

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 18

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE...

Welcome to issue 56 of the World's Number One Online Mountain Bike Magazine! We're heading into Autumn in Europe and the trails are running prime after a great summer. This issue we head to Wales both for Red Bull Hardline and to check out the

mighty Black Mountains Cycle Centre. We also chat with Alistair Beckett about bike design and Ewen Turner takes a budget hardtail to an enduro race. Short and long travel bikes get some testing alongside components to make your riding life better!

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- THE ARCHITECT -

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PUBLISHING EDITOR

Rou Chater
rou@nextelement.co.uk

TECHNIQUE EDITOR

Clive Forth
clive@mtbskills.co.uk

TEST TEAM

testteam@imbikemag.com

FEATURES EDITOR

Ewen Turner
ewen@imbikemag.com

WEB EDITOR

James Swann
james.swann@imbikemag.com

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHERS

Irmo Keizer
Ben Gerrish

DESIGN

Raise Creative
raisecreative.com

ADVERTISING SALES

Mary Booth
mary@imbikemag.com

IT DIRECTOR

Alex Chater
alex@nextelement.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS

Dillon Osborne, Bartek Wolinski,
Dave Macfarlane, Roo Fowler,
Kike Abelleira, Tristan Tinn,
Dan Wright and Paul Box.

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RIDER RICHARD GASPEROTTI
PHOTO ADAM MARSAL



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RIDER ANDREU LACONDEGUY
PHOTO PAULO MARIA / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

ISSUE 56

This time last issue I had just had a major operation on my leg after a fateful crash in the Alps in August. It's amazing what time, medical staff and the human body can do.

Ten weeks on from the accident I've ditched the boot and I'm learning to walk with two shoes on, something I didn't think would happen until November at least. It's been a fascinating process, this is definitely not my first rodeo in terms of recovering from injury, but it is the most time I've had to spend "non-weight bearing".

Two months is a long time to have a limb hanging around, as I am sure some of you know. During this period there isn't really anything you can do. Keep the leg elevated, try and eat healthy, keep fit, take supplements and let the body do what it does best.

Positive thinking is a key ingredient here, and it is easy with the tedium of it all to let the dark days creep in. I kept my mind active with work and started some other fun projects in my spare time. The time I would have spent on the bike was spent riding an electric scooter, making videos and working on podcasts.

Once you make it through that period, the fun begins. As you start to put weight on the ankle all of a sudden what you actually do bears an effect on the healing process. I invested in a wobble board and just rolled my ankle and foot on that, and the increase in mobility was incredible.

Short walks around the block with the crutches worked the repaired ligaments and tendons while putting pressure through the joint. I went from thinking I couldn't possibly put weight on my foot in the boot to walking over a mile out of the boot with the crutches helping to support my weight in just two short weeks.

I'm getting stronger every day, and hopefully will be able to start cycling soon, then after that, the MTB can come out of retirement. On one condition though, it doesn't spit me off again, well not for a while at least anyway!

Enjoy the latest issue.


Rou Chater

Publishing Editor

RIDER JORDI BAGO
PHOTO THE RASTA ROCKETT



EDITORIAL

A man with a beard and short brown hair, wearing a grey t-shirt with 'FB ON' printed on it and blue jeans, stands next to a black mountain bike. The background is a vibrant, abstract mural with bold geometric shapes in yellow, pink, blue, and black. A diagonal black line runs across the upper right portion of the image.

Ali Beckett has been around bikes for a long time, helping design some of the most successful bikes on the planet. In a rapidly changing world, I caught up with him to chat about where bike design is heading and why everyone is getting excited about those high pivot bikes. We get a rare chance to take a glimpse inside the mind of one of the most in-demand mountain bike product designers and engineers out there.

THE ARCHITECT

ALI BECKETT - BIKE DESIGNER

WORDS EWEN TURNER

ALI BECKETT,
THE MAN BEHIND THE DESIGN
PHOTO DILLON OSBORNE

IMBIKEMAG.COM

" I WOULD REDESIGN MY BIKE PARTS OR JUST COPY THEM AND MEASURE THEM UP AND TRY AND MODEL THEM. "

Ali, you're a well-respected and accomplished designer, how did you get your first break into the bike industry?

I studied mechanical engineering in college I wasn't overly academic then I found engineering and that interested me; I'd always had a desire to tweak and learn about how things go together. I studied there for about four years, and it was my first experience with CAD, software and being able to design elements on a screen and I thought that was cool.

I rushed through my projects and brought all my bike parts in, and I would redesign my bike parts or just copy them and measure them up and try and model them. That accelerated massively my learning of the software side of things. When I finished the four years there, that's when I first went across to work at Chain Reaction because in this country if you wanted to work with bikes there was no other option and at that time it was relatively small.

I worked in sales and answering technical calls and that sort of stuff and quickly moved across to run the warranty dept, it was just me running it. I dabbled in the workshop building up my knowledge of mechanics, and engineering then got fed up and wanted to go and spend a season in Morzine. A couple of weeks before Ben Reid asked if he would help him at some World Cup races as a mechanic and I decided I would give it a go. I didn't earn any money for the first two years but gained plenty of valuable life experience!



ARE HIGH PIVOTS THE ANSWERS? MIRIAM NICOLE'S RACE RESULTS SAY YES.
PHOTO BARTEK WOLINSKI RED BULL CONTENT POOL



FROM IDEA TO REALITY, IT ALL STARTS WITH A SKETCH
PHOTO MERIDA

What was your first design job in the mountain bike world?

A job at CRC came up, they were looking to increase the house brand team, so I went and helped them in the offseason. This was working on Nukeproof, and they were just launching Vitus at that point and had Ragley and a whole pile of things. It was a great opportunity, and I became the brand manager for Nukeproof. I learnt the hard way about how to deal with Taiwan and Asia, the process of getting stuff made.

I was in a unique situation because I was doing every aspect of it, I was doing the market research, coming up with what I thought the products should be, what the geometry should be, the travel should be, where's the competition.

**" I WAS IN A
UNIQUE SITUATION
BECAUSE I WAS DOING
EVERY ASPECT OF IT "**

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CLEAN, SIMPLE DESIGN, WELL EXECUTED, THE ALPINE TRAIL FROM MARIN
PHOTO ROO FOWLER/ MARIN

" TO DESIGN A NEW FULL CARBON BIKE AND HAVE IT IN STOCK THE MONDAY AFTER SAM HILL WON THE OVERALL EWS SERIES ON SUNDAY. THAT WAS AN ACHIEVEMENT! "

Then I'd sit down and design it all with the help of Dale McMullen. He's a great engineer and great guy; he has a good eye for detail (he developed the original Mega with Brant Richards).

I was involved in the full range for 2015, the new DH bike, a new Mega, the slopestyle and dirt jump bikes. For some reason, we

did them all in one go which was a baptism of fire. Needless to say, everything was late, and it was a real mission. I remember waiting on the frames arriving, from Taiwan to go to Eurobike, these were the first prototypes, and all the other guys were on holiday, and I was the only one in the office waiting for these frames to arrive and try and build five bikes and drive them to Eurobike. But I loved it. I always knew I wanted to work for myself, even when I eventually left (on good terms) I wasn't entirely sure what I was going to do.

The Mega is one of the most successful

enduro bikes of all time. How does that feel to have been an integral part of that process?

I think it's cool, I get obsessed with details, and there are lots of bits I would chop and change. One of the biggest challenges designing the bike was being the product manager and trying to get the bike delivered on time and get all the spec sorted with the third parties and all those guys. That is an extremely difficult process to do so I was really, really pleased. To design a new full carbon bike and have it in stock the Monday after Sam Hill won the overall EWS series on Sunday. That was an achievement! I was really stoked and pleased with how that went.

" THERE ARE SO MANY DIFFERENT STYLES OUT THERE, SUSPENSION LAYOUTS, DIFFERENT SIZED BEARINGS, CLEARANCES, ALL OF THAT MAKES THE PRODUCT. "

Is there a style of bike that people or brands want designing for them? How does a product designer work with a brand?

Some brands know exactly what they want, know exactly how it's going to be and what they need help with is 'how should we get them made?' or ' what can we expect from the process?' Some clients need me to tell them what type of bike we should be making, should it be four-bar Horst link? High pivot? It's all about knowing what the customer wants.

Is it a UK customer? Or someone in the states that don't need the same mud clearance? Or is it targeting the more entry-level side of things? All of those things equate to how likely they are to be successful. These things all factor into what makes a good bike for that customer. There are so many different styles out there, suspension layouts, different sized bearings, clearances, all of that makes the product.

That is product design to me, not just sticking tubes together, it's understanding how it's going to be applied and who it is you're directing the product at. I could just replicate previous bikes for clients, but I want to do better. I don't think there is one bike design that is better than the rest, all of them work.

Are bikes starting to look the same? Is there a convergence point where all bikes essentially look the same?

I do think bikes are starting to look similar and it's tricky. The easiest bike to make is a four bar style,



that is the easiest bike to engineer. That's because a bike's a bike, it has to fit two wheels, and has to fit a drivetrain that comes on a certain specification. You know the drivetrain requires 'x' amount of clearance etc. Everyone is designing a bike around the same set of components, that limits the flexibility to be unique.

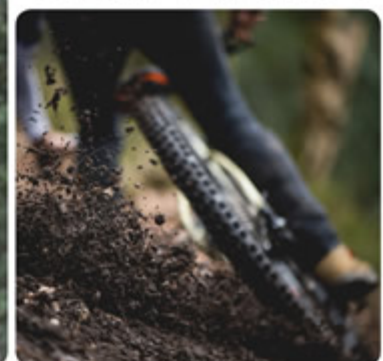
You have to fit around certain length shocks and standard bearing sizes, so the easiest way to do that, from purely laying out tubes and the welds just seems to be that four-bar layout. A vertical shock where you can bolt it onto the bottom bracket and easily position the main pivot is, from an engineering point of view, easier than putting a shock mount on a tube where you're trying to save weight or add flex.

