

jumped into the lap of my throat was when sliding down an uh-oh-steep, loose-gravel-topped hill on the way to a mud bath. Only then did I wish for the wheelbase (and armor) of a battleship. The geometry is a modern 70/72-degrees (head-tube/seat-tube angle) with 2 1/8-inches of fork rake. The chainstays give good tire clearance plus room for the inevitable mud and crud that likes to meet at the U-brake. Bottom bracket height is a moderate 11.6 inches.

One thing Malinowski learned from Gary Fisher was the importance of rider position. His studies revealed that motorcyclists not only like their brakes where they're supposed to be, but like to sit up a bit more than their nose-to-the-ground mountain biking relations. Consequently, the Pro Comp's top tube is 22 1/2 inches, which may be a bit short if you're used to stretching out over the bar.

Sold alongside motorcycles, this bike should fly off the sales floor. But how

would it stack up against other mountain bikes at bike shops? We think that for a new entry at this price point, it might get lost in the crowd—we've seen Araya RM-20s on \$500-\$600 bikes, for instance. That's a reflection not of the Pro Comp XT's quality, but of how competitive the industry has become in a few short years. Still, the MS Pro Comp XT will put goose bumps on your tattoos, and you don't need a license or leather to ride it. ■

Donovan 'Struts' Its Stuff

The Ultrapformance Prototype Mountain Bike

BY GREGG MORIN

One of the least known, but most innovative, of Colorado's custom off-road framebuilders is Boulder's Ken Jonke, whose Donovan Ultrapformance Bicycles have many unique features.

The Prototype, Jonke's top-of-the-line Donovan, features an all-Prestige frame including the fork. That's not unusual, because many high-end mountain bikes boast framesets of Tange's light, high-strength steel. What is unusual is that instead of Tange's Prestige MTB tube set, Jonke uses standard *road-gauge* Prestige, with thin, 0.7 to 0.4-mm-wall butted down and seat tubes, versus Prestige MTB's heftier 0.9 to 0.6-mm-wall butted tubes.

Yet the Prototype is anything but the wet noodle you'd expect from these light tubes. Jonke's secret is flat, 1/8-inch-thick "struts," made from drilled-for-weight 6061-T6 aluminum that he press-fits into the three main tubes. There, they act as directional butting to increase joint strength and rigidity at critical frame stress areas.

The struts, which extend 4 inches into each tube, are oriented laterally at the bottom bracket to resist side-to-side flexing. At the head tube, the top and down-tube

reinforcements are inserted vertically to resist the forces of the constantly vibrating forks.

Use of the reinforced, lightweight tube set results in a light, 26-pound bike. The road-standard tubing also allows Jonke to use a Cinelli investment cast bottom bracket shell and short point lugs—traditional touches of strength that should appeal to off roaders who cut their teeth on skinny-tire road bikes. Jonke uses clean fillet brazing for the unicrown fork and fast-back-style seatstays. He also uses silver solder throughout, including for the fillets, which allows a lower brazing temperature than brass. It also ensures the integrity of the frame because the thin steel is particularly susceptible to weakening from heat.

The top tube slopes upward 3 degrees from the seat tube to the head tube. This provides more stand-over clearance and puts the cyclist's upper body in a comfortable, slightly more upright position. The frame angles and dimensions also add to this comfort, but still make the bike quick and agile. The 71-degree head tube, 72-degree seat tube, and 17-inch chainstays combine for a tight 41-inch wheelbase.

The Donovan feels just right jamming

up steep singletrack or flying down fast jeep roads. Upper body weight is well-balanced by the 22 1/8-inch top tube and custom one-piece bar/stem combination. The bar portion is completely straight—no rise or back sweep. This felt strange at first, but it soon became evident why cyclists are moving to a flatter bar—it places the hands lower and slightly more forward for a powerful climbing position. It almost feels like clutching the brake hoods of a road bike while climbing.

The bar/stem clamps to a sleeve that's silver-soldered into the steerer tube. This design saves weight by eliminating the long bolt and wedge found in most stems. Fillet brazing and an internally routed front brake cable add to the combo's sleek look. The bar/stem can be purchased separately, for approximately \$120.

All Donovans are equipped with Shimano Deore XT components throughout, including powerful XT cantilevers front and rear. Jonke is also designing a caliper brake that he feels will be a big improvement over conventional designs.

