



2019 BREEZER LIGHTNING TEAM 29

Price: \$2,899

Sizes: XS, S, M, L (tested), XL

Online: breezerbikes.com

Tester: Stephen Haynes

Age: 40

Height: 5'10"

Weight: 200 lbs.

Inseam: 30"

Reach: 17"

Stack: 25"

Top Tube: 24.4"

Head Tube: 69°

Seat Tube: 73°

BB Height: 12.5"

Chainstays: 17.2"

Weight: 28 lbs.

w/o pedals, specs based

on size tested

Breezer has been around since the beginning in the form of its founder, Joe Breeze. The Mountain Bike Hall of Famer was playing around in the hills of Marin County with Gary Fisher, Charlie Kelly and Tom Ritchey back in the mid-'70s, and is credited with developing the first model mountain bike, the Breezer 1.

Since then Breezer has grown into a bike brand with a range of offerings from everyday transport to the likes of the bike on review here, the Lightning. While Breezer the company was bought by bicycle maker Advanced Sports International in 2008, Breeze the individual continues to design frames for the company, lending his imaginative vision and historic legacy to the development of new and exciting offerings.

The Bike

The Lightning, first introduced in 1991, is one such creation. Born of the no-nonsense stuff that made the origins of the species so interesting, the Lightning's double butted steel tubing and classic lines draw upon the very best of decades past, in looks and innovation.

Taking the Lightning in, it may be tempting

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to write it off as a boring or lackluster bike, given the straight lines and small diameter tubing. But look closer and you'll delight in the finishing touches that make this bike the sleeper that it is.

Eschewing a bent seat tube in favor of the more utilitarian straight tube suggests this ride might be all starch and no personality, but the seatstay's gentle curve to meet the rear dropout is a bit of a raised eyebrow. The rear dropout's thru-axle with 148 Boost spacing is a nod and a wink at the bike's current mood as well. The front triangle has a similar, if inverted, curve breaking up the straight lines, which converge on a tapered head tube.

Aside from the frame making the best of a well-worn material, the bike employs up-to-date technology to propel its rider through space. A PF92 bottom bracket mated to the

SRAM Descendant crankset and 11-speed drivetrain delivers a nice, smooth propulsion system, while the 29 inch WTB ST Light i35 wheelset rolls well over most everything.

Other parts that round out the build include SRAM Guide hydraulic disc brakes, Race Face Atlas handlebar (which is silver here but will be black in the consumer spec), KS LEV Si dropper and a Fox 34 Rhythm 120 mm fork.

The Ride

Whether climbing up long gravel and surface streets, or steep technical climbs, the Lightning remains steadfast in its approach. Stable and capable, the bike rolls up and over everything I've put in front of it. The wide-ish 785 mm Atlas handlebars do a lot in terms of leverage as well, and they're right at the limit



for me with regards to usefulness in amongst the trees of western Pennsylvania.

The KS LEV Si dropper was a new one for me and is a pleasure to use. Quick and responsive, the unit works flawlessly and is hardly a consideration while riding, which is as it should be. With the seat dropped, the Lightning goes from being a perfectly sensible bike into a super fun bike you want to keep riding. All the straight lines and classic-looking tubing exit the mind as you roll over roots, rocks and the like, taking bad lines the whole way down.

The Lightning is neither very steep, nor very slack, and with a wheelbase of 44 inches, it's not very long either, giving it a funfulness to bound around on the trail. The short-ish 17 inch chainstays keep the rear end active and give the rider the ability to get over most things that the front end will clear in a sort of "loft and tuck" fashion, if you will.

The WTB Trail Boss 29x2.6 and WTB Vigilante 29x2.3 front and rear, respectively, are decent enough all-around tires, but got a little squirrely when conditions arched more towards the wet. Still, they feel voluminous without being "plus" sized. This means slight-

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ly better rolling through transitional space and better carrying of speed in general. It also makes for easier turn-cum-carving rather than feeling like every turn is an event as do some plus-size bikes.

While you can run 27.5plus wheels in the Lightning thanks to ample clearance and Boost spacing, I did not ride it with this setup. I think the bike would be a lot of fun set up in "plus mode" and would likely act a lot more like a big kids BMX bike, rather than the all-rounder it is in 29 inch form.

Conclusions

I've been pleasantly surprised by this bike from the off. The combination of looks and ride performance has done well by the name Breezer. In many ways this bike is an affirmation of what a really competent 29er can do when done right. Anyone looking for a relatively straightforward steel hardtail that packs a punch and will remain relevant for years to come should give this bike a look.