

SHOW TIME

It's drool time again! The major bike shows at Friedrichshafen and Anaheim have been tempting everybody with all the new goodies soon to be available. For those of us who couldn't go, JOHN STEVENSON and BRIAN HEMSWORTH give us a run-down to whet our appetites.

While the Friedrichshafen Eurobike show was predominantly aimed at the German market, its timing as the first in the annual round of European and US trade shows made it a launching point for a whole stack of new products, some of which were, well, not exactly ready to fly, despite the assurances of optimistic product managers that production versions were imminent.

The main trends are similar on both sides of the Atlantic, so I'll leave it to Mr Finger-on-the-pulse Hemsworth to explore them below – here's MBUK's guide to the highlights of the Eurobike show. ▶





▲ Best catalogue: Merlie's hand-out featured a couple of pages of specs and a lot of ultra-cool pics of ultra-cool racers and ultra-cool Merlie staff with their ultra-cool Merlie bikes, like this one of US roadie champ legs Thompson. The Japanese version vanished quicker than an unloved bike in London, such was the perceived ultra-coolness of its great pics and incomprehensible captions.

▲ Campag's Record OR drew crowds of drooling technoweenies. It features their existing eight-speed set-up with optional aluminium sprockets, and a clever Micro Drive-style chainset that uses existing Campag sprockets as chainrings.



▲ The MBUK Show Team stopped at nothing to suss out the latest important development. This fun mini-tandem wasn't one of them, though.



▲ The new, lighter Rock Shox II were everywhere, and look to be the major original equipment fork next year. Expect to see them on bikes from as little as £400!



▲ At the heart of Shimano XTR is a lighter STI unit featuring Rapidfire Plus, a two-trigger shifter that puts the uphill button under your finger and the downhill under your thumb. Sounds complicated but works great. The whole group is immaculately finished, light and expensive, a Terminator 2 of MTB components. Early reports from racers and Shimano's tech support guys are that it works brilliantly and gets on doing so. Prices in Britain will be about £730 without pedals, quick release or seatpost. Time will tell how long it lasts in Madville UK.



▲ Specialized R&D head Tom Parkes explained their new gas and oil suspension fork, complete with a boot to protect sliders and stanchions from crud – a smart move for the UK.



▲ Tandems were everywhere; and you know that they're a happy thing when a company the size of Specialized gets in on the act. As the mountain bike market gets older (not 'matures' – all the tandem mountain bikers we know are big kids) the market for bikes for two is growing rapidly. MBUK wants a trailer so we can ride with the Sally Hibberds of this world and keep up!

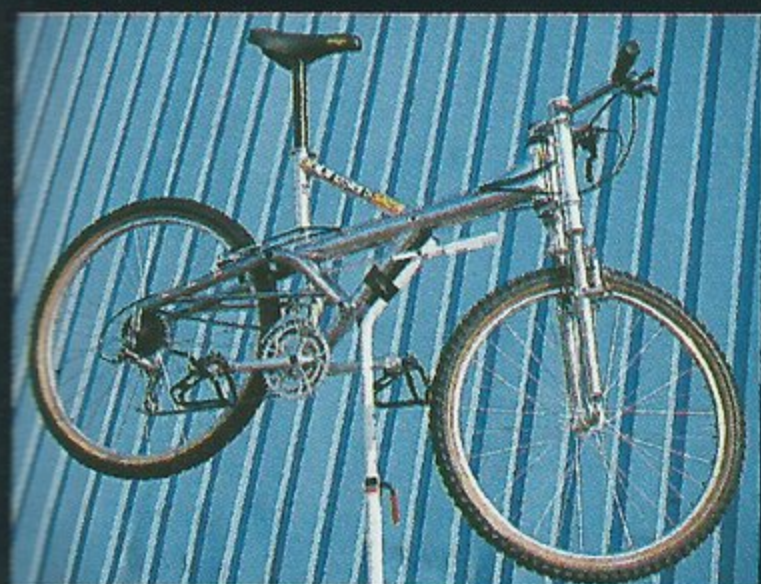


▲ Another one. Scott's suspension bike looks as well-sorted as most of the larger companies' bikes. Are we itching to get our paws on these machines? You bet!



