



MOOTS ROUTT ESC

Price: \$13,193

Sizes available: S, M, L, XL

Size tested: L

Weight: 23.2 lbs. (with custom framebag and two bottle cages)

TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

- **Stack:** 650mm
- **Reach:** 396mm
- **Head tube length:** 190mm
- **Head tube angle:** 70.5°
- **Seat tube length:** 570mm
- **Seat tube angle:** 73.5°
- **Top tube:** 590mm (effective)
- **Chainstays:** 445mm
- **Bottom bracket drop:** 70mm
- **Fork offset:** 51mm
- **Wheelbase:** 1100mm
- **Standover height:** 856mm

SPECIFICATIONS (AS TESTED)

- **Frame:** Moots titanium, three bottle mounts
- **Fork:** Bearclaw titanium, triple mounts, rack mount
- **Handlebar:** Enve Gravel carbon, 480mm
- **Stem:** Enve carbon, 60mm
- **Rear derailleur:** SRAM Eagle AXS, wireless 12spd
- **Brake levers/shifters:** SRAM Force AXS, wireless
- **Brakes:** SRAM Force hydraulic disc
- **Rotors:** SRAM, 160mm

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BY DAN MEYER

→ Many years ago, when I was a young service member living in Southern California, a friend and I visited the local BMW dealership. We were both junior enlisted Marines and didn't make enough money to afford an oil change on a German vehicle, let alone an entire car. But my buddy — let's call him Steve — had been struck by the then-new 7 Series luxury sedan. Steve wanted one, and he wasn't about to let a little thing like a piddly government paycheck stop him. Steve took one for a test drive (the back seat was so sumptuous that I was nearly lulled to sleep). Back at the dealership, Steve began to convince me just how he could afford an \$80,000 car. He figured if he never spent another dime on anything but insurance and fuel, he could afford it. Of course, he would have to live in the car, which, from my perspective in the back seat, didn't seem like such a bad idea.

I thought Steve was fully nuts, but hey, it wasn't my money he was spending. And besides, who am I to tell someone they can't have the best?

Which brings us to the elephant in the room: no, the price you're seeing on these pages is not a typo. And yes, \$13k for a bicycle is atrociously expensive. But the Moots Routt ESC is not intended to be an affordable mode of transportation for the average



- **Bottom bracket:** White Industries 30mm BSA, threaded
- **Crankset:** White Industries M30, 38T
- **Cassette:** SRAM GX Eagle, 10–50T, 12spd
- **Headset:** White Industries
- **Seatpost:** RockShox Reverb AXS dropper, wireless
- **Saddle:** Selle Italia SLR Boost Gravel
- **Hubs:** White Industries CLD+, 110 x 15mm front, 148 x 12mm rear, thru-axles
- **Rims:** Astral Outback Carbon, 28h, tubeless
- **Tires:** Maxxis Ikon 29 x 2.35in., tubeless

GEARING RANGE

	38
10	110.9
12	92.5
14	79.1
16	69.5
18	61.6
21	52.8
24	46.1
28	39.7
32	34.7
36	30.9
42	26.3
50	22.2

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consumer. Handmade in Steamboat Springs, Colorado — and with as many U.S.-made parts on it as possible — this titanium dreamboat is for well-heeled enthusiasts who want the very best. Obviously, this bike is unattainable for mere mortals like many of you (and me, no doubt). And that’s okay! There’s nothing wrong with appreciating the best the current bike market has to offer and thinking, “Someday, maybe ...”

Moots has been around since 1981, and they’ve specialized in titanium since 1991, when they introduced their first space-metal frame at the Interbike tradeshow. Moots has continued to innovate ever since, introducing novel designs like soft-tails and dropbar 29ers. Few bikes are as instantly recognizable to those in the know as a Moots, with its unique brushed titanium frame and classic lines. And even with all the changes in drivetrains, modern “standards,” and geometry, a Moots is still considered to be a bike for life (if only because it’ll take that long to amortize its cost).

