

# ALPINESTARS

## AL-MEGA E900

*A little less flash for a lot less cash*

Alpinestars is a funny company. Long famous for producing quality footwear used by motorized athletes with names like Roger DeCoster, Kevin Schwantz and Bob Hannah, Alpinestars broke into the world of mountain bikes three years ago intent on doing things differently. In an industry more defined by me-too look-a-likes than sparks of individualism, Alpinestars immediately made a name for itself with its striking, somewhat unorthodox, bike designs. There was the radical T-24, which was a metal version of the famous Trimble monostay bike that catered to smaller riders. The company went through a handful of wild suspension bike designs, none of which ever made it to the showroom, but each a creative statement in itself. Then, of course, there were the elevated-chainstay, bent-seat tube design Ti-Mega, Al-Mega and Cro-Mega EOS (Elevated Oversize titanium, aluminum and chromoly, respectively) models, which made up the bulk of its lineup.

Like a fancy and rare tropical fish swimming in an aquarium full of run-of-the-mill goldfish, the Alpinestars easily stood out among all the rest. However, in terms of production costs and consumer understanding, they were swimming against the tide.

### QUESTION ONE: HOW MUCH FLASH & CASH?

We have tested the Alpinestars Al-Mega before (*MBA*, June '92). We liked the bike's looks, and we liked the bike's ride. Why bother with another test, you ask? Well, for the most part because the folks at Alpinestars went and changed the frame. Was it changed just for the sake of change? That's what we wanted to find out. Besides no longer running the bent seat tube (more on that later), Alpinestars is now making the bike available in either complete or frameset form. We were a bit shocked to hear that the price of the Easton ProGram-tubed bike was only \$750. Sure, you can still score a decent entry-level race bike for the price, but this is a lot of frame for the money. In fact, the Al-Mega frameset is perfect for the serious racer who has all the trick parts but is looking for a new frame after a few seasons on the old mount.

### QUESTION TWO: WHAT ARE THEY OFFERING?

Alpinestars makes the Al-Mega frame in 15-, 17-, 19- and 20.5-inch sizes.



*In action: Due to the frame design, it was not surprising to find that the Al-Mega had a stiff ride. Luckily, it was only so stiff as to make it a predictable handler through the rough. Alpinestars is now making the frameset available for only \$750.*

Frame weight for the 19-inch model is a claimed 4 lb. 3 oz. Our complete bike, set up as a team replica, hit the scales at 26 lb. 11 oz. With the tape measure in hand, the Alpinestars read as follows: 23.5-inch-long top tube, 42-inch wheelbase, 11.8-inch-tall bottom bracket and

16.9-inch chainstays. By virtue of the straight seat tube, the chainstays are just a tad longer than last year's 15.9-inch measurement. The reason for the switch in seat tube shapes? Alpinestars designer Monibert "Mooney" Gaba says they found a 20%-25% increase in frame stiffness. "It



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◀ *A new look: Alpinestars decided to take a couple of steps back in the fashion department and do away with its novel bent seat tube design frame. Despite the more standard look, the Al-Mega retains its sense of individualism with its oversized and polished Easton ProGram tubing.*

was basically a switch to what works better than just looking for trickness," he adds.

### QUESTION THREE: WHAT IS PROGRAM TUBING?

Alpinestars relies totally on Easton ProGram VariLite tubes to construct the Al-Mega. Unlike some Taiwan-made steel bikes that tout a certain type of name-

brand tubing, but then only use it in the front triangle, you can rest assured that the ProGram tubes are used throughout. Easton got a big jump on other aluminum bike builders when it first introduced the ProGram tubes back in '90. Unlike most other aluminum bikes at the time which relied on straight-gauge tubing, the Easton sticks used taperwall construction that

mimicked the butting used on steel tubes. Though most of their competition has found ways to butt their tubes by now, Easton was the first and their tubing is still recognized as the most advanced.

