Bike Test

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Sonder Frontier Rigid 27.5+
An off-road all-rounder for bikepacking, rough-stuff, and even technical trails. Dan Joyce tested it.

Sonder’s Frontier Rigid looks like an aluminium version of the Genesis Longitude: the frame and fork bristle with braze-ons and there’s room for 29er or 27.5+ wheels. But the Frontier’s geometry is based on a taller fork and its head tube takes a tapered steerer, so you can fit – or buy it with – a modern 100mm suspension fork.

The rigid version is cheaper, lighter, and still capable off-road, especially with 27.5+ wheels (a zero-cost upgrade over 29in wheels). Plus-tires absorb bumps well enough by themselves so long as you’re not chasing trail centre Strava KOMs or racing choppy descents.

Among the忽多the忽多options for complete bikes. You can specify different wheels, handlebars, saddles, a dropper seatpost, lights... For regular technical riding, a dropper post is a must. While you can lower a rigid seatpost with a quick-release clamp, this post bangs into the seat tube bottle bosses (unless you saw it shorter).

Gearing is good for a budget bike thanks to the trickle down of SRAM’s 1x12 Eagle groupset. That 50t large sprocket yields an 18in bottom gear, which combined with the traction of wider, softer tyres will winch you up very steep slopes indeed – if you can keep the front wheel from lifting. The Frontier is a little short in the top tube, so the front end isn’t always well weighted. If in doubt, go up a size.

I found the 780mm handlebar and hard grips uncomfortable, big tyres notwithstanding. A hacksaw, different grips and bar ends would solve that, as would an On-One Geoff handlebar.

Verdict
Versatile, upgradeable, and good value, the Frontier Rigid is best suited to ‘natural’ trails but is well worth considering by any non-jumpy mountain biker on a budget.