▲ At last! A rideable suspension bike! Paul Brodie's weird-looking machine had an All-sop Softride unit under the saddle and a distinctly original leading link fork with elastomer dampers and the brake mounted on the reaction arm. It felt fine in a quick spin round the car park.

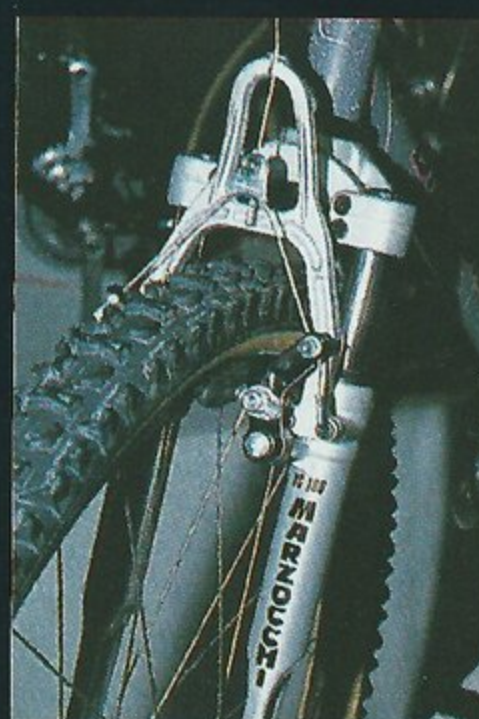
▶ Greg Herbold won't be using one of these seat folding minibikes to race downhill next year, but zipping round the show halls and the car park on one was a left.



▲ Alpinestars' prototype suspension bike had a massive 4in of travel front and rear, which designer Bill Stevenson reckons is essential for the gnarliest downhills. We didn't get to ride it because, like a lot of Eurobike's suspension bikes, this was a development prototype and sensible product managers keep such things out of the hands of the MBUK Crew.



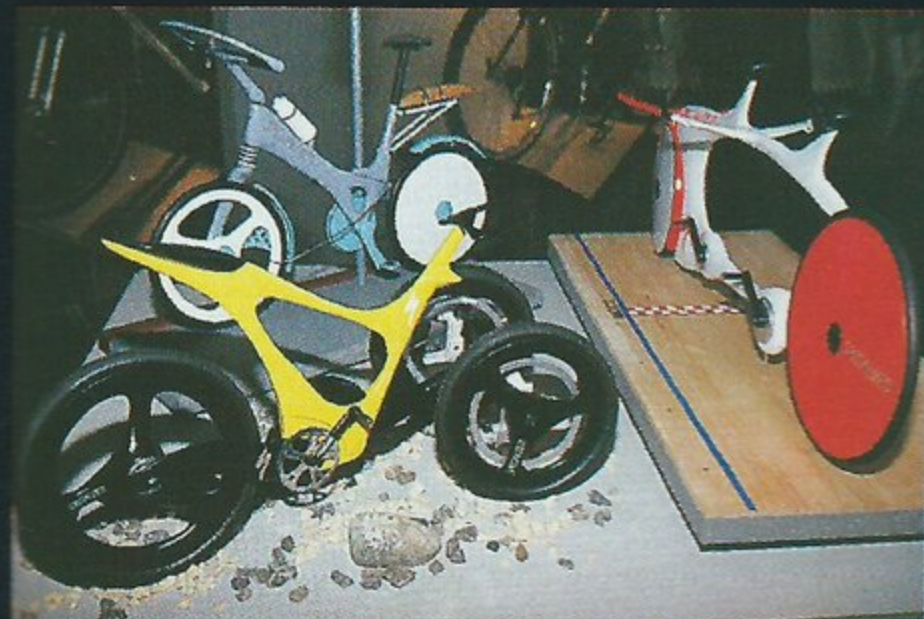
▲ Muddy Fox have joined the growing list of bike makers using the Browning suspension system, which hides the suspension components inside the steerer. Cannondale and Action Tec have superficially similar systems.