### QUESTION FOUR: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE UP CLOSE?

No doubt the Al-Mega lives up to its name with its elevated chainstays and



*Which way to the mud?: Few bikes are as successful at maintaining good rear wheel clearance without having seatstays that constantly rub a rider's leg as the Al-Mega. The externally clamped seatpost is a good idea for maintaining the frame's integrity at the much-worked-over location.*

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massive ProGram tubing. The rear end is made up from one-inch tubes, the down tube is 1.5 inches in diameter and the top and seat tubes measure out at 1-3/8 inches. Among the big tubes, multiple triangles and a myriad of welded surfaces, the Alpinestars is meant to last. It's built tough.

Though the bike shares the sweet polished aluminum finish, the well-thought-out down tube reinforcing gusset and the big, meaty welds from the earlier models, there are some subtle changes that caught our eye. We liked the newly anodized purple cable guides—cute. This year all three cables are run along the top tube (last year only the rear brake and derailleur did). The replaceable chromoly rear derailleur hanger uses a double-sided mount for increased strength.

For some reason, Alpinestars has always had a penchant for creating its own uniquely sized parts and accessories. Original Al-Megas were designed to use a specially designed water bottle and cage that fit between the seat tubes. Why? Just to be different. It was a clear example of when being different just wasn't a good enough reason to do something. Eventually they returned to a uni-



*A pricey chi-chi: About the only gratuitous nod to weight savings on our test bike was the Auriga carbon fiber stanchion tubes used on the Manitou forks. The bike was set up as a team replica, which included the Pulstar hubs. The bike weighed 26 lb. 11 oz.*

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versal-sized water jug. After additional criticism for further complicating things by using its own oversized stem and handlebar combo, Alpinestars finally reduced the size this year from 28.6mm to a more conventional 25.4mm. That means that you can interchange the bars and stem with any other accessory item. Kudos.

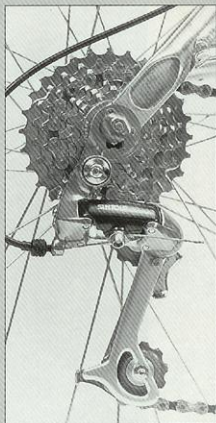
## QUESTION FIVE: WHAT DID THE TEAM PARTS CONSIST OF?

Starting up front, the Al-Mega was decked out with all the latest and trickiest

components: a Manitou II fork that used Auriga carbon fiber stanchion tubes, straight-pull Pulstar Hubs, Salsa Flip-Off skewers, Mavic 231 rims, SunTour XC-Pro gruppo, Onza bar ends, Alpinestars titanium handlebars, Grafton Speed Controller brakes and levers, ATI grips and a TopLine crankset.

## QUESTION SIX: WHAT DID WE THINK?

The one thing we couldn't see that was done differently was that the wall thickness of the front triangle was pared down a bit over last year's. Mooney says that they are slowly moving away from the



*Another nod: Besides the reinforced down tube, the Al-Mega attempts to be even more durable and rider-friendly with their replaceable chromoly derailleur hanger. The darkened spot on the seat stay is a slight weight-saving idea.*

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previous overbuilt design and taking off some weight at the same time. Overall, he says that almost a half-pound of weight was taken off the bike over last year.

Out in the field the Al-Mega felt light and maneuverable, no doubt helped by its long list of high-end accessories. The ride was stiff, but not to the point of rattling your fillings. Test riders thought the bike climbed well, went where it was pointed and felt sturdy enough to tackle any section of rough trail. The Al-Mega enjoys excellent rear-wheel clearance, something that many other elevated-chainstay bikes forgot was the reason for their being.

## QUESTION SEVEN: WOULD WE BUY ONE?

At \$2400 the Al-Mega really rates as just another fancy high-end mountain bike. Despite losing the hot-rod-ish curved seat tube, it retains enough panache and character to still set itself apart, at least visually. For a \$750 frameset, however, the Al-Mega would definitely be at the top of our list. This is a lot of frame, and ProGram frame at that, for the price. The Easton tubes are currently the hottest thing going in aluminum. If you are piecing together the ultimate bike, the Al-Mega frame is definitely a good place to start. ☐