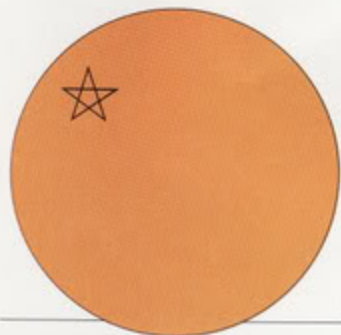


All pictures Bob Allen



Orange Boom

Bob Allen gives the top line Orange Formula the main squeeze

Lester Noble and Steve Wade of Orange Mountain Bikes can't keep this Formula a secret any longer. Taking what they've learned from designing and testing their other competition oriented mountain bikes, Noble and Wade feel they have arrived at the ultimate all steel, high performance racing machine. The Formula is a custom built frameset which will be set up to the customers specifications.

No matter how sophisticated I attempt to be when I get a chance to test a new bike, the first evaluation always seems to be the old 'grab it by the top tube and give it a lift' test. What is readily apparent is the weight of the Formula, or rather the lack of it. The 19 inch model I tested tipped the scale at a very respectable 25.5 pounds.

Steve Wade is the torchman responsible for the assembly of the Formula. He hand fits and brazes each frameset. The main triangle is Tange Prestige configured with 71 degree head tube and 72.5 degree seat tube angles. The rear end is constructed out of 4130 Cro-moly straight gauge. The seat stays are a wishbone set up with the stays being one piece bent to a U-shape. This single piece saves weight and makes a rigid rear triangle. The chainstays measure up at an even 16 inches. The small diameter tubing give massive clearance around the Specialized 1.95 Ground Control tyres.

Up front Wade has built a clean pair of

forks using Prestige blades with a 41mm rake. The steering is controlled through a one piece bar/stem unit which is also built by him. The reach of the stem is ovalised 4130 Cro-moly TIG welded to a Prestige bar with a 6 degree bend. This set up eliminates the weight of the binder bolt assembly. Noble assured me that any rise and reach can be custom built to spec.

The filed fillet brazing gives the Formula clean lines. The fillets aren't massive though. 'They're the minimum necessary for strength,' says Noble. 'After a point, fillet brazing just becomes weight. This bike is designed with the cosmetics secondary - the function is the main thing.' The matt black epoxy finish of the Formula is accented with gold 'Formula' graphics. I personally like the understated look of this all black high bred. The Formula will also be available in bright colours although the specifics weren't available at the time we went to press.

This Formula was set up with a Cook Bros Racing crankset and bottom bracket. The ultra-stiff black anodised CBR cranks compliment the bike in both looks and performance. From the first turn of these machined 7075 T6 aluminium cranks, I was impressed at how efficiently the Formula transmits the power to the ground. Hammering down on the pedals brought instant acceleration.

The long top tube (22.75 inches) and stem extension of 155mm suited me perfectly. It made for a stretched out and comfortable riding position. The Prestige front end gives a very responsive ride without being overly harsh.

The Formula comes onto its own in the climbing department. This is where the benefits of the short, stiff rear end are felt. I was able to negotiate some of Box Hill's ascents which usually left me hoofing it on longer and heavier bikes. While the Formula's short and steep geometry is not very forgiving, I was pleasantly surprised by how well it tracked on high speed single track descents. After I grew accustomed to its quickness, the Formula gave a well balanced and predictable ride.

The groupset tested was all Shimano XT complete with STI shifting. The only exception is the SunTour XC9000 self energising brakes at the rear. I am told these were used for more heel clearance. The new Superglide shifting was quick and smooth. It really shined when shifted under load. However, I will remain skeptical of the push-push type shifters until they have been used long enough to test their accuracy and durability. The new XT pedals with their raised cage give better cleat/spindle clearance and are easier to get into than previous models.

After two weeks of using and abusing this bike, I hated to give it back. The Formula demands to be ridden hard. At £1100 for the DX equipped and £1200 for the XT, it may not be for everyone. But for those looking for good value in a domestically designed and built



high performance racing machine, this Orange could be the Formula.

In addition to the Formula, the Orange line consists of two production framesets with the choice of three different Shimano groupsets. The Clockwork built from Tange Infinity tubing is designed to offer performance in an affordable package. A lighter version of the Clockwork built from Tange Prestige is the other machine in the Orange line-up. Both of these framesets are available with the choice of Shimano LX, DX or XT groups. These competition oriented production frames are built to their specification in Taiwan and then imported and assembled by Orange Mountain Bikes in their Halifax facility. 'This arrangement allows us to retain the most control over the final product,' says Noble. This control adds flexibility to what componentry can be offered as standard equipment, so bikes can be supplied with goodies such as Mavic rims.