

tread

blocks, the WCS Z-Max Shields provide solid and predicable overall handling. The front wheel railed through corners, and we were thrilled with how well the rear tracked and how good the sense of control was during braking. On climbs the Ritchey WCS Z-Max Shields maintained traction well. Their light weight and low profile helped maintain speed on fire roads and singletrack grinds. There was some rear wheel slip during steep out-of-the-saddle efforts. The rear wheel slip is amplified in loose or sandy conditions where the swallow knobs were just not tall enough to dig in.

What makes the Ritchey WCS Z-Max Shields great on dry, hard pack courses, limits their abilities in wet, muddy conditions. In mud the small center tread blocks clogged with mud and failed to shed it quickly. This made climbing steep, muddy inclines a chore. However, not all is lost in the muddy conditions as the side VFA knobs did a good job of clearing mud and continued to provide a degree of traction in corners.

The Rider

The rider for the Ritchey WCS Z-Max Shield is a cross-country racer looking for a lightweight, fast rolling, and well-mannered tire. On fast, hard pack courses, the Ritchey WCS Z-Max Shield provides speed, traction and predictable handling.

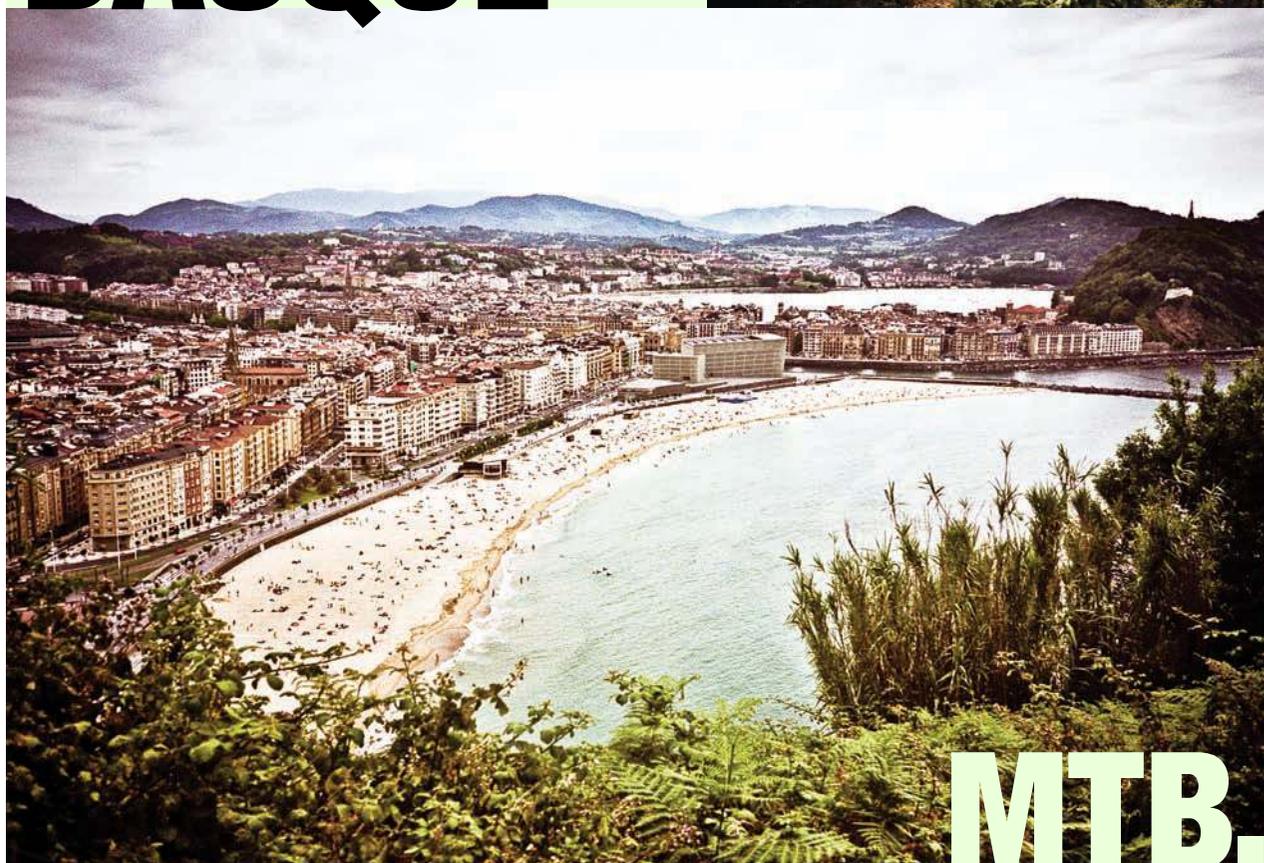
The Line

Along with the WCS Z-Max Shields, the Ritchey Z-Max line of tire includes models designed for a variety trail conditions. The Z-Max Grip features soft durometer rubber for improved traction with a Z-Max tread design and increased knob height for muddy conditions. The Z-Max Intuition WCS has a connected center ridge that is designed to bite in loose dirt and roll quickly on hard packed surfaces. The Z Max Premonition WCS is a more aggressive trail tire with trapezoidal knobs and sipes to provide aggressive traction and added grip while braking. The Z Max Classic Comp is the original all-around, front or rear world cup caliber race tire with VFA tread. Finally, there is the Z Max Evolution WCS with tread lugs that are spaced wider and shortened for reduced rolling resistance and lighter weight. \$70 (ea.); 554 grams; 29 x 2.10; ritcheylogic.com S

THE BASQUE COUNTRY is best known for its incredible culinary scene and world-famous pintxos (tapas) culture, but up in the hills above San Sebastian and beyond, there is a different kind of indulgence waiting to be discovered. From techy singletrack with tight turns, challenging rock gardens, steep grades and lush greenery, to wider and gentler options, the mountain biking in this peaceful and mysterious part of the world promises thrills for riders of every level. Fair warning: when you get up onto one of the ridgeline trails with coastal views that extend all the way to the south of France, the most challenging aspect of the trail just might be figuring out how to keep your eyes on it.

I got to sample some of the goods earlier this year after randomly connecting with Doug McDonald of Basque MTB. Doug and I met in Hondarribia then drove together to a small town of Lezo to begin our knobby-tired traverse into San Sebastian. During the course of the journey I ate an obnoxiously

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MTB.



large bocadillo (Spanish sandwich), took a miniature ferry across the Puerto de Pasajes and bushwhacked through an exquisitely overgrown trail en route to a coastal vista that turned out to be the crowning glory of my three-week trip. We ended up Playa de Gros, the local's beach in San Sebastian, where we sat on a large stone wall killing beers and people-watching.

After spending hundreds of hours exploring trails, getting lost, calling home for the occasional rescue, and generally riding the crap out of every available inch of dirt, Doug has become a virtual expert on the area. Through Basque MTB he offers affordable holidays with top-notch guiding. For a hassle-free, truly insider's view into this wild landscape and stunning terrain, he's your man.



For more information on everything from trail specifics to pricing, visit the website or drop them a line. Check out BasqueMTB.com or doug@basquemtb.com S

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