



ORANGE ALPINE 160 AM £2,799.95

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Our first thought on seeing the Alpine 160 AM at EuroBike was this could be the one. We even ran the tape measure over it to get a rough idea of sizing and promptly ordered a 16in for test.

Frame

The key thing to note about the Alpine 160 AM is that it is not a direct replacement for the Patriot; that will follow later this year. Think of it as a Five AM with a slacker head angle and more travel and you'll get a better idea of where Orange is coming from.

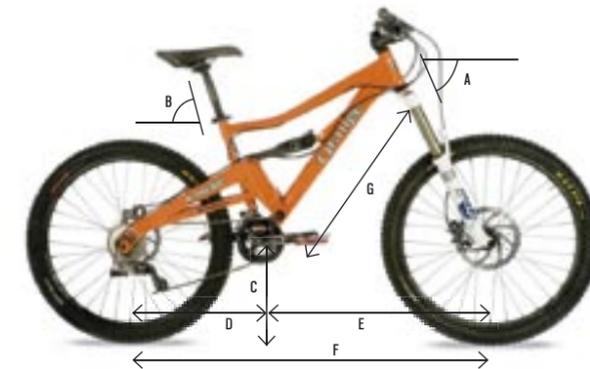
Increasing the travel from 140mm to 160mm meant using a longer stroke shock was necessary. This forced a swingarm redesign to achieve similar suspension and pedalling characteristics to the Five. Basically, the bigger shock had to sit higher in the front triangle, which meant that the forward section of the swingarm had to come up to match it. Box-section bridging members were then introduced to triangulate the swingarm and achieve the desired level of stiffness.

And while several bikes on test have interchangeable dropouts that let you switch between Maxle and 9mm QR, Orange opted for a fixed Maxle design for maximum stiffness and minimum fuss.

Cable routing is now external, geometry and travel are fixed and the only difference between the Alpine 160 AM and the FR is in the build kit.

Suspension

While there is no getting round the fact that the Fox 36 Float R is an air-sprung fork and as a result its performance will never quite match the equivalent coil unit, it's still the best lightweight 160mm option on the market. On the rear Orange has



ANGLE FINDER						
A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Head angle	Seat angle	BB height	Chainstay	Front centre	Wheelbase	Downtube
65.2°	72.7°	349mm	432mm	715mm	1147mm	660mm

resisted the temptation to spec a DHX Air shock, just to differentiate the Alpine 160 AM from the Five AM, and the bike is all the better for it. It's still not quite as good as the rear suspension on the Commencal, but it is a notch up from the Patriot XCEL we tested last year.

If you feel the need for more bells and whistles Orange is offering 36 Talas R fork and DHX air shock 'upgrades' on the 160 AM at no extra cost, while stocks last.

Components

Normally when we test a bike we have a long list of components that we'd instantly change. With the Alpine 160 everything is in order straight out of the box — even the in-house lock-on grips feel great.

NEED TO KNOW

- FRAME:** 6061 T6 aluminium, Fox Float RP23, 160mm
- FORK:** Fox 36 Float R
- SIZES:** 16in, 18in
- WEIGHT:** 14.4kg (31.8lb)
- CONTACT:** www.orangebikes.com

Granted, the Race Face cranks may not match the stiffness to weight ratio of Shimano's hollow forged offerings but seeing as the Orange Alpine 160 is one of only two bikes on test to sport a bashring set-up we are not complaining.

Hayes brakes replace Hope and while the stopping power of the Stokers matches the best brakes on the market, lever return became ultra sluggish after one muddy ride.

Performance

From the get go, the Alpine 160 felt great. It rails corners, boosts jumps, ploughs through rock gardens and the suspension gives acres of grip. Best of all you never have to second guess how the Alpine 160 AM is going to react to a new situation — leaving you to concentrate on milking maximum pleasure and speed out of every descent.

Not only is the Alpine 160 incredibly easy to ride, there's no fanning around trying to find an elusive sweet spot — set the sag wherever you want, dial in the rebound and you are done.

But quite possibly the single most impressive thing about this new bike is that it offers a massive leap in big hit capability and descending confidence over a standard 140mm trail bike, without a massive increase in weight. Crazy when you take into account the fact that it is the second lightest bike on test and it is specced to be ridden hard, not to save on weight.

Verdict

At the start of this test we said you shouldn't compare the Alpine 160 AM with the Patriot XCEL, but it is hard not to when both bikes share the same ultra slack head angle, wheelbase and only 10mm separates their travel. But there the similarities end; the 160 AM is considerably lighter, has a much lower BB for improved stability at speed and the slightly steeper seat angle makes for a better climbing position. Add that to the improved suspension spec and the Alpine 160 AM nails the Patriot on every count. As for the Lapierre, that's arguably a stronger all-rounder, but if it is pure thrill seeking you crave, the Orange Alpine 160 AM is unbeatable.

