

TASTY

Brent Trimble's radical carbon fibre frames are finally available in the UK. DAVE HEMMING took one to Cornwall to give it the treatment and came back impressed. STEVE BEHR took time off from surfing to take the snap-



Getting up at 5.30am isn't something I do very often, so I wasn't best pleased when Behr the Camera woke me at this sad time of the day to get down to the Westcountry for a weekend of playing in the sea and some serious Trimble testing.

We somehow managed to get three bikes, two surfboards, a week's worth of clothes and three people in Steve's Mazda, a problem doubly compounded by the extreme care we had to take with the Trimble. Cloud Nine Imports head honch Jeremy Leigh's personal bike, and hammered down the M4 to the coast.

Hours later we arrived, and I hooked up with local hero Oli 'Gerbil' Scott while Steve headed for the surf. Our mission was simple: test the Trimble in the tight, steep trails that typify Cornish mountain biking.

THE DESIGNER

Brent Trimble, the man whose name is on the frame, has been working in composites for years, originally in glass fibre materials for boats. He was involved in the creation of the first commercially

available one-piece carbon frame from Kestrel, and holds the patent on the production process Kestrel use. Trimble doesn't build complete bikes, just frames, so you get to hang your favourite parts on the frame, and our bike was built to be as light as possible.

As Brent will tell you, carbon fibre isn't just one material. The



The Trimble frame carries a life's

TRIMBLE



Trimble's main problem - its awkward carrying it.

st range of different fibres re, a host of different resins l them together, and then got to decide how much put where and what direc-point it in. In short, it's a cated design process that working in metal look like a walk. Composites is a tech-that's really in its infancy as bikes go, but Trimble is the forefront of its devel-t. In fact, he's so confident w what he's doing that he a lifetime guarantee on the that includes racing use, a tee that's unique in the ry as far as we know.

FRAME

Trimble looks like a bike from



... that includes race use.

another world. Trimble calls the shape an *Inverted Four*, and represents this as 4^3 . It's basically a single huge tube which runs from the head tube to the seat tube and splits into a single pair of rear stays, with the bottom bracket hung off the bottom of it and the seat tube growing out of the top. Except you can't really talk about tubes because the Trimble is all one piece. It's a monocoque design, which means that the skin of the structure takes all the loads. This is the way high-performance cars and planes are built, and it can produce incredibly light and strong structures.

Braze-ons on the Trimble are a bit sparse. There are no facilities for things like racks and guards, because the frame design doesn't give you anywhere to anchor them, and apart from the cable stops on the right hand side of the frame and the two sets of bottle bosses, the frame is pretty plain.

What's eye-catching about the Trimble, though, as well as its out-of-this-world shape, is the paint job. The huge main tube gives lots of surface area for the sprayer to get creative, and Trimble offers a tiger-stripe paint scheme that looks great and turns heads wherever you go.

Behind the 'seat tube', the seat stays have been cut out altogether, leaving one pair of large rear stays with bonded-in aluminum drop-outs. Because it's possible to use carbon fibre to allow a certain amount of flex, Trimble has designed his frame to give a resilient ride. In short, it's one of the comfiest frames I've ridden, and when we could get him out of the Cornish surf and on to a bike, Steve was particularly impressed with this aspect of the bike, since standard frames tend to pound his occasionally dicky back.

Mounted on the stays were a pair of U-brake bosses, though current versions of the frame have cantilever mounts. When Trimble designed the frame, low-profile cantis didn't exist so the U-brake,



The Trimble's unique looks come from its one-piece 'monocoque' construction. It's tough, light and comfortable.

with all its problems of mud-retention, was the only choice. Now, though, you can fit sensible brakes.

The headset is a standard lin job. Trimble doesn't see any reason to go oversize - he's happy with the performance of a standard headset and so were we.

HANDLING

Some carbon frames are so stiff they're uncomfortable, and their lack of vertical compliance makes it difficult to keep the tyres in contact with the ground. The Trimble's inherent 'give' means you can go blasting down rocky trails and not have to worry about trying to get your hands to the brake levers in time before you lose it. This is because the frame's accurate, neutral handling encourages high-speed downhill antics but the flexible stays take all the beating instead of your body, which makes a nice change.

In corners, the Trimble's flex also helps keep the wheels on the ground, allowing you to choose a line and stay on it. Our test bike had a rigid fork, but we couldn't help thinking that here was a machine that urgently needed a suspended front end to complement the cushy rear end. Don't get us wrong, though, the Trimble doesn't have the shock-absorbing capacity of a fully suspended bike

like a Cannondale or Boulder, it just has enough flex and dampening to make life more comfortable.

The angles of the Trimble are much the same set of numbers we've come to expect from any frame builder who knows what he's doing - a 71 degree head angle and a nice middling seat angle of 73 degrees.

Bottom bracket height is 11.5in and with a 40in wheelbase the bike is a very quick mover through the dirt. The 16.75in chain stays are about right - any shorter and the bike would lose perfor-



Downhill, the absorbent rear stays make Trimble fast and confidence-inspiring.

the Trimble has grown a bit, and the top tube on the 19in version is now 22.5in.

The Trimble we tested came with a Rookbar, a one-piece carbon bar and stem combo made by Brent's brother Roo Trimble, also a composites wizard. It wasn't particularly light, about the same as good lightweight separates, but it did look well sexy.

NIGGLES

There were a few minor things we didn't like about the 4¹, but since our test, Trimble's long-awaited 1991/2 version has become available and we understand that most of our gripes have been dealt with. Our test bike had an internally routed rear brake cable,

but current Trimbles have a full set of slotted stops that run the cables along the outside of the frame. This is where brake

cables should be, and why anyone thinks it's a good idea to bury them in the frame is a mystery.

Carrying the Trimble is a problem. There's nothing you can really do about this except to fit gears that are so low you'll hardly ever have to carry it.

Our Trimble also suffered from a lack of clearance in the rear triangle, and tended to clog up. Again, current versions have much more clearance, largely because of the switch from a rear U-brake to a cantilever that was made possible when low-profile brakes became available.

The bottom line

In conclusion, the Trimble is a very high quality machine.

It handles well, it's light and comfy, and it looks great. It's not cheap, but it is comparable in price to other lightweight exotica, like titanium frames, and its unique ride qualities make it a good choice for riders who value comfort and want a light bike. ■



Airtime! The Trimble's light weight made it easy to fly.

mance because the rear end wouldn't flex as much, any longer and it wouldn't climb as well.

The 22.125in top tube on our test bike was a bit short for my liking - 23in would be about right, but it takes a hell of a lot of time and money to change the moulds just to turn that top tube to 23in. Since we tested it,



PROS:
Light, comfortable and uniquely eye-catching; right at the cutting edge of technology

CONS:
Awkward to carry; expensive; right at the cutting edge of technology

TRIMBLE 4¹ TECH SPEC

MATERIAL: 100 per cent carbon fibre monocoque construction. Aluminium rear drop-outs, single bolt steel seat clamp (no OR)

SIZES AVAILABLE: 16in, 17in

SEAT ANGLE: 73 degrees

HEAD ANGLE: 71 degrees

TOP TUBE: 22.5in/22.125in

CHAIN STAY: 16.75in

BB HEIGHT: 11.5in

HEADSET SIZE: 1in

BB SHELL: 56mm, to fit

122.5mm Deore XT BB

BRAZE-ONS: Two sets of

bottle bosses, slotted cable

stops, rear cantilever bosses

(must be used with low pro

brakes)

WEIGHT: 3.5lb (19in frame)

COST: £350

FROM: Cloud Nine Imports