▲ The new improved Marzocchi forks feature more slider/stanchion overlap, bigger stanchions, slightly less travel and improved bracing across the sliders. It should add up to a much better fork. The company also has a rear shock that retrofits to last year's Cannondale EST and stiffens it laterally.



▲ Trek's suspension bike uses an elastomer bumper system in the rear and a gas/oil fork. The fork was developed for Trek by Japanese suspension giants Showa, and is comparable to Rock Shox in weight. The rear unit is all their own work, and provides three inches of travel for one inch of compression.



▲ A glimpse of the future. These are scale models of some of Specialized's wilder ideas for the next generation of superbikes. Like project cars, they may never see production, but they're evidence of some radical free-thinking going on at Specialized HQ in Morgan Hill, California.



▲ Mongoose's German importer had this half-assembled suspension bike which uses a spring/oil rear shock and a Taiwanese copy of Rock Shox Mk I up front.



▲ Cannondale's Delta-V is a development of, and improvement on, last year's promising but flawed EST bike. An improved, more rigid rear shock should produce better handling in the back, while the steerer-mounted front suspension is designed to have no lockout so it moves with every bump. Designer Mark Farris reckons a fork should move as much as possible, and after throwing a Delta-V down some gnarly stuff at the Worlds, we agree.



▲ Zak Tempest and Graham Hot-Pie were to be found modelling Been Bag's Deranged Range of clothing, zooming about on a borrowed tandem and generally acting daft. Nothing new there then.



▲ That Merlin suspension bike in detail. The Proflex-style rear shock uses elastomer bumpers but no pivot – the chainstays just flex. Up front the forks move on pivots that project forward from the head tube and the bumper is hidden inside it.



▲ Tange's elastomer Shockblades were a total surprise.



▲ Yeti drew a lot of attention with this Johnny O'Mara special, designed by Johnny's motorcycle friends.



▲ Yes, those are forks turned backwards, and yes, those are bungee cords. Pretty slick, eh?



▲ Lawwill's fork copes with straight-on herb hits.

For some US manufacturers Eurobike was just a fraction too early. Brian sussed out the new stuff at the Anaheim show a mere two weeks later.

Asking me to write about Anaheim is like asking Tolstoy to write about a war. There's no way to write a cohesive article that's shorter than *Go With the Wind* about all the cool stuff at the show without leaving half of it out. So rather than cut too much, I chose simply to list as much as I could in a (seemingly endless) series of notes.

TRENDS

1 Prices are going up (again). Component prices went up, as did tubing and accessory prices. The Japanese and Taiwanese seem to be in cahoots with one another, and we all get to pay for it! The all-chronometry frame threshold, a traditional indicator, is up to nearly US\$350.

2 Suspension is everywhere. One amendment to that rule, though, is that "real" suspension is harder to find. I saw easily 15 to 20 varieties of suspension fork displayed, but only **Rock Shox**, **Marzocchi** and **Scott** are really doing much in the way of business.

3 The bike industry went on a diet, big time. Virtually every manufacturer told us about how much weight their bikes have lost. Most spoke of 1-2lb reductions, though we heard one speak of a 6lb loss on one model. Heck, until a year ago, it took five years to lose 2lb!

4 Titanium is bigger than ever. The show was flooded with titanium. Frames, forks, shocks, saddles, bars, stems, seatposts, pedals, nuts, bolts and even water-bottle cages. While they help to shed weight, the cost is astronomical. The

funny thing is, they all say that business has never been better. Sounds like there's a lot of titanium junkies out there.

5 Performance reigns supreme. In years past, aesthetics played a big part in mountain bike design. This year ultimate performance has to be the thing. "If it doesn't do something, get rid of it" seems to be the cry. Real tyres (lots of *Stokes*, *MegaRides*, *Z-Maxes* and *Porcupines*), lightweight components, trick forks and conventional chainstays were all in force at Anaheim. As for bar ends, they're now standard equipment on hundreds of bikes.

