

Homegrown hardtails

Three British companies show us their individual takes on the go-anywhere, do-it-all rigid rear-ender. Under starter's orders we have contenders from Orange, Pace and Whyte...

▲ Mick Kirkman ■ Danny Milner



Orange P7
Pro £1,199



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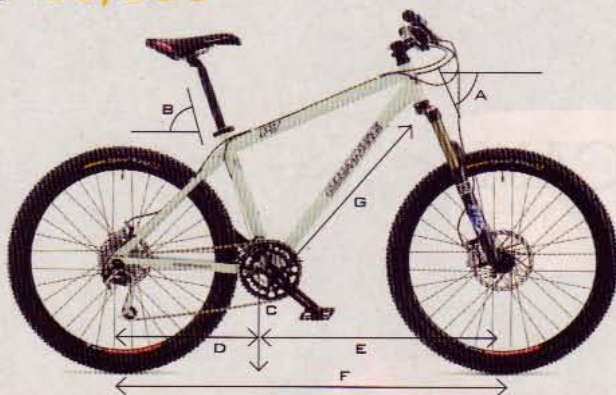
The steel Orange is the odd one out here in material choice and comes specced as standard with a coil spring fork, looking to sacrifice a bit of weight for a smoother, more reliable ride. The Orange is the most straightforward and heaviest on test here, but should also be the most hardwearing.

FRAME

Thousands of P7s are still bashing around the countryside from when this frame first left the drawing board. The design has evolved as suspension has changed and the latest version comes in a gloss white paintjob and tailored for a 130/140mm fork. The main frame tubes are cold-drawn double-butted steel, with the top-tube ovalised for maximum contact area at the seat and head-tube junctions. Standard stuff, but it definitely helps build a durable frame. The down-tube is reinforced behind the head-tube and with crud catcher eyelets as well as bottle mounts; Orange knows this bike is looking at a muddy life.

The seat-tube is shimmed down to a 27.2mm seatpost, with a clamp facing forward out of the muck. Orange says this is a practical measure, but we felt this also offers extra comfort in the form of flex for a long day in the saddle.

The wishbone seatstays are curved to give a little more compliance and offer good mud clearance. Sliding dropouts are based on machined aluminium plates for a singlespeed option, but also offer the ability to lengthen the rear chainstay by around half an inch. We used this as a tweak and moved the rear wheel backwards, finding some more grip and stability by bringing rider weight more over the front end. One thing to watch out for is the sizing on the



ANGLE FINDER

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Head angle	Seat angle	BB height	Chain stay	Front centre	Wheel base	Down tube
67.6°	71.2°	12 $\frac{1}{2}$ in	16 $\frac{1}{4}$ -17 $\frac{1}{4}$ in	26 $\frac{1}{4}$ in	43-43 $\frac{1}{2}$ in	25 $\frac{1}{2}$ in

Orange as we are all over the recommended 5ft 8in for a 17-inch but felt the need to swap from the 19-inch we tried initially.

FORK

Orange goes for the durability and plushness of a coil spring fork in the form of a Fox 32 Vanilla R. The Fox fork is actually only around half a pound heavier, with a similar ride height to the Revelation, even with the 10mm more travel afforded to the Fox. Only offering preload and rebound adjustment, the 32 R is a little basic but we didn't need to touch this fork once. Damping is spot on and it simply works hassle free. The Vanilla 32 doesn't give you the adjustability of the Revelation but is the smoothest fork of the bunch.

NEED TO KNOW

WEIGHT: 12.34kg (27.2lb)

FRAME: cro-mo steel

FORK: Fox 32 Vanilla R, 140mm travel

CONTACT: www.orangebikes.co.uk

COMPONENTS

Even as the cheapest bike on offer, the P7 has some solid kit. Shimano XT runs with a Raceface XC Evolve drivetrain. The wheelset is a mixture of Hope hubs with WTB Speeddisc AM rims and stopping comes courtesy of Avid Juicy 5s. As we've said before we love the feel and stopping power of the Avids, XT is as reliable as ever, but some parts can't compete weight-wise with the more expensive kit on the other two bikes.

A 28-spoke wheelbuild might be an option for a comfort-adding weight saving, but will affect durability. The stem was the perfect length and the shortest on test at 60mm, with Supercross bars being spot on in sweep and width.

PERFORMANCE

The P7 rides lighter than it weighs and the geometry and balance feel spot on. The steel feel definitely gives it a zing and it's the only bike on test we rode straight out of the box, without the need to change any components. The Orange simply feels sorted and has better traction and cornering speed than its less firmly planted aluminium counterparts.

You can cover ground quickly, even if it's not as razor sharp as the Pace, for example. We didn't really notice the extra weight over its rivals too much out on the trail, except on the longer climbs. Descending on the P7 feels confident and sure-footed for a hardtail.



Sliding dropouts allow rear centre adjustments



Rear end offers bags of mud clearance

VERDICT

Best on test here, the Orange has the most no-nonsense approach — nothing too flashy, but it rides brilliantly with excellent balance and rider position. The steel P7 is plainly and simply pitched as a bike for riding without having any mechanicals or hassles, whether you're out for an hour or on an epic ride. It's designed for anything from hardcore rocky descents to just cruising down the pub. The Orange is excellent value with some good, well thought out components matching its do-anything remit, and it simply goes great straight out of the box. If you are looking for the most versatile and practical package, then this one's for you.

