle of the Sanction is an instant reminder of the bikes 'take no prisoners' attitude. It is beefy and solid feeling with a long wheelbase but a surprisingly upright riding position (short reach to the bars thanks to a low-rise 70mm Thompson Elite X4 stem). We clipped in after fiddling with the external suspension settings (there are many) and went out on the dry summer trails of Western NY determined to find the limitations of the Sanction. We failed at finding the bike's limits but succeeded in walking away impressed.

Expecting that 35 pound heft to pose a problem in the get up and go department, we were absolutely blown away by the bike's pedalling performance. Simply put - the Sanction does flats and yes it does climbs too. With around 25% sag dialled into the Fox DHX shock, the Sanction spurts forward with authority usually reserved for XC rigs and the reason for this is hardly a mystery: GT's ever-refined iDrive system puts the rider's weight (when seated) behind the cranks while the pedals actually put downward force into the completely isolated rear triangle. On paper the system is unique, on the trail it is downright amazing. Maybe you think we're overdoing it a bit on the praise department but let's put it this way: We found ourselves continually pushing the big ring (of the two) and with the very highest gearing consisting of 32 teeth and found ourselves wishing we had the option of up- shifting into a third ring to keep the power coming on! Most bikes this burly feel like they have too many gears, and yet this one begs for more.

Additionally, we appreciated the firm yet responsive feedback that the Shimano Hone cranks provided. The entire chassis is the perfect blend of rigidity without feeling overly stiff.

The suspension is well mated for the task at hand which includes everything from small trail clutter to all out rock garden poundings and aerial escapades. This was our first opportunity to sample Marzocchi's 5.5 Bomber and we found the fork to be an excellent choice for the Sanction's dual personality as a pedal-happy trail bike and a downhill dominator. The ProPedal equipped Fox DHX 3.0 Air may lack a few external adjustments of the well respected 5.0 version, we found the shock to be more than adequate for nearly anything the mountain had to offer thanks in no small part to the amazing ID equipped chassis.

Once the speeds start to increase, we found that long wheelbase mentioned above to be quite an asset in offering up unrivalled stability with a relaxed cockpit that encouraged railing lines that would cause lesser bikes to overshoot. We found that the

harder we pushed the Sanction, the better it seemed to handle. This is not a bike that loses its composure when the going gets rough. What's more, those six inches of travel we've been clamouring on about works well enough in slow-speed situations but transforms into sheer brilliance once the ground points downward.

We were initially in the habit of taking the smoother lines around our favourite downhill runs (a habit from our 5 and 4 inch travel bikes) before we realized that the Sanction doesn't flinch when pounded through rough chop, square edge clutter, or endless rock gardens. On the Sanction, the quickest route was often the straightest one down the mountainside regardless of what obstacles stood in its way only unlike a true downhill bike, this wasn't on account of the fact that carving a sharp corner wasn't an option. If your definition of bliss involves pedalling over tight ribbons of single track, the Sanction delivers. If on the other hand your idea of good times is to blitz the side of a mountain, the Sanction has you covered there too.

Unlike the Sanction 1.0 which includes Shimano's new XT brakes, GT spec'ed the 2.0 with the proven performance of Avid's Juicy 5 system. Don't mistake this change in the spec sheet to reflect a downgrade to lower the MSRP of the 2.0 - the Avid Juicy modulates beautifully without causing the dreaded real wheel lock-up that so often accompanies high-speed braking before sharp corners. After a quick and painless burn-in, we adored the brakes on the Sanction 2.0 and wouldn't swap them out for the XT's even if we had the choice.

Pieces and Bits

Despite its appearance as a slightly scaled down downhill or big hit machine, the Sanction has a few component specs that may come as a surprise in the form of relatively narrow tires (2.3") and a low-rise stem coupled to a fairly flat bar. Rest assured these decisions weren't mistakes on GT's part nor were they selected for price shavings. After a minute in the saddle, it becomes quite obvious that part of the bike's incredible pedalling performance stems from the fact that a slightly slimmer contact patch with the ground equals less rolling resistance. In addition that 67 degree head angle would cause too little rider weight to reach the front wheel had a high-rise stem been mounted to a sweeping downhill bar.

Be forewarned that the Sanction frame tends to run a bit on the large side so riders used to medium may want to demo a small before purchasing (and so on). If we could change anything about the Sanction, we would probably exchange the bash-guard for a third chain ring ala the Force on account of the simple fact that the Sanction rider is more than capable of pushing it. How often can that be said of a bike this burly?!

GT's attention to detail is phenomenal considering its MSRP- Little things like the GT lock on grips and Crank Brothers Acid pedals just peg the value meter. Finally, the colour of our flat grey test bike is listed as Cassius Clay. If that's not typical GT goodness in a nutshell, we don't know what is.

Conclusion

GT has created a bike (two of them actually) that has absolutely obliterated the notion of shying away from the long-travel mountain bike market. Not only does the Sanction do the impossible by combining pedalling performance with big-drop

burliness, it does so at half the price of its closest competition (the Santa Cruz Bullet). We spent three weeks thrashing our test bike on some of the gnarliest east-coast downhills we could find and our Sanction is truly no worse for wear. As a member of our long-term test fleet, we hope to eventually swap that bash guard for a triple chain ring setup to push the limits of its trail proficiency. We'll keep you posted as to the results but, in case you haven't been paying attention, suspect that it will continue to amaze.

We started this report by talking about the concept of new school design and believe that the GT Sanction is a perfect example of where the market is heading. Whether downsizing from a 45-pound downhill bomber or up sizing from a 25-pound missile, the Sanction will manage to impress. With a simple, bombproof design and handling that feels every bit at home in tight sweepers as it does at the bike park, we think GT's designers had one thing in mind when they designed the Sanction: Fun.

We can state with confidence that they succeeded.

For More Info: gtbicycles.com.