

fighting weight

Carbon hoops that put up their dukes

DT SWISS EXC 1550 \$2,675 / DTSWISS.COM

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE YOUR BIKE *FEEL* lighter, rotational mass—rims, tubes and tires—is the most important area to cleave off the grams. Sacrificing rubber, however, can also mean sacrificing traction when the terrain gets burly. Likewise, running pinner-light cross-country rims isn't much fun—they'll usually result in a flexy ride and lots of time behind the truing stand. One solution to this conundrum: wide, strong carbon rims. DT Swiss' EXC 1550 hoops were some of the first carbon-rimmed wheels on the market, designed specifically for heavy-duty shredding.

The first thing I noticed about the EXC 1550s was their feathery weight. Tipping our scale at just 1,536 grams per set, these hoops quickly approach XC-race wheelset weights. This lack of heft, along with the promise of durability, made the DTs an obvious choice for the brutal terrain and long miles of the BC Bike Race. Even after flogging these wheels for seven straight days of rocks, roots, logs and mud, the DTs never needed to be trued or serviced. Better yet, I never felt like they were holding me back going up or down.

These wheels, however, go far beyond just being light and extra-durable. High-speed, aggressive cornering is where the 1550s fully bloomed. They exhibit incredible stiffness,

while also allowing the bike to remain flickable. These wheels are basically an aggressive rider's dirty dream mixed into a flying dream—yeah, pretty awesome.

The wide 29-millimeter rim width ensured a good tire contact patch and very little tire roll, especially with high volume tires, which helped the ride quality all around—especially in hard corners and over rough terrain where tire roll can mean the deference between railing a line or flipping ass-over-end.

For the most part, I ran these wheels with 2.25- to 2.4-inch tires, inflated to about 30 psi. Despite those low air pressures, I never pinched these wheels hard enough to flat spot—or soft spot, in the case of carbon—the rims. In fact, throughout the year and a half I've owned these wheels the only "damage" they've accrued has been a chewed up freehub body (read on) and some minor cosmetic scuffs on the rim.

My first gripe with these wheels? DT Swiss does not recommend using the 1550s without tubes. Tubeless systems are generally lighter, offer less rolling resistance and are far more resistant to flats than the average tube-and-tire combo. All good things, especially if they could be combined with the advantages the 1550s offer. The lack of tubeless compatibility is a bummer, but honestly, I like these wheels so much that I'd run them over other tubeless wheels any day.

The sole mechanical issue I had with the wheels is their soft freehub body. Over time the cassette decided chew into the freehub body, which made it particularly difficult to remove. When removing my cassette, I had to use a prybar and hammer—two tools that would even make Mike Tyson cringe when applied to high-end parts.

The 1550s can be purchased with just about any common fork and dropout combination: 9- (with DT Swiss' through bolt), 15- or 20-millimeter front (all interchangeable with adaptors) and 10-millimeter (with DT Swiss' through bolt) or 12-by-142 rear axles.

The wheels come with one final downer attached—the big one—the price. While the 1550s improved the ride quality of every bike I bolted them to, I still find myself asking whether they are worth 2,675 bucks. Are they? Maybe, maybe not. If you have a few bikes, the DTs could turn one of them into a true quiver killer. You may, however, have to part ways with one of your other steeds in order to pay for these wheels. —RYAN LABAR