

NORTH OF THE BORDER ROCKY MOUNTAIN BLIZZARD ENDURO

• The Rocky Mountain boys have an advantage over a lot of bicycle companies in the States—they are located off the beaten track. Some of the most innovative and creative mountain bikes of the past few years have come from Canada. It's not that the Canadians are inherently brighter or more astute than their American or European counterparts, it's just that they live, work and ride in an environment that shapes machines rather than being shaped by them.

Rocky Mountain builds bikes to withstand the rigors of going off-road in the Great White North. If it can't take it, the Rocky Mountain boys don't have time for it. The \$1575 Rocky Mountain Blizzard Enduro is built for the wilds of Canada—without concern for the fashion scene in Frisco or L.A.

Frame: The MBA test crew might go a full season without testing a single bike made out of Tange Prestige Concept tubing. It just isn't used much by stateside builders, but obviously, we haven't been looking in the correct place. In this issue of *MBA* alone, Canadian-based manufacturers Kona and Rocky Mountain are showing models made out of the uniquely shaped Japanese chromoly tubes. Concept tubing is specially drawn to place more material where it's needed and less where it isn't.

The Kona Explosif and Rocky Mountain Blizzard may both come from Cana-



dian companies and use Tange Prestige Concept tubing, but apart from that they are completely different. Rocky Mountain's trademark has been the radically sloping top tube, and the Blizzard does nothing to damage that rep. The sloping top tube intersects a custom-formed seat collar that rises 3.5 inches above the top tube. Thanks to extra reinforcing and a front-mounted seatpost quick-release, the extended seat collar allows for maximum standover clearance without flexing the seatpost.

The rear of the Blizzard features a wishbone seat stay with a stout monostay joining two tapered seat stays together.

Rocky Mountain selected the Tange Strut forks because of their incredible rigidity, mud clearance and unique looks. Very beefy.

Rocky Mountain Blizzard: Canadian bicycle companies may be the last bastion of the true-to-life, do-it-all, Ground Zero school of frame design. The Blizzard is built to last a lifetime with its sturdy construction and attention to detail.

Miyata miles: With H-Ball's design influence, Miyata's production facilities, Rock Shox Mag 20s and a year of race testing, the carbon fiber Elevation 7000 was very responsive, well-appointed and a joy to ride. ▶

Drivetrain: As radical as the Canadian-designed frame is, the drivetrain is relatively conservative—but conservative in mountain biking can mean excellent performance because it eschews the whiz-bang push-push, twist grip and flip shifter systems. The Blizzard comes with no-hassle Shimano Deore XT thumbshifters—the good stuff. The only two variations from the known quantities of the past are the short-cage rear derailleur (which works well with the 12-28 rear cluster) and the top-pull front derailleur (to eliminate the need for a roller).

Cable routing is a little on the strange side (for our tastes). Rocky Mountain runs two cables on the left-hand side of the top tube and one cable on the right side. Most builders avoid putting cables on the left side of the top tube because off-road riders tend to lean against the left side when resting. The cables can pinch the rider's leg or leave grease marks on his pants. We can't endorse the cable routing, but do like the spaghetti tubing that directs both the front and rear brake cables on their assigned paths.

Components: Rocky Mountain selected components for the Blizzard from a variety of aftermarket companies. The tires and seatpost are from Ritchey, while the aluminum stem and bars are from Syncros (another Canadian company).

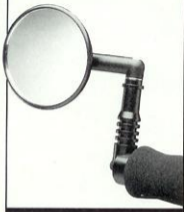
If you were expecting run-of-the-mill rims on the Blizzard, you would be wrong, because the Blizzard comes with hard-anodized, black-coated, Wolber AT-15 rims built up with 32 DT spokes by



Wisp 'o wind: There are no questionable, flexy or feathery design features on a Rocky Mountain. A special high-rise seat collar supports a stout and well-finished wishbone rear end. Yes, Virginia, that is a fender mount on the end of the wishbone. Very sano.



Alternative: In a world dominated by suspension forks, the only reason to build a bike with standard forks is if they offer something different and unique from run-of-the-mill unicrown forks. Tange Struts are a valid alternative. They are bullet-proof, rigid, flex-free and strong.



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Wheeltech. If Rocky Mountain dropped the black color, which resists scratching and braking thanks to the hard anodizing, for natural silver rims we would be ecstatic about the wheel choice.

Brakes are Shimano Deore XT low-profile cantilevers controlled by Shimano SLR two-finger brake levers. The rigidity of the Strut fork and wishbone rear end results in positive brake input. Once you wear the coatings off the rim, the Blizzard has incredibly good pucker power.

Rocky Mountain private-labels their own saddle from Velo, and our test bike came with an effective shoulder holder addition that allows the rider to portage the bike by setting the snout of the saddle on top of the shoulder. Very trick.

The Blizzard comes stock with Shimano 525 SPD pedals, which is great marketing if every buyer has SPD-compatible shoes.

Interesting features: The most interesting feature of the Rocky Mountain Blizzard is its "Ground Zero" construction. This is a bike that can withstand the rigors of off-road biking year in and year out. It offers a unique look, especially with its two-tone black-and-white paint scheme, that few production bikes on this side of the border can copy. From its

sloping top tube to its wishbone seat stays to its reinforced seat collar to its Strut forks, there is no danger of anyone calling the Blizzard a clone-mobile.

Comments: We would be remiss if we didn't mention that modern frame geometry is backing off on the head angle as of late. The days of the carbon-copy 71/73 head/seat tube angles certainly aren't behind us, but more and more builders are kicking the front out for more stability and comfort. The Blizzard is on this cutting edge with a 70.5-degree head angle and 73-degree seat. "Big deal," you say. "What's a lousy half a degree?" It is a big deal because it means that the frame designer hasn't put his brain on remote control. A half-degree in the head angle can give a rigid bike like the Blizzard a more comfortable ride, especially as the speeds increase or the horizon turns from horizontal to vertical, and more control.

The Blizzard is a bike that needs to be ridden hard to get the most out of it. It's a shade stout for casual trail riding or plugging along. It wants to be hammered and it really doesn't begin to sing its song until it is pushed to warp speed. Then the bone-jarring ride becomes plush and nimble. The half-degree of head angle would be helped immensely by a half-inch more top tube length. This is a stable bike at speed, but made a little nervous in the rough and technical sections by a long stem, short top tube and brawny strength. ●