"EVERYONE IS DESIGNING A BIKE AROUND THE SAME SET OF COMPONENTS, THAT LIMITS THE FLEXIBILITY TO BE UNIQUE."

SAN QUENTIN



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" IF CUSTOMERS WANT SOMETHING UNIQUE, THEN IT WON'T BENEFIT THEM. THE POWER OF THE BRAND COMES INTO PLAY AND HOW THEY MARKET THEMSELVES. "

THE PERFECT BLEND OF FORM AND FUNCTION?
PHOTO PIVOT CYCLES

The number of privately owned and truly unique companies, there aren't many of them now. These are the guys who have the opportunity to be unique and try something new. That's a risk, going away from the norm and what's commonly accepted.

Bikes are getting more similar, but I'm not saying that's a bad thing, as it allows the company to make improvements and make a better product for the customer. If customers want something unique, then it won't benefit them. The power of the brand comes into play and how they market themselves.

You're working on a high pivot bike with Forbidden currently, what's the buzz about high pivot bikes at the moment? Commencal have taken the world cup by storm this year on their Supreme with a high pivot downhill bike is it the future?

There is always a compromise and a balance between what you are trying to achieve. The main benefit here is the rear wheel axle path if we think about your fork angle, your suspension moves and allows your front wheel to move along that same angle when it hits a bump. On the rear, some traditional designs mean the wheel doesn't move back, it can be moving upwards and in some occasions forward into where the bump is.

The benefit of a high pivot is that, within reason, it allows the back wheel to move backwards and upwards, out of the way of a bump, essentially making the bike more efficient and handle rough terrain better. That's it in a nutshell.





THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL
PHOTO DILLON OSBORNE

"I DON'T THINK HIGH PIVOTS ARE FOR EVERYONE, IT WILL TAKE TIME FOR THEM TO BECOME ACCEPTED AND AESTHETICALLY PLEASING, THEY'RE A BIT FUNKY LOOKING."

That's why it's been applied most effectively in DH bikes, as it is purely about bump absorption, and shouldn't be worrying about pedalling as much. That's why it's been easier to apply to a downhill bike up till now.

The reason it hasn't been applied to shorter travel bikes so far is that in the past we have obviously had multiple chainrings, and you

couldn't do that because you have to run an idler with it. Now with the adoption of one by drivetrains, that's one less barrier to the whole thing. The pedalling efficiency is the next part, as this was previously poorly understood.

High pivots aren't new, they've been around a long time, but for my projects, we realised that we could get the pedalling efficiency we wanted from it. We had a hunch, and it seemed ok on paper, but it wasn't till the first ride that we were really impressed with how it did work out. I don't think high pivots are for everyone, it will take time for them to

become accepted and aesthetically pleasing, they're a bit funky looking.

And the idler pulley is there because of chain growth?

If the idler weren't there, the pedals would kick back so much in suspension compression, so it, unfortunately, has to be there. Now, we are seeing lots of people experimenting with idler pulleys on their bikes. If you move the pivot too far away from the chainring, you do have to run an idler pulley. This is probably the biggest stigma, I never wanted a bike with an idler, something else to go wrong, another place to collect mud. I'm now at a point where I think the benefits outweigh that compromise.

LOOKS LIKE A SESSION, WINS LIKE A SESSION.
RACHAEL ATHERTON TAKES THE WIN AT THE WORLD CHAMPS 2018
PHOTO BARTEK WOLINSKI/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

"WHEN I DESIGN, THE FUNCTION TAKES THE LEAD, SO YOU HAVE TO MAKE A LIST OF PRIORITIES OF WHAT YOU WANT."



So what are those benefits to high pivot bikes?

Rearwards axles path and absorbs bumps like no other and it feels like you have more travel, and the by-product we didn't foresee in our designs, is to do with anti-squat. Traditionally when you pedal on a bike, the suspension wants to compress, and your weight comes back. With a higher pivot, it's actually counteracting that so the bike ends up pedalling much better than a four-bar bike of the same travel. It blew our minds, we weren't expecting that. You can also run such a short chainstay length due to the pivot location.

As a designer, how important is the balance between form and function? Do bikes have to look nice?

First of all, when I design, the function takes the lead, so you have to make a list of priorities of what you want. Do you want a water bottle? What tyre clearance do you need? What size Shock do you want? All these questions need gathered up and put into a skeleton with the geometry and then that leaves you with quite a limited space for you to then design the profile or the aesthetics.

When I designed at Nukeproof for example, aesthetics was a big thing for me, I'd been working as a mechanic and seen all these top-end race bikes being raced, and I felt I had a good idea for what looks good and what didn't look good. When I look at bikes whose top tube lines up with nothing, and engineering and industrial design has been used to design a bike I feel like they've missed it a bit.



NO CABLES HERE! HOW WILL WIRELESS SHIFTING AFFECT THE AESTHETICS OF BIKE DESIGN?
PHOTO: BARTEK WOLIŃSKI/ RED-BULL CONTENT POOL

"SURELY THE JOB SHOULD BE FOR THE FRAME DESIGNERS TO ADOPT THE SAME ETHOS AND MAKE SOMETHING THAT'S REALLY GREAT DESIGN WITH AN EYE FOR AESTHETICS."

I don't believe we are designing a product here that you can't blend form and function together, you'd be hard pushed not to do that. Now that front derailleurs are a thing of the past, all these things are making it easier. As we move towards wireless drivetrains and stuff, you think, they're getting rid of all the complexity. Surely the

job should be for the frame designers to adopt the same ethos and make something that's really great design with an eye for aesthetics.

Who does it well? Are there any examples you'd be willing to share?

I think Canyon do it well now, their latest versions look really good. I really like the new Specialized eBike, and you know, YTs look unique and flow well, I think they're all aesthetically pleasing. Bikes should look aggressive, and they should look dynamic. Marin is one of the great comebacks, some

of their bikes are killing it, and the new 29er is pretty simple but it aesthetically pleasing and looks good.

Modern geometry is obviously a battleground. Are you enjoying the flexibility that modern trends allow in the design process?

I'm enjoying researching and looking into the geometry trends. When I started on my own, I spent a lot of time looking into it in depth and testing as much stuff as I could. I spend a lot of time looking into fork offset, as no one had explained it to me in a way that I thought made sense. So I went off and worked it out myself and came up with my own theories about fork offset and head angles.

" HE GETS ON ANY BIKE, NO POINT TELLING HIM ANY NUMBERS, HE JUST GETS A TAPE MEASURE OUT AND MEASURES FEET TO BARS, AND IF IT MAKES SENSE, THEN HE'S HAPPY, AND AWAY HE GOES."

ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ENDURO BIKES EVER, THE NUKEPROOF MEGA
PHOTO KIKE ABELLEIRA/NUKEPROOF

I think there are guys pushing geometry for the sake of being different and there is always going to be limitations at the top and bottom of anything. Working and advising clients on geometry it's about establishing what they want for their bike, and making numbers that make sense and I think there is a sweet spot and I think people are going too far. I feel it really does depend on the application as well, are you creating a race bike, or for people that watch racing and then ride trail centres, they are two very different things.

Have we got sizing on bikes right, shouldn't we be measuring bikes in a different way? For instance from pedals to grips?

I hundred per cent agree with that. I think that it's tricky as there are so many elements to geometry. One of the things we haven't talked about is designing frames where every size has a different rear-centre length (chainstay). From an engineering and manufacture point of view, it's very difficult to do, and the factories don't like it, but I think that feet-to-bars measurements are key.

That's how Sam Hill measures his bike, he gets on any bike, no point telling him any numbers, he just gets a tape measure out and measures feet to bars, and if it makes sense, then he's happy, and away he goes. I do think that's the only true measurement you can work off.





It's trial and error for a lot of people as well, such as how much stack height can affect things. Stack height can make a big difference to the reach of a bike. On extra large sizes, with slack head angles, by the time they've got the bar height up, the reach is often reduced. Then I looked into back-sweep on handlebars, where one degree could put your handles 15mm back! At the same time, numbers on a website, are one thing, it gets you reasonably close, but there is still no replacement for swinging a leg over a bike and testing it.

"THERE IS STILL NO REPLACEMENT FOR SWINGING A LEG OVER A BIKE AND TESTING IT"



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THE POLYGON XQUARONE DH'S LOOKS ARE DIVISIVE,
BUT IT'S INCREDIBLE TO RIDE
PHOTO POLYGON/DAVE MACFARLANE

**"I KEEP COMPARING IT TO THE CRAFT
BEER INDUSTRY, MAYBE PEOPLE ARE
PREPARED TO SPEND A LITTLE MORE
MONEY ON SOMETHING THAT IS UNIQUE."**

**What do you feel the future holds
for bike design and development?**

I think we're at a good place now. It feels there have been huge advancements in the last five years since enduro became a thing, but frames are still bolted together in the same rough layout. I can't see any big changes coming, just constant small improvements to things like bearing quality, or how bikes are silenced by mechanics on the downhill circuit.

I think it's the small details for now. I think we will see more small companies coming through, I keep comparing it to the craft beer industry, maybe people are prepared to spend a little more money on something that is unique. Riders always want something that no one else has!

**Thanks to Ali Beckett,
Redburn design**



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WORDS EWEN TURNER
PHOTOS PAUL BOX

Ewen Turner turns modern mountain biking on its head and travels south to race the DMR Ex Enduro on a budget hardtail that cost him £650!

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"WE REGULARLY TALK ABOUT BARGAIN FULL SUSPENSION BIKES COSTING ONLY £2000, OR EVEN 'ENTRY LEVEL' BIKES AT £1000. A GRAND IS A FAT CHEQUE FOR ONLY 'ENTERING'."

Barriers to participation in mountain biking are high. Its lack of accessibility is due to many factors including awareness, facilities and not least, money. Getting kitted up to ride mountain bikes is no frugal affair, with high prices for everything from helmets to footwear, before you have to factor in a bike! I'm fortunate to test some very nice kit,

and I freely admit to becoming de-sensitised to the costs of bikes and forgetting what normal is. I felt it was time for a dose of reality, to get back to the roots of mountain biking and see how the sport looked from the ground floor, rather than the Kashima coated penthouse suite.

