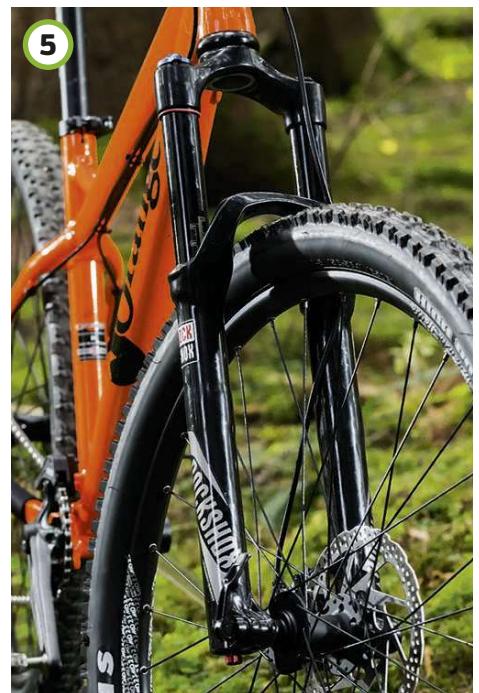




1 A 44mm headtube gives maximum flexibility
2 A narrow/wide ring is backed up with a chainguide
3 The price-conscious rigid post could be upgraded to a dropper
4 The budget hoops are heavy but reliable
5 The Revelation fork could be stiffer



Orange Crush

£1400 Hardcore hardtail with clear, dogged trail-crushing intentions.

The Crush has been around a while now, always with very clear intentions – to be a gravity-biased trail slayer. Orange's most recent 650b-wheeled incarnation has had some exciting frame changes to modernise its geometry, further increasing its functionality and fun factor. The rear triangle has been made slightly shorter with 430mm chainstays, and features a 142x12 bolt thru-axle as well as more tyre clearance for wider rims and chunky tyres. The headtube is now of the 44mm variety, allowing the fitment of all headset types and steerer shapes. It also means that if you own an Orange Five, for example, everything can be swapped back and forth for summer and winter configurations, should you desire. Most provocatively for us, the top tube has been made slightly longer at 613mm (size medium) and the head angle slacker at 66 degrees – as we say, clear motives. We tested the entry-level Crush S on everything from cross country-esque days, to full-on black-graded downhill runs.

Crush by name, crush by nature

Okay, buckle up, you're in for the ride of your life! At 12.8kg (without pedals) it's no flyweight for a hardtail and means winching to the top of the first hill is achieved adequately if not effortlessly. A lengthy front centre does result in the ability to climb up gradients well beyond the range of the 11-36t rear cassette – it's no XC bike, but is precise enough. However, stand at the start of the first trail and the Crush is like an eager pup (think pitbull) straining on its lead, gagging to be let loose after the neighbour's poor unassuming cat. Simply dropping in to the trail isn't enough for the Crush, it wants you to start a way back down the fire road and sprint into the mouth of hell. The slack head angle and tight back end means weaving through a tight slalom course of trees is dispatched with ease. In fact, the Crush wants you to slap corners and clout through root and rock gardens so hard and fast that a delightful orchestra of rim dinging and spoke flexing becomes the Dolby surround sound of every trail.

The wheels on this cheaper model are Alex MD23 rims built on to Formula hubs. While they're heavy and un-refined, they proved perfectly reliable, remaining true and dent-free, which is hugely surprising considering the Crush literally wants you to try to rip the tyres clean off in every turn. Speaking of tyres, you'll want to swap out the Maxxis Ardent rear before riding it on anything other than

your driveway – at this time of year, it was next to useless grip-wise and being the cheapest of options in the Maxxis range, its compound is harder than most. The S comes with a 140mm RockShox Revelation RL fork bolted to the front. While it's perfectly capable and stiff enough for most trail situations, if you want to hit things as hard as the Crush will allow, you'll likely want something beefier – the more expensive RS model comes with a Pike fork.

Winch and plummet

With such a low stand over and relatively low bottom bracket height of 310mm, all formed from industrious-looking custom-butted 6061-T6 aluminium, it's not designed to be a cross country whippet. It'll do it, happily in fact, but that's not the purpose of the Crush. That bottom bracket height makes cornering hard an absolute riot, and the low top tube results in a bike that's just as happy hucking the local dirt jumps as it is galloping down your local DH runs with you hanging off the back giggling like a kid in a candy store – like we did, lots.

With winch and plummet being its main objective and internal cable routing available, the Crush is crying out for a dropper post. A KS Lev Integra can be specced as a £240 optional extra and the next model up, the RS, comes with one already fitted. A mix of reliable Shimano SLX 1x10, Race Face cranks and chainring round out the drivetrain and show it's clearly aimed at reliability while keeping prices down. Entry-level Shimano stoppers offer sufficient power for hauling up while the 760mm-wide Kore bars and 50mm stem finish off the cockpit. The frame itself is uber-stiff but not overly harsh. Sure, if you gas-to-flat on the Crush – which it'll love – you'll be rewarded with a brick wall-style boneshaker of a landing, but nothing you wouldn't expect from such a burly aluminium frame. Rule 12 of the Velominati rules – N+1 (Google it now) – holds firmly true with the Orange Crush in question.

www.orangebikes.co.uk



An absolute brawler of a hardtail, hugely capable and diverse but it's crying out for a dropper post

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