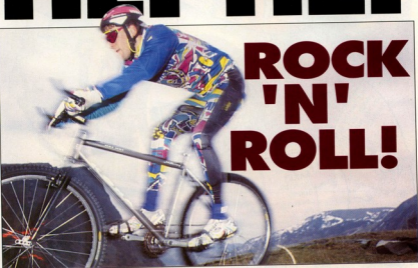


# HEI HEI

# ROCK 'N' ROLL!



*Titanium's the leader of the gang for top line racing MTBs like Kona's Hei Hei.  
Test: Dave Smith. Pics: Dave Willis/Eric Whitehead Photography*

**S**trong, light, fast, resilient, rust-proof, exotic, silly name, beautifully put together - but enough about me, what's the Kona Hei Hei titanium MTB like? Well it's all of the above, and a whole lot more besides.

Designed by Joe Murray, still only twenty-eight and one of the most mega-active people in the mountain bike world, the Hei Hei (the name is Hawaiian for 'race!'), is built in the USA by titanium producer Sandvik, whose bike manufacturing set-up has been developed with Murray's active involvement. Apart from making tubes, Sandvik are acknowledged as world leaders in welding techniques, something which is obvious from the quality of work on the Hei Hei.

If you're a rich speed freak in need of a new set of wheels, then step this way. If you're not rich, but still a speed freak then tough, 'cos like any titanium bike the Hei

Hei costs a bomb. (£1195, that's just for the frame!). So what will we, the typical mountain biker, miss out on when our bank manager says 'Get lost'?

We're probably all guilty of needless drooling over light bikes and components. Even so, some designs make little difference to performance - nice though they may be. Consider this. A superlight fat tubed alloy frame has a greater surface area, which means that in comparison with other bikes more mud will stick to it and the bike will increase in weight accordingly.

Yet here is a superlight beast, which looks just like a 'normal' race MTB, and has function at the heart of its design rather than merely providing a new topic for 'Gary Gearfreak' to discuss endlessly.

The frame is made from seamless 3Al-2.5V titanium tubing - an alloy of titanium with 3 percent aluminium and 2.5 percent vanadium, which is relatively easy to weld and work with and is used in practically

all titanium bike construction. (eg the Lavoie bike reviewed in December 1989). Although titanium is nearly twice as dense as aluminium, it is much stronger resulting in a superlight yet very strong frame. However it isn't as stiff as other frame materials, thus giving a 'soft' ride. Despite its considerable weight advantage over steel, the walls of the tubing are actually thicker, so it should be less prone to denting than steel frames.

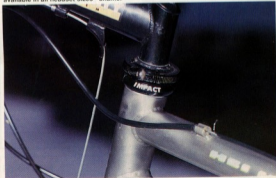
The tubes are put together with some of the best welding you are likely to see on any bike - ever. This year sees a change for the Kona titanium with a move to oversizing. The head tube diameter is now 1 1/8 inches and the down tube has also swollen, which should eliminate a little of the frame flex normally associated with titanium bikes. The titanium plate rear drop-outs are water cut, well machined and beefy. The 71 degree head tube and 73 degree seat tube geometry is identical to Joe Murray's own bike.



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Of special interest was the Impact headset which needs only an allen key to adjust, the initial tightening of the lock ring being done by hand. The beveled up 1/4 inch lower bearings are protected from grunge by a tight flexible plastic sleeve. Offered as a product in its own right it must be a winner, especially at around £25, though it isn't available in all headset sizes - shame.



Along with a 23 inch top tube, 16.75 inch chain stays, 1.65 inch fork rake and 42.5 inch wheel base. All in all a pretty standard and well proven race geometry.

The frame finish is natural titanium, no coating required, as titanium won't rust or corrode why hide it under a layer of paint? The plain finish matched with black Project Two forks, looks really mean and business like - the business being no messin' racin'. Other than a tubing identity sticker no mention of titanium was made on the frame, a nice touch from Kona suggesting a quiet pride in their product as opposed to the brash boastfulness of some companies.