We regularly talk about bargain full suspension bikes costing only £2000, or even 'entry level' bikes at £1000. A grand is a fat cheque for only 'entering'. I'd been wanting to get involved with some budget bikes for a while, and the more I looked at them,

the more I knew I needed to drop the price. From £1000 to £800, to finally settle on £650. This seemed to be the spot where a mountain bike actually looks like a mountain bike, not a 'bicycle shaped object'. I also needed to put my money (figuratively) where my mouth was, and not just test a bike for a couple of laps, but really get out there and live with a low-end bike.

Enter my experimental steed, Marin's new San Quentin, chosen by myself. I must add, this is no paid promotion, even this article is on a very tight budget. To add some excitement to the experiment, I was once again invited to my favourite enduro, the DMR EX Enduro.



This is a three-day blind enduro in Exmoor and, keeping it in the budget theme, could well be described as a bargain version of the Trans Provence/BC/NZ etc. Multi-day stage racing is probably not what these bikes are designed for, but with the money saved on the bike, I could go to some pretty rad races around the world! The challenge was set, three days racing on a bike cheaper than the suspension forks on my 'other' bike!

Racing around the forests and hills of Exmoor would be an excellent if potentially ill-advised test. The stats speak for themselves, 121km over the three days with almost 4000m of ascent and descent. The trails vary from wide-open rocky boulder fests, through to smooth flowy woodland singletrack with gradients from mellow to near vertical. I predicted something would break, either the bike or myself.

"WITH THE MONEY
SAVED ON THE BIKE,
I COULD GO TO SOME
PRETTY RAD RACES
AROUND THE WORLD!"



" WITH NOTHING TO PROVE, THE FREEDOM AND LACK OF RACE PRESSURE WERE BRILLIANT; I COULD JUST RIDE ON AND HAVE A GOOD TIME. "

Rocking up with a cheap bike turned out to be pretty liberating. No worries about what tyres to run, or suspension to tune in, it was ready to ride straight from the box. In the interests of full disclosure I did run tubeless, so a couple of valves and some sealant were required to get it up to speed. Without the need to fettle my bike endlessly, I could focus on the free beer on offer and get into the spirit of the event.

Interestingly, the bike didn't turn many heads. Maybe I'm just a bike geek and constantly check out everyone's ride, but I blended in pretty well, until someone asked what I was doing to my seat post. Turns out some riders have forgotten a world without dropper posts! With nothing to prove, the freedom and lack of race pressure were brilliant; I could just ride on and have a good time. The crucial question for me was whether I would have a good time and actually enjoy the riding, or simply suffer around the course.

The race is long, and over the three days, we received an uplift each morning before relying on our own efforts to grind around the rest of the course. With between six and eight stages per day, the race rewards consistency, raw speed and fitness. Racing mixed with awesome sea views and copious quantities of tea, cake and beer combine to make one of the best weekends of the year.

Once on the bike, we (the bike and I) had a period of adjustment. The lack of gear was certainly apparent, and at this price, fifty tooth cassettes do not exist, so old school nine speed would have to do.





" THE TRAILS REMAINED AWESOME, ALL IT REQUIRED WAS THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TO HAVE A GOOD TIME. WITH THE PRESSURE OFF FOR RACE RESULTS, I JUST WANTED A FUN TIME, AND THAT WAS DOWN TO ME. "

A thirty-two tooth chainring and a thirty-four rear cog were going to push my knees more than I would have liked, but we always used to manage in the good old days when we insisted on running one-by drivetrains with small cassettes.

On descents, the main issue was the suspension or lack of it. The trails remained awesome, all it required was the right attitude to have a good time. With the pressure off for race results, I just wanted a fun time, and that was down to me. A stiff frame with a less than supple fork made for a bone-shaking ride. Dropping into the loam filled corner riddled trails of Exmoor was great, but the rocky open trails less so. Get the bike on the right terrain and I felt barely disadvantaged, get it out of depth, and things got spicy pretty quick. Fortunately, with an event as enjoyable as the EX it's hard not to have a good time and despite the odd sense of humour failure with the drivetrain, good times continued through the weekend.

Truthfully, I still had an awesome weekend of riding. Would I choose to race this bike every week? No. Rather than any one thing causing me grief, it was a war of attrition on my body. Back, shoulders and legs got a kicking on any descent, and by the end of the race, I was a bit broken.

Lessons learnt were many. Firstly, good events and good trails exist regardless of the bike you ride. If you can put race results aside and enjoy the riding,



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it's hard to have a bad time. It may be a bit deep and meaningful, but there is certainly a lesson here in enjoying the bike you ride regardless of cost and forgetting about how many clicks of low speed rebound you wish you had on your fork. Just ride your bike, smile and eat cake.

This exercise also served to remind myself what I should be thankful for in the world of bikes. Back in the good old days, I spent large portions of my time truing wheels and bending rims back into shape. Then, it was routine maintenance, but now, wheels have come on so much, that even on a bike such as this, they ran trouble free with not a single dent. There is much to be thankful for in modern mountain biking, and although my body is more battered than it would have been on a more bouncy bike, the kit these

days is exceptional. I had brakes that worked, with one finger and didn't drag, squeak or give up. I had a wide bar and short stem and a cockpit that put your hands in the same place as on a bike ten times the price.

What I didn't expect to miss was the humble clutch mech. We take this for granted even though it has been around for only a short period of time. Running a nine-speed mech with no clutch meant the chain was whipping around like a flag in a hurricane. This caused all manner of drivetrain issues, chain suck and despite the chain guide, dropped chains.

" WITHOUT A DROPPER, IT WAS HARD TO SMASH THE CLIMBS ON STAGE, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE CHAIN DROP/SUCK SITUATION WAS THE MAIN CAUSE OF TIME LOST ON PEDALLY STAGES. "

The good news was, despite bending the chain and the chainring, nine-speed kit bends back nicely with the application of a trailside rock! I doubt Eagle responds so well to such Neolithic maintenance regimes.

I'm not one for over sharing my results, no matter how mediocre, but for this test I was interested. 2017 I finished in 18th place, this year I finished 47th. Fortunately, the always rapid Jono Jones won last year and this year, which makes for some analysis. In 2017 I was 15% slower than Jono, and in 2018 I was 27% slower, both on hardtails, but the Pipedream frame from last year costs the same as this entire bike. It's a chunk of time, but can probably be explained by a few crucial parts of the bike.

Firstly without a dropper, it was hard to smash the climbs on stage, but more importantly, the chain drop/suck situation was the main cause of time lost on pedally stages. The agricultural fork, didn't take much of the sting out of the trail, but overall the bike was fundamentally good, and not a world away from any other mountain bike. If I could have put the power down more easily I'd have been faster, and a better fork would be comfortable, but that's all. I do reckon, however, that Jono Jones would win on a tricycle, so maybe the analysis is pointless.





After the race and back on a much more expensive bike, it didn't feel as 'night and day' as one would expect. A full suspension rig soothed my battered body, and the more numerous gears allowed for height to be more easily won. As riders, we are pretty spoilt with performance, and a bike may cost significantly more, but you can't buy skill or good times, you have to make that yourself. I'm happy to be back on my posh bikes, but with a little more appreciation for the finer things in mountain biking.

"YOU CAN'T BUY SKILL OR GOOD TIMES, YOU HAVE TO MAKE THAT YOURSELF."



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" IF YOU HAVE THE RIGHT GEOMETRY AND THE RIGHT ATTITUDE, A CHEAP BIKE CAN TAKE YOU FURTHER, FASTER, AND MORE CONFIDENTLY THAN EVER BEFORE. "

Those out there looking for a budget bike, it is all about the angles, always the angles. The only way I survived the race was due to a slack head angle and a long-ish reach. Without this set up I would have been a jibbering wreck for the whole weekend. Many entry-level bikes are essentially based on XC geometry with long stems and steep head angles. Experienced riders who like descending have been demanding shorter stems, wider bars, longer reach and slacker angles for years.

This is because it gives the rider more confidence. Why then, should we not give all this confidence inspiring geometry and knowledge to new riders who probably need it more than anyone? If you have the right geometry and the right attitude, a cheap bike can take you further, faster, and more confidently than ever before. The top end may be getting ridiculously expensive, but it's the bottom end, which is exciting for me, it'll only be a few years, and clutch mechs will be standard at this point, and an air fork can't be far off. The future of mountain biking is here, affordable bikes to put smiles on faces and more people on the trails.

Thanks to The Ex Enduro, DMR and Marin for representing all that is good about mountain biking! If only the race times were divided by the cost of the bike, I could have been stood on the podium!

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PHOTO CHASING MATES AND HITTING JUMPS IS THE ORDER OF THE DAY HERE.

WORDS EWEN TURNER PHOTOS TRISTAN TINN

TRAIL GUIDE

BLACK MOUNTAIN CYCLE CENTRE

Ewen Turner heads to a sleepy valley in Wales and hits the Black Mountain Cycle Centre with some big hitters.

Expect tractor uplifts, massive jumps and a guest appearance from a mountain biking legend.



These Trail Guide features are usually easy. Just go somewhere awesome and tell everyone how amazing it is and how they should go there immediately. I instantly felt differently about this place, the same feeling I get about unspoilt wilderness trails or secret venues known by only a few.

What's different is that this is a bike park, with uplift, with jumps, berms and a manufactured feel to the trails. What sets this place apart is the scale, it's small, family owned and run, and has a homemade, rustic feel that suits the sleepy valleys that make up the surrounding landscape. A hidden gem. Don't go there, you won't like it...

Wales is covered in mountains, really big mountains with rocky, craggy summits and some of the highest elevations in the UK. To get here from the North, I have to drive past the mountains of Snowdonia, in favour of a collection of small valleys near Abergavenny, an area I know very little about. The reason for the trip here has come about serendipitously from various date shifts, changes and unavailable venues, but a new, unusual location always gets me excited.

