

ORANGE ST 4

THE NEW CROSS COUNTRY?

FAST BIKE. WITH A LARGE SECTION OF THE BIKE INDUSTRY MAKING LIFE SIMPLE FOR ITSELF AND THE BUYER BY LARGELY STICKING TO THE GENERAL RULES WITH WEIGHTS, MEASURES, LINES AND ANGLES ON BIKES OF VARYING TRAVEL, ORANGE HAVE COME UP WITH SOMETHING A BIT DIFFERENT. THE ST4 IS UNCONVENTIONAL BOTH FOR ORANGE AND WHEN COMPARED TO MOST OTHER COMPANIES IN THAT: A) IT'S NOT A SINGLE PIVOT AND B) IT'S AN INSANELY FAST 4" BIKE.

Words Steve Jones Photos Victor Lucas





ORANGE ST4



SPEC

Frame: Orange ST4 18" 100mm travel
 Rear Shock: Fox RP23
 (Soft rebound tune/Medium compression tune)
 Forks: Fox Float RL
 Headset: Hope
 Stem: Answer Atac Pro 50mm
 Bars: Easton Monkey Lite XC Carbon
 Grips: Orange
 Brakes: XTR 160mm discs
 Shifters: XTR
 Rear Mech: XTR
 Front Mech: XTR
 Chainset: XTR
 Bottom Bracket: XTR
 Pedals: Funn
 Cassette: XTR
 Chain: XTR
 Hubs: XTR
 Rims: WTB Speedisc AM
 Tyres: Continental Mountain King 2.2
 Seatpost: Thomson Elite
 Saddle: SDG Belle Air RL



Whilst the distraction to rocker link is not an exactly new method of suspending bikes the ability to ride a four-inch bike pretty rapid on descents is a relatively new idea. Bikes of this travel are mostly all about seat up, long stem pain. Of course it can do all that nonsense better than a lot of bikes that boast the skill but where the ST4 scores is in its all-round ability and security at downhill speed.

But before taking a look in more detail it's worth thinking first about where this bike will live. With ideas of all-mountain varying across the Atlantic and also the English Channel this bike needs pinning down to a certain extent. It's definitely no volatile Alpine goat living on the edge of outcrop, but as a fox for sniping around British forest loops it's a killer. Plus there's no hiding from the fact that the UK is a very old and worn down landscape made up mostly of sedimentary sandstones. Where we ride is most likely to be smooth singletrack or motorised forest trails...surfaced, screed and screamingly fast. With the right bike these places form our own giddy zip lines.

It was the Americans perhaps who came up with six-inch 'all-mountain' bikes and the Brits duly fell over themselves trying to get into the custard, forgetting for a moment that we don't actually live in an Alpine landscape. Five inch has taken over as the British benchmark, as six became just too much bike. And that's pretty much where we are at as five gives both the necessary cushion on larger terrain and also the comfort for the less experienced rider. And it's still a lot of bike if the hardest test it ever gets is Spooky Woods or Skyline.

The main problem with four though...inches that is...is that just as geometries generally get slacker, longer and lower by the adding of travel inches, the reverse is true of shorter travel bikes - light, tight, steep and pretty scary once you tip them down up front. As a crude generalisation four inch bikes are pretty boring on descents simply because the design mindset on shorter travel bikes is seen as more closely linked with a cross country racer/long distance rider in mind. Away from specific 4X bikes there ain't many four inch razzers on offer. I can only think of the slightly longer Cannondale Rush or Specialized Epic that would take on this knife.

The ST4 is a bladerunner, and as the Orange ad

proclaims 'you have met your match' or something like that anyway. And its true, this bike is only really for expert riders, mainly due to the low bottom bracket height that requires precise riding skills. If you can cope, well it's an absolute flying machine but it requires no small amount of finesse. Hit the shapes of the ground right and it'll take off, picking up speed super rapid and holding a line that many downhill bikes would struggle to understand. We did find in certain shape corners that the bike tried to straighten itself out up front and this could be due to the nature of the rear travel or the fact that it's a relatively new experience to be riding bikes of this travel at these speeds.

Treat it like a six-inch slugger by expecting it to munch up seven-inch square edge hits and it'll quickly shout back at you to stop being so stupid. It's definitely not a big hitter but a high speed singletrack scorcher that doesn't balk at the idea of being taken down the BMX track as long as the drive' can hit the downslopes proper...innit.

This is one of the few (if only) XC/trail bikes that is comfortable to be jumped. Again don't get me wrong, its not for hucking, but then remember it has all the other things to do well, like get to the top of the descents quickly. This bike is such an amazingly grippy and rapid climber. Some have commented on the seat tube being too slack and hell it would be with a bonkers 90mm stem, but with the 50mm we had fitted climbing was balanced and easy. Jumping on a 160mm bike at this point of the test (not that we spent a huge amount of time doing this) and it's clear how over biked some riders are at trail centres.

In summary it's not quite yet the finished article but I feel Orange will only make it lighter and stiffer from here. At 26.5 lbs it's only half a bag of granulated lighter than the Orange Five. I felt that in some places the suspension wasn't reacting fast enough and needed to return quicker but another day on settings might have resolved that.

That said suspension seems way more than its 100mm and its linear nature seems to have acres of space in it. Strange riding an Orange with this characteristic, getting on the Five seemed like climbing aboard a mini DH bike (still the ruler when things get more messy). Yet this is a bike for a lot of high-speed fun on the smoother lands of this country. It's the same old car/4WD analogy but without the engine taking care of things - this is a bike that would get ridden a lot in a huge chunk of this island if riders were honest with themselves. And it's a bike that will pay back fine riding. ☑