

## JOE MURRAY DESIGN KONA EXPLOSIFF PRO

● Two-time NORBA National Champion Joe Murray has a design contract with the Bicycle Group to develop their complete line of off-road bicycles. Murray, who started his bicycle design career while still racing the Nationals, has built a reputation as a practical and homespun engineer whose bikes aren't carbon copy, clone machines.

In no way could you look at the \$1650 Kona Explosif Pro and not recognize the experienced hand of Joe Murray at the helm.

**Frame:** Tange borrowed the boutique tubest idea from Columbus for the Tange Prestige Concept tubing. By designing the diameters and shapes of each tube to fit its task, Tange Concept tubing swells, ovalizes and tapers at each end in the direction of load. The elliptical and tapered tubes look strange, but are specially designed to do the job.

Kona, a Canadian company, used tubing from Tange in Japan to build the Explosif in Taiwan so that it can be sold in the U.S.A. Very global.

Thanks to superb tubing, very good welding and clean design, the Kona Explosif's mildly sloping top tube design offers both sturdy construction and light weight. Even with the Joe Murray FutureShock front fork, the Kona Explosif tips the scales right at the 27-pound mark.

The FutureShock fork is an elastopolymer bumper fork that borrows technology from post-war (that's WWII) Harley-Davidsons. Known as a springer fork, the bumpers are mounted to a main fork and then activated by a smaller fork which is linked to the main fork. Travel is limited to approximately 1.25 inches.

**Drivetrain:** During our test sessions we had a few problems with the SunTour XC-Pro drivetrain and SunTour Micro-Drive crankset. When we tried to use the granny gear across the full rear cluster, the short-cage rear derailleur would rock back until the chain looked like it was running through a maze. Trying to run the granny gear with the smaller cogs was impossible. The solution? Shorten the chain by two links. We shouldn't have to do it, though—Kona should!

Other than our quibble with cross-gearing hassles, the XC-Pro setup was the best SunTour shifting we have encountered since the good old days. The top-mount thumbshifters have a rather long throw to them, but grabbing gears was predictable and easy, and the front shifting was awesome (a long-time SunTour trait).

The Explosif Pro is outfitted with SunTour Grease Guard. Grease Guard allows the rider to re-grease his bottom bracket, cranks, hubs and pedals with a squirt from a special grease gun. Grease Guard is a plus for people who don't work on



**Kona Explosif Pro:** The Joe Murray-designed frame is available with rigid chromoly forks or one-inch-travel FutureShocks. Kona uses Tange Concept tubing, SunTour XC-Pro components and a full complement of Joe Murray accessories.



**Bolt-ons:** Joe Murray must have an aversion to barbecuing his frame designs because the seatpost collar is a slip-on unit and the rear brake cable guide is a clamp-on. Adding to the bolt-on theme, the Kona Explosif Pro comes with a brake booster.



**FutureShocks:** With a hair over 1" of travel, the FutureShock springer-style forks seem to create overly light steering. We wore out the fork bumpers in less than 100 miles (albeit hard miles).

their bikes at regular intervals, but adds enough to the component prices to send you to bicycle mechanics school.

The Micro-Drive crankset gets its name from the fact that it uses 42/32/20 chainrings instead of the standard-issue 46/36/26 sprockets. The small chainrings are mated to a close-ratio rear cluster with an 11-tooth small cog and 26-tooth big cog. The result is the same overall gearing as standard-issue stuff, but with more ground clearance and less weight. Both SunTour and Campy went to Micro-Drive technology because it allowed them to mimic road bikes with a short-cage rear derailleur and tight rear cluster. The advantage for Campy and SunTour was a big improvement in shifting (something that only Shimano had mastered with the standard-issue chainrings and rear cluster setup).

**Components:** Kona didn't take any shortcuts in the rubber department on the Explosif. The front 2.2 Equilibrium is a

jumbo-sized, blackwall knobby designed for front use only, while the rear 2.0 Propulsion is a directional rear-only tire. Overall performance of the Explosif sneakers was good on hard to very good in the tack. Araya RM-400 Pro rims are supplied in natural silver (like all good mountain bike rims should be).

Stopping confidence was delivered by SunTour XC-Pro cantilevers. The rear brake came stock with a brake booster plate. We liked the brakes, but have always been mystified by SunTour's rubber-covered brake levers. The brake cables exit the levers aimed towards the rear of the bike, and then have to turn forward to make their arc around the head tube or to the front fork. Additionally weird was the Velocity stem, which is a clean double-pinch unit that is equipped with a cable stop and cable guide. What's so weird about that? The Kona Explosif does not

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## WORKHORSES

need cable guides on the stem because the FutureShock fork has cable guides on it.

An Avocet Racing 1 saddle is mounted to an aluminum Joe Murray O-beam seatpost. We had to clamp the saddle into the O-beam as tight as possible to keep the saddle nose from tilting upwards on long rides.

**Interesting features:** Any bike that is designed by Joe Murray bristles with interesting features. Joe's creative mind offers the Explosif buyer a water bottle cage that comes stock with cage, water bottle, tire irons and patch kit. The Combo Cage allows you to go for a quick spin without carrying a fanny pack or under-saddle bag. Unfortunately, the cage refused to hold a full bottle in place over rough terrain.

Joe's Clips—that's the product's actual name—could easily be confused with the floorboards of a '47 Packard. Without a doubt, the Joe Murray-designed toe clips are the ultimate platforms for riders who don't want to switch to SPD (and that's a lot of people). Joe's Clips have double toe straps, plastic toe box and the structural integrity of a Panzer tank. They would weigh a ton if they weren't mounted on ultralight SunTour XC-Pro pedals.

We liked the rubber seal on the bottom bearing of the headset. We doubt that it would make a major difference in a submarine ride, but it shows concern.

Obviously, Joe didn't want the Taiwanese to do any excess welding on the Tange Concept tubing because he used a non-quick-release seat clamp to secure the seatpost in place, a clamp-on rear cable guide to direct the brake cable to the rear stopper and a clamp-style headset locking ring to keep the top race from loosening in the whoops. Clamps galore!

**Comments:** The Joe Murray-designed Kona Explosif was a fun bike to ride. Every MBA test rider thought that the 71/73-degree chassis was responsive, quick-handling and well-balanced. The FutureShock fork didn't have a lot of travel, but it took the edge off of trail ripples, square-edged bumps and small-to-medium-sized rain ruts. In the suspension wars we wouldn't have considered the springer unit to be king of the hill, but it functioned well within the majority of trail riding situations. Our only complaints about the fork's function were that the rear derailleur cable rubbed on the top nut of the bumper system (occasionally snagging and always wearing through the cable housing) and the bumpers self-destructed after only 100 miles of riding.

The FutureShock's fork offset, which is fairly long, resulted in very light steering. This was okay on fast singletrack and smooth trails but caused more than a small amount of wag on climbs and fast descents. The combination of minimal fork trail and a long stem results in a feathery feel that has pluses and minuses. ●

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