The Black Mountain Cycle Centre has crept gently into the consciousness of British mountain bikers over the past year. Videos of riders hitting huge jumps and gaps have filled Instagram and Facebook to the point it could not be ignored. For me, not being the most 'jumpy' or riders, I was concerned that it may be a venue for maximum fear rather than fun, but I was to be pleasantly surprised.

STEVE PEAT SENDS IT OVER ONE OF THE NUMEROUS GAPS ON TRACK



" THIS IS A BIKE PARK, WITH UPLIFT, WITH JUMPS, BERMS AND A MANUFACTURED FEEL TO THE TRAILS. "

ROB WELCH LAYS IT SIDEWAYS ON THE UPPER JUMPS
AT BLACK MOUNTAIN



Opening three years ago, the first day saw no one turn up the owners, Joe and Gwenda, told me. It just so happens a well known Welsh bike park opened on the same day and had had somewhat more funding and infrastructure than the "little" Black Mountains Centre. Since then the place has grown organically to the size it is now, which is still reasonably small. New trails are added frequently and extra uplift trailers manufactured and added when needed.

Based on a farm, with land previously solely used for sheep farming, the centre is an excellent example of rural diversification. Extracting money from sheep is hard-won, and having a woodland on a steep hillside looked like a new way to create revenue.

" THE PLACE
HAS GROWN
ORGANICALLY
TO THE SIZE
IT IS NOW,
WHICH IS
STILL
REASONABLY
SMALL. "


CECILE RAVANEL

3 TIMES EWS CHAMPION



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" WITH THIS LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE, I COULD RELAX, KNOWING I WOULDN'T HAVE TO HIT THE BIG JUMPS FOR THE CAMERAS! "

Planning applications and national park issues have dogged developments, but they persevered and have now even featured on BBC's Sunday night show Country File. Overcoming these hurdles has been challenging as they bring a new type of tourist to the valley, but the results are clearly seen in the popularity of the place, even mid-week, we had a real buzz and plenty of riders.

The infrastructure is low key, a car park and a couple of shacks are all you get. One is the sign-on office, and the other is a bike shop and rental. Fancy an Orange Alpine for the day? No worries. Need parts?

Again, all sorted although you might need to give him a ring as he's up digging on the trails most of the time.

Our crew assembled in the car park. We were meeting up with some big hitters to explore the possibilities of the place. The guys from Peaty's products rolled in, Steve Peat himself straight off the back of a drive from the Alps, along with up and coming mountain bike madmen Rob Welch and Matt Roe. Rob used to compete in dirt-jumping and back in 2012 won pro in his first ever comp. He's not a racer but has combined his dirt jump skills with his downhill bike to become one of the most stylish riders out there.

For those in the know, he's one of the most entertaining riders to watch on two wheels.

Matt is a rider's rider and well respected across the BMX world for his stylish and innovative riding. Having recently made the transition to mountain biking, he's caught a lot of people's attention in a short space of time for his ridiculous style, bright shirts and innovative lines. A guest appearance from UK four-cross legend Martin Murray rounded off the team and added even more firepower to an already exciting set of riders.

With this level of performance, I could relax, knowing I wouldn't have to hit the big jumps for the cameras!

IT'S NOT GLAMOUROUS, BUT IF IT'S
GOOD ENOUGH FOR PEATY...



These guys were perfect for showing off the place and excellent fodder for the camera wielders.

Adding to the rural feel is the simple but effective uplift service. A tractor with a custom bike trailer is the order of the day taking around 16 people and bikes at a time. With a set of three, the uplift is plentiful and efficient although probably pretty cold in the winter. Open top lifts on a sunny dusty summer's day is a happy experience in anyone's book.

" WITH A SET
OF THREE, THE
UPLIFT IS
PLENTIFUL AND
EFFICIENT "

BIG FUN.



ROOTMILLER

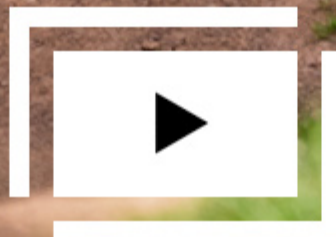
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A quick push up from the drop off gives views far and wide across the Black Mountains, with farmland and forest extending in every direction. From the top, options are plenty with blue, red and black signposts to choose from. The whole park is designed to link up different sections and can be generally divided into a top, middle and bottom. This means the number of variations is enormous, but repeating the same trails will all be part of the experience. Running laps over the same ground is also entirely necessary as the features here are big, very big. Sure it's not Rampage or Chatel's Air Voltage, but gaps and drops are in abundance, and on the black trails there is no escape.

Warming up on dusty blue grade trails is a delight, the sort of trails that demand to be ridden as a train, following the rider in front and putting the pressure on. These easier trails flow beautifully from top to bottom, with jumps to ease you into the style and flow of the place. Speeds are high, berms are well supported and smiles easily won. All of these blue grade trails can be ridden 'wheels on the ground', but offer plenty of scope for the more adventurous and faster rider.

Cranking things up a notch leads to bigger jumps and more commitment. This can be done gently through the red grade trails, with larger table tops and doubles allowing for progression, interspersed with flowing berms and rollers. Throughout all the trails are wooden bridges and features which one could imagine may be rustic, in keeping with the farm vibe, but closer inspection shows great construction of a very high quality. This quality extends across all the trails, be it vertical berms or beautifully sculpted lips on jumps.

BMX VS. DOWNHILL, STEVE PEAT CHASES DOWN MATT ROE



" GAPS AND DROPS ARE IN ABUNDANCE, AND ON THE BLACK TRAILS THERE IS NO ESCAPE. "



Care is taken on the trails here, and it shows. These are carefully crafted ribbons of flowing fun.

The more challenging trails take things up a notch, with compulsory gaps and big drops, which require plenty of thought from the average rider before committing. Get these trails right, and they flow as smoothly as the blue trails, but the consequences are much higher! All the features, however, are well made and the only danger is you overestimating one's capabilities, which we saw demonstrated by plenty of riders throughout the day! Fortunately, our team of riders were there to show us how it should be done.

" WITH A SET
OF THREE, THE
UPLIFT IS
PLENTIFUL AND
EFFICIENT "

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MARTIN MURRAY KEEPS IT STYLISH ON THE
CORRECT SIDE OF THE BARRIERS

" THE RANGE OF TRAILS ALLOWS FOR
FUN TO BE HAD BY A HUGE SECTION OF
RIDERS, WITH PLENTY TO ASPIRE TO. "

The largest jumps of all are for those truly at home with a bike in flight, and Steve, Rob, Matt and Martin drop in with a confidence that only a lifetime of air miles can prepare you for. The contrast in styles is fascinating to watch, with Steve and Martin's racer efficiency next to Matt and Robs BMX and freestyle flair. One rider squashes while another boosts, Steve takes any opportunity to overtake, even if it's in the air!

The Full Moto section at the bottom of the track is where things get massive, and full commitment is needed on the gaps. Watching those who 'can' is inspiring but fortunately, there are other more gentle trails on each side, which don't have any of the trail missing.

The whole experience is friendly, inclusive and encouraging. The range of trails allows for fun to be had by a huge section of riders, with plenty to aspire to. The staff and efficient uplift just keep things running smoothly and effortlessly. It's a great venue to combine with other venues in mid and south Wales to create a road trip and experience the best that the country has to offer.

Getting to Wales is simple, if you live in the Midlands or south of England, you'll already be familiar with the area. From further afield things get more complex, but with so many other venues close by it's easy to make a week or weekend trip viable. Internationally, flying into Bristol or Cardiff would work, as would any central airport in England.

Accommodation is hugely varied and plentiful due to the tourist set up in the area. A quick flick through Air BnB gives an enormous list of anything from camping to luxurious hotels. Quirky hotels and guesthouses are a Welsh speciality, but that's all part of the charm, I think...

Thanks to- Black Mountain Cycle Centre, Peaty's Products, Rocky Mountain UK





DROP AND ROLL

Welcome to another instalment of our core skills and techniques feature, as we enter autumn here in the UK its time to tackle the subject of drop-offs.



Dropping and jumping are two areas where the penalty for failure can be life-changing. When it goes wrong the classic outcome is an OTB (over the bars), here the typical reaction is to protect the face and head by throwing the arms out, and the extremities take the beating. Broken wrists, forearms, collar bones, shoulders etcetera are all symptoms of an OTB. The worst-case scenarios occur when the arms are not there to absorb a fall, and the rider takes the impact directly to the head. So how can we prevent an OTB and take drops safe and in style?

" THESE HELP YOU MAKE THE DYNAMIC DECISION AS TO WHAT TECHNIQUE SHOULD BE DEPLOYED "

First up let's look at the various drop-off types, from large sender drops to small rolling drops I consider any section of trail that drops down a relatively square edge and offers the potential for air to appear under the front wheel a drop-off. Small rolling drops may be taken at a slower speed as the drop height allows clearance for the chainring to pass over. When drops become that bit bigger, we now need both wheels to exit the edge (lip) of the drop-off clean, so the chainring does not hang up and scrape the lip.

There are a few key elements to consider also, these help you make the dynamic decision as to what technique should be deployed to deal with the drop. These are:

- The entry space and speed on approach
- The exit space and predicted speed on exit (drops that fall away with steep downslope landings will see a massive speed increase from entry to exit point)
- The severity of the terrain under the wheel
- The scale/height of the drop



" THIS HELPS WITH STEERING TO CHANGE DIRECTION THROUGH SERIES OF DROPS OR WHERE THE TRAIL DEVIATES "

Having weighed up the drop ahead you can select the most suited technique, the techniques are:

- Rolling Press Drop
- Punch Drop
- Wheelie Drop

In situations where a drop links into a downslope you can also "pre-hop"

eliminating the drop-off part, setting the bike up to match the slope below.