Although the test bike wasn't set up with weird and wonderful trick components it still weighed a scanty 25lbs, a couple more could come off easily. The frame alone weighs 3.7lbs, so sub-23lbs total weight should be possible.

Suntour XC-Pro groupset with self-energizing rear brakes and thumbshifters (yippee), took care of all changes in speed as desired, the new thumbshifters being notably neat, light and well made. Use of Dia-Compe Advantage brake sets would cut the weight down considerably without compromising braking performance. A neat aluminum non-quick release clamp held a Shimano XT seat post in place topped off with an Avocat Racing II saddle. Only once did I wish I had a QR option.

Controls were mounted on Kona's own titanium handlebars which weigh a mere 150 grams, and offered a very smooth ride compared with steel bars. D



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▷ An old wrist injury which usually appears when riding on rigid bars and stem was noticeably absent during rides on the Hei Hei.

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winner, especially at around £25, though it isn't available in all headset sizes - shame.

Additional 'Joe's bits' on the test bike and which are also available separately included Dewey Bar ends and Joe's Clips, double strapped toe clips. The bar ends were, well ... bar ends. A comfy curve and clamp design, light (250gms) and good value at a tad under £20. Joe's Clips seek to revolutionize toeclips, which hardly need revolutionizing. If a clip is comfy and stops your foot falling out it's good enough really. Two straps per clip is a little OTT. Nevertheless they were comfy



and my foot didn't fall out!

The wheel package consisted of XC-Pro hubs strung up with 32 spokes to Ukai UM-17 rims. The rims feature a concave inner face which should add a bit of strength without weight. Konzo's new tyres grace front and rear, the Propulsion and Equilibrium. The Propulsion rear tyre features a broken 'Y' pattern tread and gave great traction on all but the stickiest cruddy terrain. The Equilibrium front tyre is a vast improvement on the Maximum Reaction which has a tendency to wash out on corners. The steering control it offered was excellent, very sure on fast sweeping bends, without 'grabbing' too much in slower tight turns.

So how does the Hei Hei ride? This is a bike for either stonking like billy-o on, or a bike for laying down and avoiding. If you ride it slowly people will stop you and beat you severely with Hyperglide chains, and a good thing too.

The Hei Hei is fast from the start, acceleration is swift due to the obscene lack of weight under the saddle. At speed, the feel of the ride is quite unlike a steel or aluminum bike. It is 'supple' without being sloppy. When used on steel frames, the geometry used on the Hei Hei makes for great all round handling, but when used with a frame as light as this it's a real dreamboat.

Hill climbing is a joy, the 46 channring was used enough on climbs to be noticed. Jamming hard on inclines the Hei Hei really took off. Bottom bracket flex wasn't abundant, the oversize down tube stiffening it up compared with other titanium frames. Once the downhillling started - well, what can I say? Due to finding a sweet, very steep, secret forest track somewhere in Northern Ireland I think I went as fast as I've ever done downhill. The handling was excellent, safe and secure, whilst obviously not as smooth as a suspension bike would be, the Hei Hei was way better than steel.

Hard, fast, brains out riding was really where the Hei Hei was at its best. The tyres made for good cornering and climbing, though they packed up a bit too easily in stodgy Irish bogs. On fast single track the handling was great, the light weight raising flickability to new levels of consciousness. At slow speeds..... who cares? How good is a Ferrari at parking? OK, if you must know, it was good.

I only had one gripe concerning the Hei Hei frame and that was the routing of the rear brake cable around the seat tube via a little titanium pipe, making lubrication a hassle. Threading a cable through in the first place was a bit of a pain. A little ingenuity would sort that one out.

Overall the Hei Hei does all you ask of it and is an exceedingly fine mountain bike. However, the cost must be considered. Yes, you get an undeniably beautifully made, superb handling mountain bike frameset, but you fork out £1195. If you've got that sort of money to spend on a bike then the Hei Hei is good to go. I haven't, but now I've ridden it I know what I'm missing out on.