The Routt ESC belongs to Moots’s Routt family of gravel bikes, which encompasses everything from the skinny-tired racer RSL to the soft-tail YBB. With 29in. wheels and clearance for 2.4in. tires, the ESC is much closer to a dropbar mountain bike than it is to a gravel bike (if anyone mentions “super gravel,” I’ll scream). Indeed, with a long reach, a slack-ish head angle, and long chainstays, the Routt ESC sports geometry that, at least on paper, should play nicely in rough terrain and long days in the saddle. And with a big front triangle, an option for rack mounts, and triple mounts on the fork (which is also made of titanium), the ESC can haul your load as well.

That fork, however, is not a Moots product. It's from Bearclaw, a Michigan-based bike company that specializes in titanium bikes built overseas. I asked Jon Cariveau, Moots's brand manager, why Moots wouldn't make its own space-metal fork, and he replied that it didn't make sense for them to build a fork from the ground up when Bearclaw's fork met all their requirements and was readily available. "Plus," he said, "we are too busy building frames to get a fork project off the ground and given the limited number of Routt ESC that we can/will make this year, it was the right call for us." It may not have been made by Moots, but this fork is the embodiment of functional beauty, with chunky, segmented construction, girthy legs, and clean, stacked-dime Ti welds.

The ESC frame, like all other Moots products, is handmade at their facility in Steamboat Springs, and especially with the premium anodized logos, it is a thing to behold. Aside from S-curves in the seatstays, the tubes are all straight and round, which lends the bike a very business-like demeanor. One glance at the ESC is enough to tell you that this bike has a job to do, and you best get out of its way. Adding to its sense of purpose was my test bike's lack of rear rack mounts or even derailleur cable bosses (no need for the latter when the drivetrain is wireless). Moots will happily include both, however, if you prefer a mechanical drivetrain and the utility of a rear rack. Other options include fender mounts and dropper post routing.

My test bike arrived with a top-of-the-line SRAM AXS build, meaning just about every bit is made of either carbon or titanium. It's truly a dream build, but then again, it better be for this price. For \$13k, you're getting carbon wheels from Astral, a carbon handlebar from Enve, hubs and crank from White Industries, and SRAM's wireless AXS drivetrain that pairs its dropbar shifters with the Eagle derailleur and 10-50T cassette, which is the best excuse for a wireless drivetrain that I can think of. My bike even came with the AXS wireless dropper seatpost. (Don't need a dropper? You can save yourself a chunk of money and have a Moots Ti

post instead.) If that's too rich for your blood, there's the Neo Retro build for the low, low price of \$10,400.

After unboxing and assembling the ESC, the first thing I noticed — aside from how much easier a wireless drivetrain makes for shipping — was how big a bike this is. The high stack number put me in a commanding, upright position, even in the drops. But the standover height of 856mm meant I couldn't comfortably straddle the top tube. I confirmed with Cariveau that I was on the right size and asked about the high standover. "The tall square triangle was to maximize framebag volume and still be able to hold/access two bottles in the triangle," he said. "It does make the bike tall in the standover category, but readers/customers should base their size on what works for them in top tube and reach lengths." Indeed, the large felt just right while riding, and the standover didn't bother me after I learned to take it into account when stopping. With the custom Rockgeist framebag Moots had sent with the test bike, I could in fact fit two full-size water bottles in the front triangle and stash quite a bit of stuff in the framebag, including my whole cook kit, a fuel canister, my sleeping pad, and some sundries.


A funny consequence of the big standover is that the wireless dropper that arrived with my test bike was too long, meaning I had to drop the seat to my correct height every time I got on the bike. The AXS dropper engages by pushing both shifter paddles at the same time, which to be honest is not all that easy when riding in rough and fast conditions. It was a pain to fiddle with seat height all the time, but that's the breaks when testing bikes. Poor me. Of course, a Moots customer can work with their dealer to find a post that works for them. Aside from the dropper height, the AXS wireless business was easy and intuitive and kind of a hoot to operate. The motor in the derailleur makes a funny robotic *zirp zirp* when shifting up and down the cassette, and I found the shifting to be precise and consistent for the entire test period. And installing a dropper post without having to bother with routing a cable and housing? Awesome.