ROLLING PRESS DROP

The rolling press drop is the most frequently used shape we make, you're probably doing this already but without conscious thought. This technique is all about taking the bike to the terrain below rather than doing the 'dead sailor' where the rider falls down on top of the bike once it has fallen off the drop. The rolling press drop can be used on drops up to a height where the chainrings want to then grind out, if you hunt out a square edge drop of this nature

you will find its a reasonable height and, with practice these more sizeable drops can be taken with speed.

The advantage to the technique is that we get the front wheel back on the ground real fast, this helps with steering to change direction through series of drops or where the trail deviates, and it helps us to maintain or decrease speed through front wheel braking. When combined with very active legs the rear wheel can also be used for direction change and speed control, being able to trigger the legs to drive that rear wheel down is key when it comes to avoiding the front wheel manual to OTB. Let's get a look at this technique in more detail.



As we approach the edge of a drop-off the body lowers allowing the elbows and knees to bend, think about the body posture of someone jumping down from a high wall. Any speed control (deceleration) is done on the entry to the drop. As the front wheel rolls over the lip (edge), we extend the arms 'pressing' the front wheel down so as to reduce any airtime that may arise from our forwards motion. As the front wheel impacts, the surface below the extended arms can then act like shock absorbers to stop the torso from moving forward over the handlebar / front axle. The key is that the body remains behind the bar.

As the back wheel rolls over the lip, the bent legs can extend driving the back wheel down, again reducing any airtime and free fall.

" THINK ABOUT
THE BODY
POSTURE OF
SOMEONE
JUMPING DOWN
FROM A HIGH
WALL. "

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All movements and motion must flow seamlessly, it is key to avoid any stalling points, these occur from digital stop-start like movements from the rider and snatchy braking. If through the section you are having to maintain speed with control braking (common on a series of rocky or rooty drops) then avoiding the 'stall' by using smooth movement of the body and braking force are key.

" APPROACH AT WALKING PACE AND SLOW THE BIKE TO ALMOST ZERO. "

To build up your muscle memory and help you move instinctively find a small drop you can roll down, approach at walking pace and slow the bike to almost zero. Get low on the bike bending the elbows and knees, try and avoid jerky motions and grabbing the brakes, let the wheels roll steadily and maintain speed as the front wheel crests the edge. When the wheel goes light ease the pressure on the front brake, your contact patch is reduced at this point, and the wheel may want to skid, use more back brake pressure to try and compensate. Ready to absorb the landing as the front wheel impacts the trail below, keep rolling steady and now increase the pressure in the front brake to help maintain control.

As the rear wheel approaches the edge, get ready to drive the legs down simultaneously easing the pressure through the back brake to avoid locking up. Remember to keep looking up the trail, we spot the lip/edge of the drop-off by moving the eyes not the whole head. In this instance for practice try and bring the bike to a stop as soon as possible having rolled off the drop-off. This practice technique helps with building muscle memory to not only absorb the landing but also for the braking control element.





" WE NEED TO BE MORE DYNAMIC AND POWERFUL IN OUR MOVEMENTS IF WE ARE TO KEEP THE WHEELS ON THE DECK "

You gain that important feeling of where the contact patch of each tyre/wheel lies and the amount of grip available from your tyre/drop-off combo.

When the speed increases (beyond running pace) we start to feel and see more airtime under the wheels, in these situations we need to be more dynamic and powerful in our movements if we are to keep the wheels

on the deck (an inevitable small amount of airtime is unavoidable). It's at this speed range that we can deploy either a rolling press drop or move on to a punch drop.

THE PUNCH DROP TECHNIQUE

Moving faster and presented with bigger higher drops it's time to deploy the punch drop, the Jackie Chan of dropping techniques. As before we sight and spot the lip/edge of the drop-off by using the eyes to look and not the head, we lower on the bike, bending elbows and knees, as the front wheel gets to the lip we punch the bike forward avoiding lifting the front wheel

upwards. The trajectory should match a virtual horizontal line. There may be interference at the lip that wants to 'donk' the wheels upwards, we need to punch through these shapes and allow the fork and shock as well as the arms and legs to absorb this interference so as to not interfere with the flight path.

With the bike punched out in front of you as the rear wheel is passing the lip it's time to use your fingertip grip to bring the back below you, so you are centred over the bike ready to absorb the landing (these accelerate and decelerate shapes are similar to those learnt in the manual). The arms and legs will naturally extend as the bike drops away below you leaving you in a position ready to absorb the landing.



On larger drops we need to anticipate larger forces on landings, staying centred is key as landing either loaded up in the front or rear of centre can unsettle the bike and reduce your ability to take the impact through the limbs efficiently and safely.

Those of you riding bikes with bigger longer travel forks may get away with landing front wheel just before rear wheel unless the terrain is very rough in the landing zone. Always aim no matter what travel you have to touch down with both wheels contacting at the same time. On downslope landings you may naturally end up landing front wheel slightly before the rear, once again we are looking to keep the torso behind the bar to help prevent an OTB and to drive the bike ahead.

" TOUCH DOWN
WITH BOTH
WHEELS
CONTACTING
AT THE SAME
TIME. "

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Small drop-offs require us to make these shapes exceptionally fast, its much harder (believe it or not) to take small drop-offs really smooth compared to larger ones. If you can float off a kerbstone landing centred in a silky smooth fashion, then larger drops are a breeze. With larger drops it becomes more of a head game, the added flight time gives you way more time to get centred and ready for landing. However something that often makes drop-offs more challenging are the entry and exit zones, you may be on the turn, have sniper roots to deal with or trees and clumps of rock to navigate before you get to the drop-off.

" BRING THE BIKE TO A STOP AS CLOSE THE EDGE AS POSSIBLE "

When space on entry and exit are limited, and the drop-off height too large to roll then a wheelie drop will need to be deployed. These super slow speed severe terrain situations are uncommon for the vast majority of riders, and the trials like techniques required take that extra dedication and time to master. If you are familiar with pulling tight wheelies and lurching the bike, then this is right up your street.

WHEELIE DROP

Roll in towards the lip and bring the bike to a stop as close the edge as possible, from a static track stand position wheelie up and drive the cranks round so you edge forward on the back wheel balancing the bikes pivot point through the back brake, spot your landing. Continue to drive the crank round, as the rear wheel drops off the edge ready for a rear wheel bias landing where you can control the rollout (you may need to come to a full stop on landing to change direction and or set up for the next feature). Again use the suspension in the legs and arms to help absorb the landing.





PRE HOP TECHNIQUE

Some drop-offs may fade away fast with a steep and or short back slope. Here we avoid sending it to flat by bunny hopping before the edge of the drop-off and nosing the bike into the downslope. By doing so, we reduce the flight time, get back on the ground to brake and steer and more importantly avoid the 'huck to flat' situation.

" ANGLE THE BIKE IN FLIGHT TO MATCH THE BACK SLOPE AND BRING THE BIKE IN AS CLOSE TO THE LIP AS YOU DARE "

As your rolling in towards the drop time your hop so you eliminate punching off the lip, angle the bike in flight to match the back slope and bring the bike in as close to the lip as you dare, try and avoid sending it too far down the back slope unless of course, you have a massive run out!

With this advanced skill you can also drop-off and into sections while on the turn, these are quite specific situations and deployment of techniques but certainly ones to add to your skill cv.

Remember folks - LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP.

Size up the drop and check the run-out and landing area. If your not sure then save it for another day. Start with small drop-offs and keep it steady with the speed control, build your pace in line with your confidence and ignore your mates telling you to MTFU. Style and finesse will lead to pace, better to drive a slow car fast than a fast car slow!

Oh and one more thing... Don't let your ego write cheques your body can't cash.

A full-page background image of a male mountain biker in a black and red jersey and a black helmet, riding a white and black trail bike on a dirt path through a lush green forest. The bike has 'MAXXIS' written on the tires. The rider is leaning forward, and a cloud of dust is kicked up behind the rear wheel. The scene is brightly lit with sunlight filtering through the trees.

TRIED AND TESTED

The 2019 models are starting to roll through the test teams hands already with rides from Marin, Merida and Rocky Mountain, plus seeing as it is still technically 2018 there is a capable hardtail from Vitus in the mix too. We've also got product from SixSixOne, Funn, USE and TRP on the table too!

BIKES

Marin Alpine Trail 7

Merida 120 6000

Rocky Mountain Altitude Carbon 90

Vitus Sentier 29 VR

SEATPOSTS

Funn UpDown

USE Helix

BRAKES

TRP G-Spec Quadiem

HELMET

SixSixOne Reset

ALL WORDS AND PHOTOS THE IMB TEST TEAM
PHOTO THIS PAGE DANIEL GEIGER

"IT'S HARD TO FIND FAULT, CERTAINLY IF YOU KEEP IN MIND THE PRICE TAG."

TO VISIT THEIR WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

We all know that Marin is back in the game with some great bikes, and are certainly not afraid to try new things. They've pushed hard into the lower end of the price spectrum while simultaneously releasing the Wolf Ridge, their head-turning, top-end trail bike. Their bikes are coming fast from all angles.

Building on the success of the Rift Zone, Hawk Hill and B-17, the Alpine Trail takes the MultiTrack suspension system and turns it up to eleven. 150mm of travel matched with a 160mm fork suggests a hard hitting bike, and coupled with a 65-degree head angle it's getting serious. So hang on, what about that Wolf Ridge? Isn't that their long travel 29er? Well, yes, and er, no. Yes, it is a 160mm 29er, but as far as Marin and Nalid (the suspension design) are concerned, it's really just a trail bike with long legs. If you really want to go full enduro, then the Alpine Trail is the bike to do it with, not the Wolfy.

So with that cleared up, we can get into the detail of the beast. Long travel, big wheels and contemporary geometry all packaged into an affordable bike.

CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE



"AN EXCELLENT
ADDITION TO
THE MERIDA
LINE-UP."

