

longtermmer



**Orange Alpine 160 - Custom Build**

review by Jim Smith

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mellow yellow

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Due to the long stroke shock and high pivot the swingarm cross brace is necessary to maintain stiffness, it also makes a neat space to wrap an inner tube!

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Most bike companies these days develop their products with the concept of more. More pivots, more travel, more fancy material. More is progress. More of something means that we're moving forwards and it therefore must be better.

Or perhaps not. Orange Bikes have stuck with the simple single pivot (the Blood & 225 are simply linkage actuated single pivots) and through tweaking the pivot point, perfecting the geometry and changing the tube profiles Orange have created some true classic bikes, the Five being a modern day trail centre legend.

The Alpine is a breath of fresh air, a true all round frame. A bike that'll pedal uphill and descend like a mini downhill bike – sounds perfect really? Or even – the ideal retired downhiller's bike. All the thrills without the old, creaking bones, perfect for the rider who has hung up the race plates but still wants to go downhill fast. Don't get confused though – this isn't a replacement for the Patriot. Think of it as a new bike altogether to avoid getting wires crossed.

The Alpine has had a long childhood, going through various prototypes including the sought after Alpine Five until eventually ending up in its current form as the Alpine 160 – a mini 224 with the ability to pedal uphill. Sounds ideal for the UK, where let's be honest, unless you're on the podium at your local races, you really don't need a big 10" travel bike – and for events like the Megavalanche a full on downhill rig is just too much travel and weight.

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But does it live up to all this hype? In the last few months I've been putting it through its paces on cross country tracks and short downhill runs. Set up with a more heavy hitting build of Fox 36 Van R forks, DT Swiss 440 hubs laced to 5.1D rims, Fox DHX Coil shock, twin ring SLX cranks up front and Avid Juicy Carbon stoppers means that it'll shrug off nearly any downhill track in the UK as well as whipping around the usual Welsh trail centres with ease. Not to mention its namesake, the Alps, where the mix of relatively low bottom bracket (13.5") and the low standover height compliment the downhill bike feel and would be right at home on flat out Alpine trails.

Let's be honest though, this is a 6" travel frame and it's never going to climb like a hardtail, however with a steeper angled seat tube and a long seatpost you can crank the seat right up (I'm using a 400mm USE post) and get spinning. Pedal bob is limited by the high pivot point and the suspension remains active over bumps. You can get the frame with a Fox RP23 air shock but coming from a downhill bike background I feel the coil offers the best performance on the trail. The frame is not available with a QR option, but rather uses the rear Maxle setup which is very useful if you're putting your bike in and out of a car like me and is set firmly in the big dropouts for maximum stiffness.

With 160mm front and back this bike is very well balanced and feels confident in the air with the right geometry to make going at speed downhill so much fun. Compared to other bikes in the 'all mountain' stable such as the Lapierre Spicy or Commencal Meta 5.5 it does have a slightly longer wheelbase making it more stable on the downs and a much slacker head angle (65.5 degrees compared to 69 on a Meta 6) means this bike descends like no other enduro rig around. Combined with a set of wide bars and a 50mm stem the steering is nice and direct. You can have the bike in a number of options, I chose frame only, but the frame is the same in all of them – only the build kits differ.

Altogether a true mini downhill bike with the ability to climb hills, this bike rails corners, jumps confidently and ploughs through tough terrain with reliable, predictable suspension. This isn't the best all round bike because it suffers a little on the ascents, but if you're in the market for an hard hitting enduro bike then look no further – Orange have got the design perfected with the Alpine 160.



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Using a mix of Reynolds and 6061 tubing the Alpine has great lines and super strength for a minimal weight penalty

Manufacturers take note: Cable guides thought about as part of the design, not an after thought!

