



Does less travel + more fun. The ST4 thinks so.



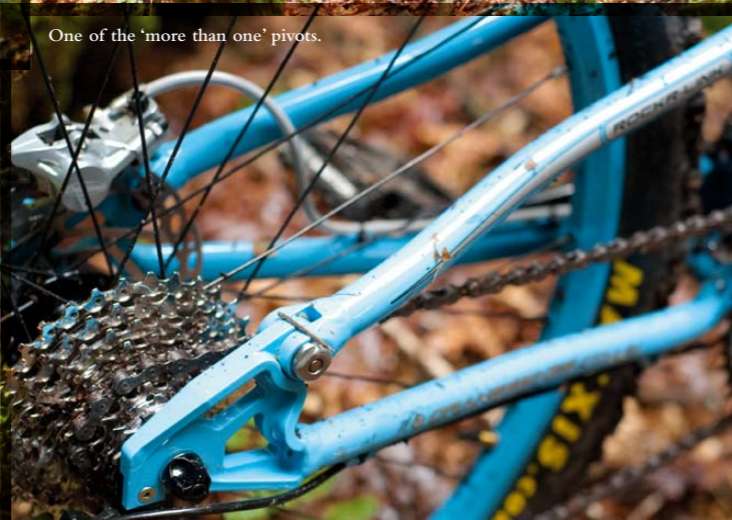
The Rockr.



How 'bout those rims?



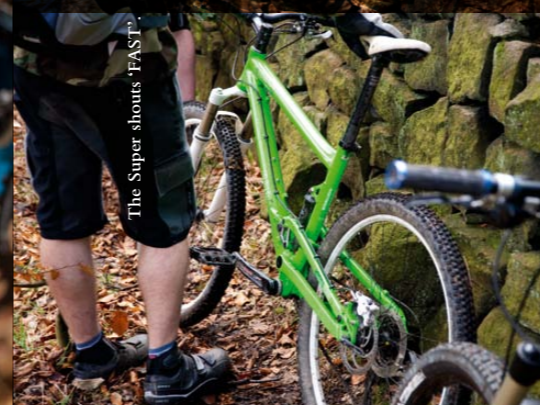
We can still see you.



One of the 'more than one' pivots.



The camo jacket won't disguise the Super 4.



The Super shouts 'FAST'.



The Contact System



Near detailing throughout.

HEAD TO HEAD COMMENÇAL SUPER 4.1 V ORANGE ST4 PRO

Sim and the Singletrack team present one of the most eagerly-awaited head-to-head tussles of recent times.

Photos by Sim

Commencal Super 4.1

From: Madison, www.ultimatepursuits.co.uk

Price: £2,446.80

Orange ST4 Pro

From: Orange, www.orangebikes.com

Price: £2,399.95

It probably came as a shock to the Orange faithful, that 'their' brand had strayed away from the simplicity of a straightforward single pivot system and introduced the 'ROCKR Link', still a single pivot, but a linkage actuated one, and more concerningly one with more than one pair of bearings. What were they thinking over in Halifax? Commencal, whose similar looking Contact System has been around for a while, probably put down their macchiatos and raised their Gallic eyebrows at what 'Les Rosbif' had come up with. There's no getting round it, they look very similar. Orange are probably the masters of the single pivot though and for them to stray from what they do best means there must be some benefit, a big one at that. They know that their fans, who are proud of their lack of anything resembling a maintenance routine, will need a lot of convincing that having a link involved is the way forward for this bike.

Ride.

So why have Orange gone for this design? Firstly the benefits of having a skinny looking bike can't be overlooked. While the mono-coque frame and subframe look good on longer travel bikes, on the shorter travel bikes it looks heavy, and for people wanting a 110mm travel frame weight matters, both visual and actual. This design allows Orange to use skinny looking tubes so the bike looks lighter, and the psychology behind bike choice is not to be overlooked when designing a bike. Obviously the other benefit is producing a system that is, and let's get this out of the way now, very accomplished. Commencal bikes have always climbed fantastically, the Contact System finds grip where others fail, leaving you swearing at the fact that you can't blame the bike for failing to clean a climb. Orange's adoption of a very similar system certainly makes a lot of sense.

The Super 4.1 is Commencal's top of the line 100mm full suspension XC bike, looking at it says 'race-day' and the ride reflects that. The Orange on the other hand says 'all-day' and looks up for anything you are, sitting less comfortably in a pigeon hole. Looking at the geometry reinforces this, the Commencal has a 69.5° head angle on the medium size and the Orange a 68° head angle. Whilst the Super 4.1 feels quick and nimble on forest singletrack it feels twitchy on

open, rocky descents. The Orange in contrast, while no slow-coach through the trees can't match the Commencal for whipping through tight trails, get it out on the rough stuff and it feels stable and reassuring but at no point dull and will out pace the Super. The problem, if you can call it that, with the Orange's geometry is that it really lets you go fast and hard, and there's a point where the Orange starts to feel a bit flexy at the back end, and it's before the bike feels like it's hit top speed. You could slow down, or buy an Orange Blood, but this bike wants to go quick and we can't help thinking a back end that was just a touch stiffer wouldn't go amiss.

Climbing, the Commencal just rips. The only bike we've tried that feels quicker is the Giant Anthem and that's only by the breadth of a racer's stubby leg. Out of the saddle climbing is encouraged and you'll run out of gears to shift up to quickly as the bike almost dances up the hill, the shorter wheelbase helping give the impression of an excitable pup. The Orange isn't as quick as the Commencal but is still a good technical climber, the long wheelbase and low bottom bracket combined with a suspension system that finds grip anywhere there is grip to be had, means you can climb at a snail's pace, virtually stop, change direction and not spit traction.



British craftsmanship...



...or Andorran artistry ?



Spec.

The Super 4.1 is Commencal's top of the class full suspension XC bike. Rock Shox SID Race forks with 100mm of travel, Formula ORO K24 brakes, Race Face finishing kit and Maxxis Larsen tyres are all top drawer items. Commencal make some of the best looking bikes out there and this is no different. The graphics, careful component colour co-ordination and a general feeling that someone really cared about how the finished article would look as well as ride seem to exude from the Super. It looks right. Orange bikes are more well known for their workman like approach to aesthetics, but the ST4 has a trick up its sleeve against its sophisticated French counterpart. Custom painted rims. Why? Because Orange can, and because they do all their powdercoating in house so they decided to give it a go. While nay-sayers go for the safety of black or white rims, we here at Singletrack applaud the addition of colour. It does look good, we are right. So there. They are a custom option though, so black is still on the menu. The rest of the spec isn't exciting but all perfectly workable with the ever reliable XT and Hope hubs and Tech X2 brakes. Even the Rockshox Recons which we had our doubts about proved to be

more than capable performers, although we'd probably invest in a pair of Fox 32 Float RLC QR15 forks both for the increased low speed compression control and for the added stiffness up front for when you achieve the speeds the Orange is capable of.

Overall.

Take either of these bikes to a trail centre and they will fly round; no wallowy over-sprung machines here. If you ride exclusively at trail centres you'll be happy with either of these bikes, although if you're more partial to the black runs and play areas the Orange will probably feel more comfortable and if you want to set lap records around the entire centre then the Commencal will be your weapon of choice. Out of the centre and it's a more obvious split. If your riding involves Speeder Bike impressions and hitting gaps through trees at high speed, the Commencal will instill that 'Riding God' feeling and if you ride XC races or enduros you'll feel right at home on the Super. If you are more into rocky descents and getting the biggest grin and speeds possible on the downs without compromising all-day riding ability, it's hard not to love the ST4. **st**