COMPONENT NOTES

SHIMANO

I know there was some press in last month's issue, but *XTR* deserves another mention. This new gruppino of **Shimano's** is possibly the best ever made for mountain bikes. The weight is down (significantly), the action is better (thanks to the new *Rapidfire Plus* shifter), and the cost is sky-high. Word has it that early estimates of US\$1,000 retail price tags are wrong; my sources now say US\$1,200-1,400 is more like it. The worst news: we hear delivery is already in question and slowdowns and delays will be frequent. Also new is the lighter and less expensive *RS25 SPD* pedal, plus three new *SPD* shoes. Look for pros to be raring on the new *MGW* next year (the only ones who can afford them).

SUNTOUR

Micro Drive was introduced before the US and European shows. I had the chance to test a production sample a few months ago and can honestly say it's **SunTour's** best to date. It's light, it's strong, and best of all, it actually shifts (what a concept).

CAMPAGNOLO

Yes, another group hits the market. This one might fly. Reaction to **Campag's**

Recond OR was modest, but sincere. While US manufacturers weren't beating down their doors, a number of highly respected builders are singing its praises, based upon initial testing. Pricing is keeping it off anything but the most expensive bikes. Oh, yeah, the new front hub with a 14mm axle should be a big hit with users of suspension forks.

GRIPSHIFT

A big surprise to a lot of people. **SRAM** has introduced the *GripShift SRT 300*, a grip shifter that really works. It's ultra-light, doesn't increase the diameter of the grip, and uses the shortest throw I've seen on a grip shifter. It made it on to a number of mountain bikes, but the big surprise was that it was found on tons of cross bikes. Specialized and Trek were two of the biggies to use it. Look for the *SRT 500*, *700* and *Elite* models to show up on more mountain bikes come mid-season, once production really gets going.

SACHS

Sachs finally broke through. The first production units of their twist ring shifter to hit the States landed on one of **Schwinn's** models. While it's only a sub-US\$400 bike, this has to be seen as a big deal, being **Sachs'** first major spec on a US bike.

BIKE NOTES

DIAMOND BACK

DB have revamped and redesigned a line that they had significantly improved just last year. The same guys that do the **Diamond Bike** bikes are the ones who signed an exclusive deal with **Marzocchi** for US distribution. The first thing they did was improve **Marzocchi's** design, then put it on some of their own bikes (smart thinking). **Panaracer Stokes**, **Marzocchi** shocks, trick **Brosno** bar end/handlebars (all-in-one bars) and lighter weight frames are all a part of the mountain bike line. Of particu-



A An emerging trend: the 'super cross' bike. Here's Diamond Back's new 700c mountain bike which boasts SunTour Micro Drive, Brahma bars and radical 700x45 Smoke tyres.



Top: The world's costliest production bike - Raleigh's \$4,500 Tomac special. **Bottom:** Tandems were a hot item at Anaheim too.



A Here's a good example of the diet the bike industry's on. It's a production Kestrel that weighs under 90lb with conventional parts; 1992 is going to be a great year for weight freaks as ultra-light bikes and parts hit the market in a much bigger way than before.

lar interest is a new 'super cross' bike: the *OceanRise Comp* uses a light **True Temper** chromoly frame, **SunTour's XC Pro Micro Drive**, lots of trick parts, and 700c wheels, topped off with track 700x45c **Smoke** tyres.

GARY FISHER

While the *RS-1* got some nice reviews this past year, it never really got off the ground. Gary had his hands full trying to coordinate a number of different suppliers and lots of new technology. Well, the *RS-1* is for real this year, and Gary whetted our appetites with a new moulded composite carbon-fibre model, the *Atomik*. Versions have been tested, though they want to shed some of its currently excessive weight. Also new from **Fisher**, a new *BowTrox 2.6* tyre. That's right, a 2.6in tyre!