TO VISIT THEIR
WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

Continuing Merida's overhaul of their full suspension range, the 120 is the latest model to be brought up to speed. Sharing the style and layout of the bigger 160 and 140 models, the 120 aims to be everything the modern trail rider wants from a bike. Merida claim this new bike is the best balance of 'trail oriented riding on one side and demanding long distance rides with big climbs on the other'.

The demands of the trail rider have changed dramatically over the past few years, and new trail bikes are sporting more aggressive angles than ever while maintaining their agility and playful riding style. The 120 gets in line with these new trends and sports a 67-degree head angle and a 75.5-degree seat angle. Sizing is modern but not progressive with a reach of 455mm on the large, and a 40mm bottom bracket drop aims to keep it all stable.

The 120mm of travel out back is managed with a RockShox Deluxe shock and is matched with a 130mm Revelation up front. The drivetrain utilises SRAMs Eagle GX while Shimano cover the brakes and Merida use their own wheels to make the whole thing roll.

[CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE](#)



BRAND ROCKY MOUNTAIN MODEL ALTITUDE CARBON 70 YEAR 2019

"A GREAT
LOOKING,
FUN AND
WELL-BALANCED
ALL-ROUNDER"

TO VISIT THEIR
WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

The last few years has been a good journey for Rocky Mountain Bikes, and with the Altitude undergoing a progressive facelift their 'aggressive trail' bike has been well received around the globe. With the Slayer filling the big, hard-hitting enduro category, the Altitude is free to concentrate on being a long travel trail bike, or shorter travel enduro machine. It just depends on your point of view I suppose, but Rocky call it an 'Aggressive Trail' bike.

Available in two aluminium and three carbon build options for 2019, the Altitude offers itself out in a wide range of prices and build finishes. It's great to see a high-end performer available not only to those with the healthiest of budgets. With prices ranging from £2699.99 for the Alloy 30 model through to a whopping £6999.99 for the highly spec'd Carbon 90, there is a price to suit a large range of riders.

Finishing components come from Fox and RockShox, Shimano and SRAM. Our model is the Carbon 70, which boasts an eclectic mix of components including Fox Performance Elite suspension, SRAM Eagle drivetrain and Shimano XT brakes.

[CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE](#)



BRAND VITUS MODEL SENTIER 29 VR YEAR 2018

"A FANTASTIC ALL
ROUNDER WHICH
CAN HANDLE A
HUGE VARIETY
OF TERRAIN."

TO VISIT THEIR
WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

At a penny short of a grand (currently just £899.99 on CRC), Vitus' Sentier 29 VR sits on that price point on which mountain bikes really start to get good. It's also at this price where a decision is made about hardtail versus full suspension. Full suss rigs can be bought around this price, but the level of quality kit on a hardtail at this price is far better. Difficult decisions all around, but the Sentier represents a proper bike, with excellent options for upgrading, as and when budgets allow.

At its heart, the Sentier benefits from some modern geometry in the form of a longish reach at 446mm on the large and a slack 66.5-degree head angle. This sets the bike up as a stable performer and with the ability to run a short stem and attack the descents. Seat tubes are short to allow for droppers, and there is stealth routing for one should you wish. Strangely there is exposed cabling for the rear mech (rather than full outer casing) on the top tube, but the routing is neat and all external.

[CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE](#)



"THE UPDOWN POST DELIVERS A GREAT, RELIABLE POST AND EXCELLENT MODULATION"

TO VISIT THEIR WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

This is the second generation of the Updown dropper from Funn. The first was not without its problems, but this new, internally routed post claims to have solved all the previous issues. Available in 30.9mm and 31.6mm diameter, the post comes with either a 125mm or a 150mm drop. Internally it contains a sealed cartridge, which can be removed, and easily replaced by the owner if any problems occur. However, Funn doesn't expect there to be any with their new cartridge that has solved the air-in-oil bounce that many dropper posts with internal floating pistons suffer from.

The seat clamp is a two bolt affair with large easy to access bolts and plenty of adjustment. The cable clamps at the lever, which makes installation simple and the cable can be simply hooked over the seat post end with a metal adapter. The post is nicely short in length so it will fit easily into many frames, with 245mm from collar to the base. The collar itself is 30mm, so, all in all, it's a good post for smaller frames or those with awkward seat tubes with interruptions.

CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE

" OFFERS
RELIABILITY,
QUALITY
CONSTRUCTION
AND GREAT
ACTION. "

TO VISIT THEIR
WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

USE's new Helix dropper is their first foray into the world of the dropper seat post. They have been producing suspension seatposts for some time and brought that knowledge and experience to the Helix. British made, the Helix uses a mechanical system and removes the need for air and oil by using a helical shaft and a clutch system. The helical system keeps saddle play to a minimum and mechanically clamps itself infinitely through the system.

Available in 30.9mm or 31.6, the Helix comes in a drop of 125mm or 165mm making it a potentially good option for taller riders demanding more drop. In 165mm mode the post is very long with a big 300mm needing insertion to get the post fully slammed into the frame. The collar is low profile which helps make the 165mm of drop more usable for more riders.

The lever is a four-way adaptable design, for under or over the bar and left of right settings. It is also I-spec and Matchmaker compatible for SRAM and Shimano if you wish to tidy up your handlebars.

CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE



"CONFIDENCE
INSPIRING AND
OFFERS SUPERB
LEVER FEEL AND
MODULATION."

TO VISIT THEIR
WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

TRP have made recent improvements to their hydraulic disc brakes, with close involvement from Aaron Gwin. Previously overlooked by many riders, TRP has come back into the mix and have been getting lots of attention, mostly due to the Gwin influence but also from brands starting to spec them on lower end bikes. There are plenty of subtle details that Gwin has spec'd for his signature model, but the overall appearance of the brake is less than subtle.

The levers are very moto-inspired, longer than average, with a pitted finger grip for added security in the slop. There is a nifty tool-free reach adjuster tucked away behind the lever to dial in the distance. It's not the easiest to get to with gloves on but is well protected and looks sleek. There is no bite point adjust, but this wasn't an issue for me out of the box.

The four-pot callipers are equally as eye-catching as the levers with longitudinal fins to help dissipate heat. There is no option to top-load brake pads, with Gwin preferring to avoid potential flex in the calliper.

CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE



"A DISTINCTIVE
LOOK AND A
COLLECTION OF
WELL THOUGHT
OUT FEATURES"

TO VISIT THEIR
WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

The new Reset full face helmet from 661 is just one of their new products to hit the market created to provide bang up to date style and features at an affordable price. As the name suggests, the Reset has been freshly designed and crafted from scratch with a focus on making it a highlight of the new range.

Out of the box, the Reset immediately impressed with its contemporary, sharp design combined with a lightweight feel (1100g in Medium) and certainly gives the first impression of a helmet that might cost far more than it does. Retailing for 99 Euros on their website, the Reset is making itself available to a massive audience.

There are four snazzy colours to choose from, and we've been testing the 'Tropic Orange', which has a light metallic gold finish with orange accents and a nice arty tropical flower design on the back. This might not to everyone's taste, but we like the style and the fact that 661 are trying new things. There are more subtle, but still very good looking options, of course, Matador Red, Midnight Black and Tundra White are available.

[CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE](#)



REDBULL HARDLINE 2018

WHEN THE TOUGH GET GOING THE TOUGH SIT IT OUT AND WAIT FOR THE RAIN TO PASS



WORDS CLIVE FORTH
RIDER DAVE MCMILLAN
PHOTO SVEN MARTIN/RED BULL CONTENT POOL



' WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS TRACK THAT LEAVES
THE WORLDS BEST ON EDGE AND KEEPS THEIR
EGOS IN CHECK? '



That statement is a testament to just how difficult this unique track is and how much respect the riders have for it. The 2018 Red Bull Hardline was already lining up to be a hotly contested and wild event; the course had been perfectly groomed by head trail designer Dan Atherton and his team of helpers with a new bench cut section leading riders "Out of the Woods" into a monster timber ladder drop. The already massive doubles in the field had been extended, and Thursday's practice saw Brendan Fairclough

back flipping the oversized step up jump high up on the mountain.

Then the rain came....

The riders high soon dropped to a massive low as the Welsh weather gods cried their eyes out all day Friday, the sense of just wanting to get on with it and stay in that special mindset that is required to ride terrain like this was overwhelming. By early afternoon it was becoming clear that practice would be pointless and dangerous,

it was evident by the vibe in the riders' hangout area that there is an element of intimidation and a huge amount of respect for this track.

From my years of riding, racing and coaching, I already know that no one feature looks the same through two sets of eyeballs, for what one person finds intimidating and 'scary' another just flows on through. On the flip side, something that may seem innocuous to one person can become a huge mental hang-up for another. So what is it about this track that leaves the worlds best on edge and keeps their egos in check?

It was time to get some track talk before I brave the elements and do a track walk.

The Riders

RedBull Hardline is an invitational with a limited entry list, made up from seasoned World Cup racers and riders who are on the up in their World Cup careers. This year's line up looked like this.

- Adam Brayton, UK.
- Alexandre Fayolle, FRA.
- Bas Van Steenberghe, CAN.
- Bernard Kerr, UK.
- Brage Vestavik, NOR.
- Brendan Fairclough, UK.
- Charlie Hatton, UK.
- Craig Evans, UK.
- Dan Atherton, UK.
- Dave McMillan, UK.
- Erik Irmisch, GER.
- Florent Payet, FRA.
- Gaëtan Vigé, FRA.
- Gee Atherton, UK.
- Greg Williamson, UK.
- Henry Fitzgerald, UK.
- Jérôme Caroli, SUI.
- Joe Smith, UK.
- Kade Edwards, GBR.
- Kaos Seagrave, UK.
- Keegan Wright, NZ.
- Killian Callaghan, IRL.
- Laurie Greenland, UK.
- Matt Walker, NZ.
- Oscar Hårnström, SWE.
- Phil Atwill, UK.
- Reece Wilson, UK.
- Thomas Estaque, FRA.



'MADE UP FROM SEASONED WORLD CUP RACERS AND RIDERS WHO ARE ON THE UP IN THEIR WORLD CUP CAREERS.'