Riding the ESC was a pleasure, but not for the reasons you may expect. Yes, it's a comfortable bike thanks to the compliance inherent in the titanium tubing of the frame and fork, and the long and low geometry makes it feel very stable and reassuring. But what surprised me was just how incredibly *fast* the ESC was. With the included framebag and bottle cages, the ESC weighed in at just over 23 pounds on my bathroom scale, which certainly helps in that regard. So too do the flyweight carbon wheels and speedy Maxxis Ikon tires. Taken together, it makes for a bike that can sprint up steep, loose pitches and float through rough descents. It feels as though you're pedaling in a vacuum, as if there's no resistance at all. I rode the ESC on a series of familiar dirt roads and singletrack in the Wasatch foothills, and without really trying very hard, I set a whole bunch of PRs on both climbs and descents. That's right, *descents*. On a few trails, I was faster on this rigid dropbar bike than on my fancy carbon full-suspension mountain bike.

Even loaded up for an overnight, the ESC felt quick and light on its feet. With 15 or 20 pounds of gear packed into the framebag, a Road Runner Jumbo Jammer jammed between the hoods of the Enve bar, and a Revelate Designs Shrew seatbag, the ESC transformed into a literal escape vehicle. On a mix of pavement and singletrack, the ESC was a joy to pedal loaded; the extra weight didn't seem to alter its riding characteristics one bit aside from making it feel even more planted and stable. If I were gearing up for an extended outing on a dirt-focused route such as the Great Divide, and speed was a priority — and, of course, money was no object — the Routt ESC would be my first choice. The AXS claims a run time of 60 riding hours on full charge, so of course you'd want to bring a charger and use it at every opportunity, as well as a battery pack, if you chose this high-end build.

The too-tall dropper aside, every part on the Moots worked perfectly. The SRAM Force brakes are strong without being too grabby, and the AXS hoods and brake levers are comfortable. The Enve Gravel bar was a nice

surprise in that the drops' flare doesn't put the hoods in a weird position, which is a bit of a pet peeve of mine. The Astral carbon rims laced to White Industries hubs made for a light and stiff wheelset with a nice buzz while coasting. (If it were my money, I would consider aluminum rims for a more forgiving feel.) The Ikon tires are fast rolling and efficient, even on pavement, and are an excellent choice for the ESC. I might want a front tire with a little more bite for Utah's notoriously loose trail conditions, but tires are always a personal choice. So too are saddles: the Selle Italia felt fine under my bum for shorter rides, but I swapped it out for an Ergon I had lying around for most of the test period. Another thing that a prospective buyer could work out with their Moots dealer is the gearing. With a 38T chainring and SRAM's 10-50T cassette, I found the gearing sufficient for my reasonably strong legs and the bike's light weight. Going for a smaller chainring and/or the larger 10-52T Eagle cassette would earn you a lower gear for the steps.

My buddy Steve did not, in fact, buy that BMW 7 Series he'd so lusted after. In the end, common sense ruled the day. But he had acquired a taste for the finer things, and years after he was discharged, he found himself buying an older BMW sedan, followed by a very fast BMW motorcycle. In that vein, have I now developed a taste for very expensive bicycles? I admit that my time on the Routt ESC has opened my eyes to why someone would spend five figures on a pedal bike — the ESC really is that good. But thankfully my choice in career path (nonprofit publishing is not a pot o' gold) will prohibit me from ever being in a position to consider spending that kind of money on a bike. I simply could not justify even thinking about buying something that expensive. I'd have to sell all my bikes, and my car, and probably a few other things. I'd have to live in a tent for the rest of my days. Then again, I do like camping. And how many bikes do I really need? I wouldn't have to spend money on gas if I got rid of my car. Maybe this could work ... 

Dan Meyer is the Managing Editor of Adventure Cyclist.

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