GT

Refinement is the big thing for GT. They have one of the more successful race teams in the US, and they've tested and especially like their aluminium bikes. Consequently, their aluminium frames are figuring a lot more prominently. Upgrades like bar ends, *Rock Shox*, SPD pedals, and **Ritchey WCS** super-light tyres are found on numerous bikes in the line-up.

HARO

Haro continue to be on the cutting edge, both in designing bikes and in their graphic appeal. A prototype suspension bike (elastomer) looked pretty sweet, but I was told they're going to do lots of testing before it hits the market. New rectangular seatstays and chainstays on the *Extreme AL* feature internal gusseting, while both *Rock Shox* and *Morcochis* can be found on various models.

NISHIKI

While they're having a tough time living down the lack of success of the much-publicised *Allen* bikes, **Nishiki** unveiled a new **Richard Cunningham**-design shocker. It looks to be one of the smartest systems out, at least by what many industry insid-

ers say. Actual production is still in question, though. Add that to the new *Allen SP*, designed specifically for the new *Rock Shox*, and it may be the breath of life that **Nishiki** need.

SCHWINN

America's largest bike company has split its line in two. The high end is **Paramount**, while the low end is still just **Schwinn**. Highlights include a new low-temperature silver-brazing process for the **PDG** (**Paramount Design Group**) bikes, quicker geometries, and a radical new front/rear suspension bike. It's due out by mid-year, with luck, and was co-designed with **Eric Buell**, a wizard of the motorcycle industry.

UNIVEGA

One of America's most price-competitive bike lines made a big impact on the show. A mass-production front/rear-suspension bike which looks an awful lot like the **Boulder** custom bike, it will retail around US\$1,200 as a complete, which is less than most front/rear-suspension frames cost. Another milestone: a full-chromo bike with **Scott Uni-shock** forks for less than US\$600. Do you think these guys feel there's a market for suspension?

SUSPENSION NOTES

ROCK SHOX

Totally new for this year: The *Mog 20* and *Mog 30* feature entirely new gats, and will come out of a brand new California factory. Improved seals, less weight, magnesium legs and a lower height all add up to greatly improved performance (I've been on one for two months now). The *Mog 20* also has the benefit of adjustable lock-out, which effectively works like a damping adjustment. Pretty cool stuff.

TANGE

Tange brought big news to the show in the form of a new suspension fork. Their *Shoc8blades* is a new elastomer design

which has a really trick (read stiff) brace and a large, single elastomer bumper in each leg. It looks great, and should be out by the first of the year.

LAWWILL DESIGN

From the famous motorcycle racer, star of *On Any Sunday* and designer of **Gary Fisher's RS-1** suspension bike, comes a radical new suspension fork that tackles several previously untouched problems. First off, the leading link design has a unique 'anti-dive' feature. This means the geometry of the bike doesn't change as it compresses. Secondly, the mechanics of this fork, now called the **Lawwill Leader**, allow it to take severe frontal impacts (the kind that fold most forks). Bashing into the kerb outside the convention centre at high speed was enough to prove their integrity to me. Several big companies are currently negotiating for the rights to this new design.

LEADING LINK

Here's one for you. For under US\$100 you too can have suspension fork. Just flip your fork around backwards, attach this neat little arm into the hub of your wheel, wrap some bungie cords around it and voila! The designer claims to have ridden on one for 17 years without a failure. Hmmm, sounds like a good one for **Stevenson** to test...

CLARK-KENT

From the guys who helped design the **Scott Uni-shock** comes a new, high-end titanium fork. Reversing the telescoping action, the elastomers sit in the upper legs. That, combined with the 'two-part three-point' brake bridge, makes this one of the lightest yet stiffest suspension forks we've seen.

SORT-OF SHOCKS

Unfortunately, a good number of poorly-made **Rock Shox** clones appeared at the show, boasting 'equal performance' at less than half the cost. Watch out for these things. Lawsuits may be the result of some of the less-than-safe units. ■