PHOTO DAN WRIGHT

Riders take on the course in a qualifying run, and the ten fastest proceed to the final race run, with limited practice this year it was going to make Hardline THE hardest line for some. The course had already claimed victims, and the abbreviated start list for the qualification would see some seasoned riders on the sideline and some fresh talent battling it out for that coveted title.

I hooked up with Adam Brayton (Hope Tech) to get the low down on his season so far and the course that awaited. Adam is well known as a rider who likes to let it all hang out and go big, he had an off at the World Championships in Lenzerheide just a couple of weeks previous and was already on the back foot when it came to taking on RedBull Hardline.

THE ABBREVIATED
START LIST FOR THE
QUALIFICATION
WOULD SEE SOME
SEASONED RIDERS
ON THE SIDELINE

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PHOTO TROY LEE DESIGNS

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RIDER CHARLIE HATTON
PHOTO NATHAN HUGHES/ RED BULL CONTENT POOL



' SOMETHING UNIQUE ABOUT HARDLINE IS THE ATMOSPHERE BETWEEN THE RIDERS, EVERYONE IS IN THE SAME BOAT '

BERNARD KERR
INTERVIEW



ADAM BRAYTON
INTERVIEW



> Check the video link for the full conversation with Adam!

It was great to catch with Adam and hear about his views of his season, the course and life outside bikes. Before he sustained and then aggravated his injury, I had Adam on my short list for a podium spot. Another rider on that list was previous winner and all round top bloke Bernard Kerr from Pivot Cycles. Here's what Bernard had to say about his year of racing and the prospect of riding Hardline.

> Check the video link for the full conversation with Bernard!

It was clear that no matter how committed we are to bikes and the sport it was vital for riders to have a life outside bikes, something slightly leftfield to nerd over and indulge ourselves. With many familiar faces and old friends kicking around I got an excellent insight into this unique event and track. Brendan Fairclough (Scott - Velosolutions) seemed in good spirits and was all up for riding in whatever conditions, like many of the riders who strive for perfect race runs he too was not best pleased with his season, just slightly off the pace this year and finding it hard to get the set up he wanted.

Gee Atherton (Atherton Racing/Trek) seemed his usual cool calm collected self while brother Dan opted out from riding this year's event to get on the hill and keep the track running sweet. Something unique about Hardline is the atmosphere between the riders, everyone is in the same boat, and there are no large team pit areas for the riders to hide. They all help one another up on the course, and it seems that the 'guard' they put up at a World Cup is dropped.



'RIDERS ARE FACED WITH SECTIONS THAT SIT IMMEDIATELY ON TOP OF ONE ANOTHER THAT SIMPLY DON'T BELONG TOGETHER.'

The Track Walk

With the day nearing its end the clouds finally started to part, I jumped in the back of a Land Rover with another rider from back in the day, Mr Voice of RedBull World Cup coverage Rob Warner. Joining Rob this year on the mic and for a hair-raising ride in the Landie, none other than Mr World Champ and multiple World Cup winner Greg Minnaar from the Santa Cruz Syndicate.

The track walk with Rob and Greg revealed

the detail the cameras just can't pick up, the sneaky and millimetre precise line options that are available, the hidden gnar that's there to snag and stop you or knock you off line, and of course just the sheer scale of the features. One thing that really stood out to me was that change in scenery and terrain. Riders are faced with sections that sit immediately on top of one another that simply don't belong together.

Straight out of the start gate is an amazingly

steep, narrow, rutted line, which passes bedrock sections covered in lichen. The odd jagged rock is littered here and there to further add to the challenge of making it clean and smooth down to the first wooded section.

As the riders take an awkward right into the trees following a large rock slab the light disappears and the eyes, find it hard to adjust, even at walking pace. The dank, dark woods are littered with roots, and the gradient steepens as the first real sizeable natural feature comes into sight.



RIDER GEE ATHERTON
PHOTO SVEN MARTIN / RED BULL CONTENT POOL



A dirty, rocky edge hides the drop below, the right-hander after the plummet just seems near impossible to make, and the drop itself is hugely intimidating. Hiding under the drop, the bedrock protrudes forcing the riders to huck further down the insanely steep gradient towards the corner. If they clean this, it's on to the fast rough exit to the woods and the ginormous Cannon Gap.


The Cannon gives the riders a boost of speed, and in the dry, a feather of the brake helps control the speed into the first man-made ramp, a massive steel quarter kicks the riders over the Step Up and into the single track leading down to Dirty Ferns.

' THE BEDROCK PROTRUDES FORCING THE RIDERS TO HUCK FURTHER DOWN THE INSANELY STEEP GRADIENT '




FIFTY CRACKING DEALS

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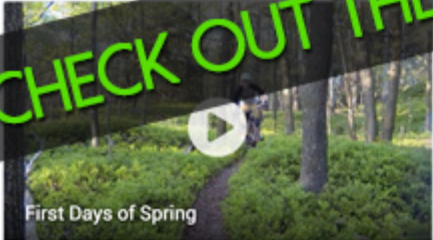
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Tried and Tested
2017 is looking to be a stellar year for new bikes for all budgets and technologies. Here we have a budget bouncer from Marin, Merida's top end e-bike, the latest Nokeproof Mega, and a keep-it-real hardtail from Commencal. We've also got the excellent Formula 35's on test too!

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Mountain Biking

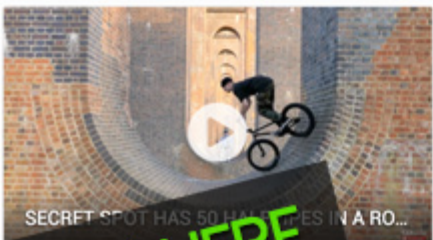


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Issue #46
INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN BIKE MAGAZINE


GET TO THE CHOPPA!
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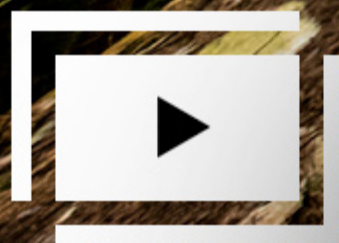
This natural technical rock strewn line has sniper rocks and stumps everywhere. The upper body is tested to the limit as the riders hammer the tight berms and rattle through the rocks and roots. This is where time can be made or lost.

The Step Down, another huge feature, takes the riders into a monster left-hand berm before immediately popping over another enormous step up jump. A few slick berms and into an off-camber woods section where it's hard to carry speed, this is needed not just for a fast run but to clear the step up hip jumps that pass over the old dry stone wall (Off The Wall section) as the trail cuts in and out of the tree line. With blind landing zones and takeoffs that have to be taken while on the turn, this section continues to prove itself difficult for the worlds best, making Waterfall Edge a popular spectator point.

The track then relents, and bike park flow trail berms give a welcome rest, this, however, is short-lived (especially at speed). The trail pops out of the trees, and the riders are faced with an overwhelmingly exposed and steep section. The line is narrow, the rocks sharp and slippery and the drop to the side not worth thinking about. With boulders at handlebar height and nowhere to go, this alpine-style section of trail will max out anyone's gnar-o-meter. As if surviving that section was not enough, the rocks give way to smooth boardwalk that leads the eye to, well.... nowhere! This is The Road Gap.

To give an idea just how big this thing is, Greg (that's World Cup DH Champ and legend Greg Minnaar) decided to not have a go at it on Thursday's practice where he jumped on the bike to get a riders eye perspective. Rob clung to the woodwork for dear life as we inched closer to the edge, the landing does not appear until the last second, and it's steep.

RIDER JOSH BRYCELAND
PHOTO SVEN MARTIN/RED BULL CONTENT POOL



' WITH BOULDERS AT HANDLEBAR HEIGHT AND NOWHERE TO GO, THIS ALPINE-STYLE SECTION OF TRAIL WILL MAX OUT ANYONE'S GNAR-O-METER. '

' THE DIFFICULTY HERE IS THE DIRT
DRAGGING ONTO THE ROCKS MAKING IT
HARD TO GET ANY GRIP '

RIDER FLORENT PAYET
PHOTO DAN WRIGHT



To add more difficulty, the riders immediately hammer into the massive right-hand berm on its exit. We safely climbed down and around the road gap to follow the track through the 'On and Off' jump then down more rock gnar. The difficulty here is the dirt dragging onto the rocks making it hard to get any grip, the hucks that follow are on the camber, very large and with no more than a bike length in the landing zones.

The new wood section lines the riders up for another massive gap jump as they fire 'Out of the Woods' and into the finish arena field. A small (45ft or so) gap helps to keep the flow as they set up for a massive 65ft gap at the Final Fly-Off, it's all so 'in ya face' and just has to be seen to be believed and fully appreciated.

The Finals

Running in reverse order with the fastest going last the crowds lined the track in anticipation, slips and slide-outs saw a few finishers avoiding the Final Fly Off with the dreaded 'muddy glove'. A condition that is not conducive to sending massive gaps! With such demanding conditions, it was young Charlie Hatton from the Atherton Racing/Trek team that picked up the pace and put in a blistering run of 3m 18.92s knocking fellow Brit Joe Smith from the hot seat.

The bar raised, Bernard Kerr left the start gate in an attempt to take another title. Bernard was sure he could shave several seconds off his qualification time and was on pace through the upper sections of the course. With so many chances to lose and gain time, it could go one of two ways as he entered Off The Wall.

The huge crowd in the finish field looked up to see a small silhouette appear below the cliff face as Bernard made his way to The Road Gap, now up on Hatton by a few seconds it was clear that Kerr was on a flyer.