Those not completely sold on Biopace chainrings take note: Jonke rotates the middle and inner rings counterclockwise one bolt hole, or 72 degrees. This modifi-

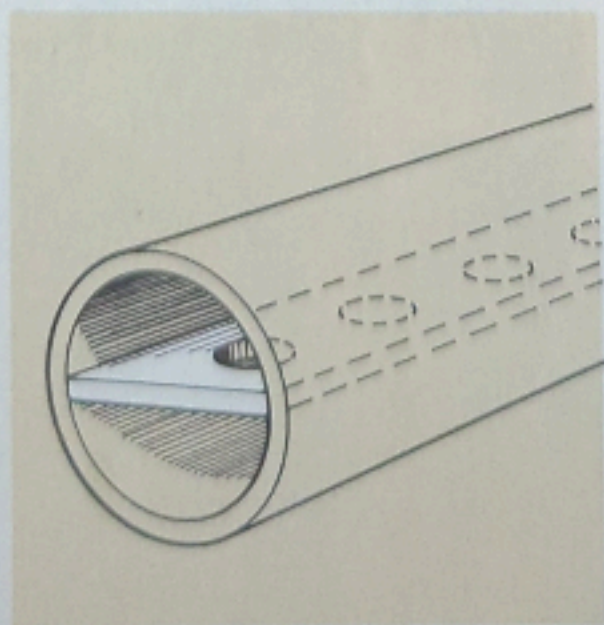


cation greatly enhances the power phase of the pedal stroke while climbing, and feels less "floppy" than normal. Try it and see if you agree.

With its Biopace modification, light Prestige tubing, and aluminum struts, the bike seemed to shoot forward with the slightest pressure on the pedals. It has to be ridden to be believed. The price of being convinced is \$950 for the Prototype frameset, or \$1,800 for the XT-equipped bike.

We had only one minor complaint about the Prototype—clearance can be a problem in the rear with any tire more than 2.0-inches wide, because of the round chainstays. This could be remedied by ovaling the tubes in the tire area. Donovan also offers two lower-priced bikes—the Outback II at \$1,400 and a TIG-welded model called the Outback I at \$1,200. If this still seems expensive, con-

sider that all three models come complete with Deore XT components, Prestige tubing, and the custom Donovan bar/stem setup. For those seeking the "perfect" ride, the Donovan should not be overlooked. ■



The Donovan Prototype uses road-gauge Tange Prestige tubing throughout, yet the bike isn't whippy. The secret is drilled $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch-thick struts (left) that are press fitted into the frame's three main tubes to enhance strength and rigidity.

HANK BARLOW

SALLY ONOPA

SPECS

Donovan Ultrapformance Prototype

DISTRIBUTED BY:

Donovan Ultrapformance Bicycles,
4949 North Broadway, Boulder, CO 80302

Country of Origin: U.S.

Suggested Retail Price: Complete Bike—
\$1,800; Frameset—\$950

Sizes Available: 17–25 in. tested in 1-in.
increments, 20 in.

Weight: Complete Bike—26 lbs.

FRAME: Tange road-gauge Prestige
throughout with internal aluminum
“struts”

Wheelbase _____ 41 in.

Seat tube _____ 20 in.

Top tube _____ 22¹/₈ in.

Head angle _____ 71 degrees

Seat angle _____ 72 degrees

Chainstays _____ 17 in.

Bottom bracket height _____ 11.7 in.

Fork Rake _____ 2.17 in.; 5.5 cm

Trail _____ 2.18 in.

WHEELS

Hubs _____ Shimano Deore XT
freehub

Spokes _____ 14-gauge stainless, 3-cross

Rims _____ Sun Mistral 36-hole

Tires _____ Ritchey Forece, front;
Ritchey Duro, rear

DRIVETRAIN

Derailleur _____ Shimano Deore XT
with SIS levers

Chain _____ Shimano Uniglide black

Crankset _____ Shimano Deore XT
26/36/46T Biopace, modified,
175-mm crankarms, Deore XT
bottom bracket

Freewheel _____ Shimano Deore XT
freehub 6-speed, 13–30T
freehub, Sun Mistral 36-hole rims

COMPONENTS

Brakes _____ Shimano Deore XT
cantilever

Pedals _____ Shimano Deore XT

Headset _____ Shimano 105

Seatpost _____ SunTour XC 300mm

Saddle _____ Moser leather

Bar and stem _____ Combination, custom
Prestige, flat, 24-in. bar, 5¹/₄-in. stem