

Jeff also sells small packs called Fuel Cells that can be mounted to the top tube and either the seat post or stem, to add another handy place for things like food or a camera.

In use, the bags keep loaded-down riding on technical terrain fun rather than something to suffer through. The extra weight is obviously noticeable, but the well-thought-out system keeps things from shifting around and affecting steering. Weight is carried on the centerline of the bike, which in my experience, makes for a more predictable ride when cornering versus weight hung from the sides in panniers. In steep terrain, the seat bag can get in the way of getting behind the saddle; stopping before the steep stuff to transfer gear to the hydration pack is a pretty simple solution.

This system seems to attract two types of riders: those looking to go as light as possible for speed such as GDR racers,

and those looking to tour on trails that would be difficult to ride with traditional racks and panniers. The custom-made aspect is the heart of the system, and allows the bags to be used on just about any mountain bike, from 6"-travel all-mountain rigs to rigid 29ers. Ready for adventure? Go to www.carouseldesignworks.com. —Eric McKeegan

Prices:

High Roller: Small (5" diameter x 11-18") - \$100,

Big (6" x 13-24", tested) - \$115

Escape Pod: Small (3-7 liters) - \$140, Medium (5-9 liters, tested) - \$160, Large (8-12 liters) - \$170

Custom Frame Packs: \$80-190

Fuel Cells: \$55-70

Map Cases: \$90-100

CAFFÉLATEX TIRE SEALANT

Caffélatex from Effetto Mariposa is a synthetic latex tire sealant available alone or as part of a kit. Using the entire kit will convert standard rims into a tubeless system or complete a tubeless-ready wheel and tire set. (It's not recommended to use non-tubeless-ready tires.) Unlike other sealants, Caffélatex becomes foamy when agitated, or as you ride, to fill the tire cavity and effectively seal sidewall punctures. It also contains no ammonia, as other sealants do, so it won't corrode your expensive rims.

The \$60 Race Kit includes one roll of 21mm-wide Caffé Tubeless Tape and a 250ml bottle of sealant, which is enough to do two 29er wheels. A syringe-like sealant injector, two Presta valve stems with removable cores and a valve key tool are also included. The Heavy Duty Kit uses 25mm-wide tape, also available separately for \$18. The 250ml bottle of sealant alone goes for \$14, and a larger 1L bottle of sealant costs \$30.

For testing, I used the Industry Nine wheelset with Stan's ZTR Flow 29er rims (reviewed in issue #138) and a new pair of Bontrager EXP 29.3 tubeless-ready tires. After cleaning the rim surface with rubbing alcohol, I applied the 21mm Caffé tape and remounted the tires with a tube pumped to 50psi to ensure even adherence. The directions recommend leaving the tube in for a few hours, so I went for a ride.

After removing the tube and inserting the Caffé valve stem, I mounted the tires as normal and added air without sealant to be sure the tires seated correctly. They held 40psi and emitted a small amount of hissing from the valve stem area. Assuming the sealant would take care of that, I unscrewed the valve core and injected 100ml of sealant into each tire, replaced the core, filled the tire with 50psi using a floor pump then shook the wheels like a madman. I also rode around my neighborhood to be sure the sealant completely coated the tires.

To my surprise, sealant filled numerous pinholes in the tire casing produced during the manufacturing process. The tire bead was tight with no sealant escaping at the rim interface. The next morning though, both tires were flat. After dismantling, I saw sealant had penetrated underneath the



PHOTO: SHANNON MOMINEE

tape and a little had leaked out of the spoke holes.

Searching the internet I realized the 25mm tape should have been used with my rims, so I repeated the entire process. Since I was starting fresh, I used one Caffé valve stem with its blocky-rectangle seal, the only style offered, and as a comparison, one Stan's stem—there are many varieties, but this one pushes into the valve hole like a plug. The Caffé stem allowed some air to escape again, but with a few shakes of the wheel the sealant secured the area, whereas the Stan's valve stem was leak-free before adding sealant.

Without tubes my wheelset lost 150g and I've yet to flat riding 26-28psi. Matt, our graphic designer, pulled a hawthorn from his Stan's-sealed tire, and without the thorn to bond to, the Stan's wouldn't reseal the hole. Replacing Stan's with Caffélatex, adding air and shaking the wheel sealed the hole in seconds and retained air pressure.

Caffélatex is obviously a play on words and when I tested the foaming action in a clear glass jar, I understood the humor. First, the color resembles a latté. Second, gently shaking the jar produced the foaming effect reminiscent of milk being steamed by an espresso machine. Besides my tape error, which could have been avoided by measuring the rim width, I thought the Caffélatex system was easy to assemble, albeit a little sticky (but cleans up with a damp rag), and its sealing capability was proved. Made in Italy. www.effetto-mariposa.com —Shannon Mominee