



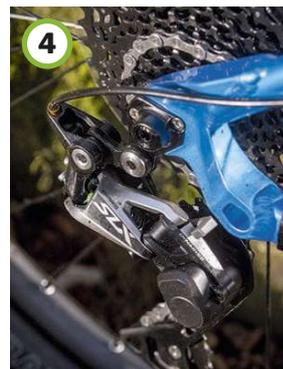
1 The thick single-piece dropouts show this bike is designed for a beating

2 The front tyre is a WTB Vigilante with a High Grip compound

3 The burly alloy frame is stiff but not overly harsh

4 SLX 1x11 provides plenty of transmission range

5 A Boost width, 150mm Vari provides the front end bounce



Orange Crush S

£1450 The Halifax hardtail that thinks it's a full-sus Alp slayer

Lots of companies hang the 'hardcore hardtail' tag on trail hardtails with a slightly bigger fork/slacker head angle than their XC bikes, but Orange really isn't mucking about with its radical rigid rear reprobate.

Described by Orange itself as "an aggressive head-banger" the Crush uses a raked out 65-degree 44mm head tube. That's only half a degree off its 160mm travel Alpine and it's only 10mm shorter in reach and the same 430mm chainstay length too.

Obviously there's more to how a bike rides than geometry but it's clear from the build that the Crush is designed to take the kind of beating that life behind a big fork and slack head angle brings.

The bolt-through 142x12mm rear dropouts are big single-piece, thick-walled sections and there's extra for the rear brake, seat tube and the head tube to downtube junction. While the S doesn't come with a dropper (the £1700 Crush Pro gets a KS as standard) there are rubber covers on the seat and downtubes for internal post routing. Otherwise all controls are kept external for easy servicing or swapping, and clean lines means this is one of the first 7000 series SLX bikes we've ridden with reasonably smooth shifting. While all Crush models come with an MRP chain-retaining top guide for a single-ring set-up, there are cable guides for a top pull front mech. There's just about room for a 2.4in tyre if you want more float than the 2.25in WTB Trail Boss rubber supplied.

Forking hooligan

Besides a switch from Maxxis to WTB rubber there's another significant change in spec on the S model since we last reviewed it. The 32mm legged, 140mm stroke RockShox Revelation is replaced with a thick walled, 35mm diameter legged, Boost-width Yari fork with a 150mm stroke. This together with the tyre swap and a new SLX 1x11 transmission (rather than 10-speed) means nearly 800g (12.8kg versus 13.6kg) has been added to the overall weight. But it's the right move as you now have a 'Heavy Duty' back tyre that won't undermine every gung-ho glory moment with a disheartening, deflating hiss. You've also got a fork that's more than comfortable prying control out of the ugliest rubble heaps like a wrecking bar. While the Motion Control damping of the RC does occasionally cough chunks there's nothing stopping you upgrading the damper to the same superlatively controlled Charger system as its Lyrik bigger brother.

Apart from that, the only upgrade we immediately started thinking about was a wider bar. That's not an unusual statement in most bike tests, but when you realise it comes with a 760mm Kore bar as standard that tells you something very significant about the Crush's character. While the Alex MD25 rims aren't particularly wide, they're laced to a wider 110mm Boost hub for extra stiffness and the WTB Vigilante front tyre is the softer compound High Grip model. The 65-degree head angle throws the wheel way out in front to self stabilise the steering, which makes the 50mm stem not just an invitation to take the piss out of every corner but a flat-out demand. Even when coming off the gearbox ballasted Zerode Taniwha we've also tested this issue (see page 10) we didn't feel we had to back off the aggression levels at all when we jumped on the Crush, and when there wasn't enough corner to get as flat as we wanted we'd find a log, rock or tree root to act as a rail. Seeing as that meant we were generally closer to knocking our heads on apex trees than scrubbing out bar ends there's certainly room and good reason for putting an 800mm bar in there. Yes on a hardtail and yes one that costs less than £1500.

Don't go thinking that this crazy confidence comes at the expense of comfort either. Yes the back end is something of a chiropractor if you don't get off the saddle over angrier terrain, but the main tubes are surprisingly forgiving without making the front end twist about like a kid with chopsticks. That also means that while Orange has plans for plus tyre bikes, we weren't begging for more air cushioning between the Crush and the ground with conventional 27.5in tyres in. Despite the fact it weighs closer to full-sus than hardtail weight, its length and fast-rolling rear tyre mean getting it back up the hill for another go was never too much of a chore either, especially when we knew how much fun we were earning ourselves in the process.

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