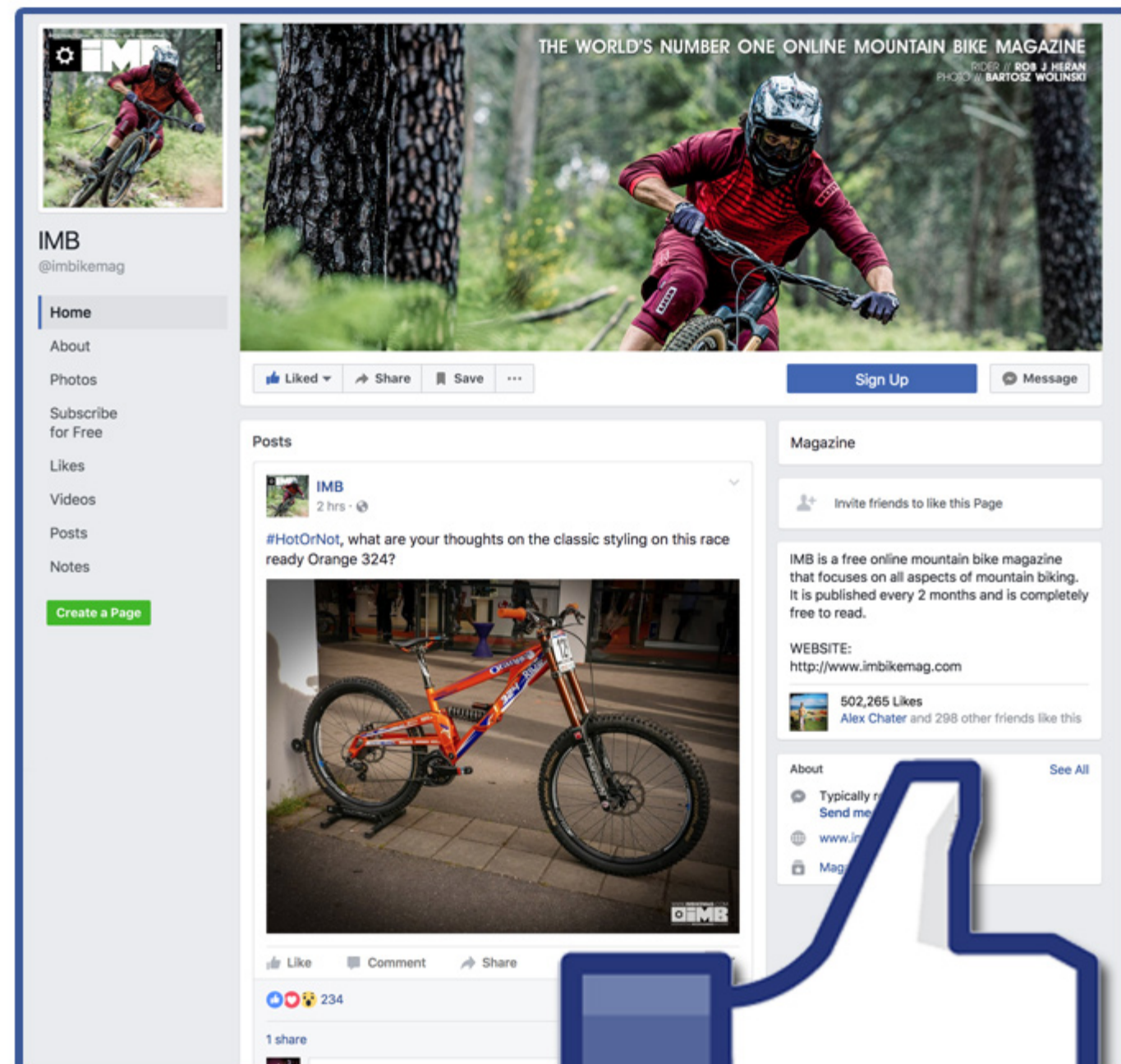




He exited the woods soared over the Final Fly Off and skidded across the line smashing Hatton's time by 6.6 seconds.

The bar well and truly raised and a very hungry Atherton sat in a start gate high upon the mountain, it was set to be nail-biting to the very end. The crowds had poured down off the mountain, and the atmosphere in the finish field was electric. Having sat with Gee in the morning drinking a brew while he prepped his tear-off system for his Oakley goggles I knew just how much he wanted this title, a win that had eluded him every year since the event began.

' THE
ATMOSPHERE
IN THE
FINISH
FIELD WAS
ELECTRIC. '



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'RIDERS ARE FACED WITH SECTIONS THAT SIT IMMEDIATELY ON TOP OF ONE ANOTHER THAT SIMPLY DON'T BELONG TOGETHER.'



Atherton is on the course and the clock ticking, with Kerr having posted a time nearly four seconds faster than Atherton's qualification time this was going to have to be an all-out assault on the toughest downhill track in the toughest conditions. Split one... He's up by 1.7 seconds! The crowd roars and everyone's glued to the clock split two...

Atherton is a man on a mission, he's up again, Kerr shakes his head in disbelief

knowing he laid down a very, very solid run. The gap has grown to 3.1 seconds but it's not over yet, with so many technical sections still to come and key areas where carrying speed is essential that 3.1 seconds can go out the window in a literal blink of an eye.

Once again the crowd wait for that microscopic silhouette to appear below the cliff face as Gee makes his way towards The Road Gap and split three. Kerr's moral

compass must be in conflict as the crowd wait for the clock and the commentator to scream out the time, **ATHERTON IS UP AGAIN!** He's now put 5.2 seconds into Kerr.

Just some crazy mud covered off camber gnarly rocks and a few massive gaps to clear, and history could be made, no punctures, no slide outs, no smashed mechs, this is it. Gee is Out of the Woods, and the crowd erupts as he sails through the air clearing the final jumps with ease to steal the win by a very impressive 5.57 seconds.

' A MONUMENTAL MOMENT IN
MOUNTAIN BIKE HISTORY. '

RIDER GEE ATHERTON
PHOTO SVEN MARTIN/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

The Atherton family invade the finish area with a host of journalists to congratulate Gee, a monumental moment in mountain bike history. That was RedBull Hardline 2018.

Position	Name	Time mm:ss:msms
1.	Gee Atherton	03:06.73
2.	Bernard Kerr	03:12.30
3.	Charlie Hatton	03:18.92



LIGHTBOX

RICHARD GASPEROTTI HAS BEEN VISITING COUNTRIES OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA AND ALBANIA SEARCHING OUT THE BEST RIDING
PHOTO ADAM MARSAL



Lightbox More shots with no particular place
to go this issue, feast your eyes!

LIGHTBOX

GREG CALLAGHAN HOLDS OFF THE COMPETITION AT THE RED BULL FOX HUNT IN NORTHERN IRELAND
PHOTO RED BULL CONTENT POOL/DUNCAN PHILPOTT



Lightbox

LOIC BRUNI GETS IT DONE AT THE WORLD CHAMPS IN LENZERHEIDE
PHOTO RED BULL CONTENT POOL/BARTEK WOLINSKI

Lightbox

LIGHTBOX



Lightbox

THE COMMENCAL JUNIOR CARTEL GO BIG IN COLORADO
PHOTO COMMENCAL

LIGHTBOX

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR FOR MANY OF US WHEN WE DIG OUT THE HARDTAIL
AND GO SLIDE ABOUT IN THE WOODS!
PHOTO MARIN/ROO FOWLER

Lightbox

LIGHTBOX

ISABEAU COUDUIRER FINISHES OFF THE ENDURO WORLD SERIES IN FINE STYLE IN FINALE
PHOTO BLUEGRASS /ALESSANDRO BELLUSCIO

Lightbox





GREG MINAAR SPENT THE DAY HITTING LAPS WITH THE O'NEAL CREW AND LOOKING STYLISH AND SMOOTH AS EVER
PHOTO ANTON GRUSLAK/O'NEAL

Lightbox

LIGHTBOX

SCOPING FOR LINES AND FRICTION IN THE WOODS
PHOTO SIMON MCLAINE

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LIGHTBOX

TORQUATO TESTA HEADING FOR THE WIN AT GLEMMRIDE SLOPESTYLE, HELD IN SAALBACH
PHOTO ROSE/DOPE HAMMER

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LIGHTBOX

WINTER TRAIL CONDITIONS HOLD NO FEAR FOR DAN ATHERTON, THE DESIGNER OF THE WORLD'S HARDEST TRAILS
PHOTO DUNCAN PHILPOTT

Lightbox

LIGHTBOX

NICK GOWAN MAKES THE MOST OF THOSE FINE ALPINE TRAILS BEFORE THE WINTER FINALLY ARRIVES
PHOTO TRISTAN SHU

Lightbox

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These are the 4 most popular videos that have been viewed on the site as voted for by you with your thumbs up likes in the last 2 months! Check out the full list [HERE](#), and if you see a video you like on the site, give it the thumbs up, it might just help to push it onto this page!

#1 WILL A WALMART HUFFY SURVIVE A DOWNHILL MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL?

A timely reminder to be thankful for the awesome mountain bikes we all get to ride. In this issue of the magazine we see what happens when an entry level mountain bike meets Enduro head-on, but what happens when a Walmart bike comes face to face with some full-on downhill trails?



[CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO](#)

#2 BLACK MOUNTAINS CYCLE CENTRE NEW TRAIL - BOMPER TO FULL MOTO!

It's all about Black Mountain Cycle Centre at the moment! Ollie Wilkins and Ben Deakin were there too, and put together this awesome run down to highlight the best lines the place has to offer and show the speed required to clear the biggest gaps.



[CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO](#)

#3 MTB T-REX

Matt Jones goes all Jurassic Park in this only slightly tongue-in-cheek natural history documentary about dinosaurs and bicycles. A man with almost no limits to his abilities, even a dodgy tyrannosaurus rex costume does little to dampen his style on a bike, the short arms and long tail don't distract and simply add to his already crazy skills.



[CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO](#)

#4 THE MOST TECHNICAL MTB TRAIL IN COLORADO?

Nate Hills takes us on a ride deep into the back country on some awesome single-track and high consequence rock gardens. With huge exposure and big, bike breaking rocks getting in the way, it's a full-on mountain bike workout testing every skills they have as riders.



[CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO](#)

MOVIE NIGHT

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RIDER SZYMON GODZIEK
PHOTO PIOTR STARON/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

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