



MOUNTAIN BIKE ACTION TEST

RALEIGH MTi-200

Titanium for the proletariat

■ We have been hearing about it for about two years now. The folks from Raleigh America told us that the blokes from Raleigh England were eyeing Russia's titanium reserves just as the Iron Curtain was beginning to crumble. While short on consumer goods, Russia, we were told, was home to the world's largest titanium reserve—and, what with the Cold War beginning to wind down, the Soviet Union was faced with a huge military/industrial complex that no longer had any real vital purpose. Just like their American titanium mill counterparts, who were soon looking in different directions for any type of work, someone mentioned "mountain bikes" to a member of the Politburo and, sure enough, the world had a new titanium source!

Russian titanium—nothing gets the American industry as fired up as talking about their newfound foreign competition. However, mention Russian titanium to any titanium techie and you will hear immediate screams that the all popular 3/2.5 titanium used for American-made bikes does not exist in the Ural Mountains. True, true. Then they will go on about how dysfunctional the Russian political scene is, and how we shouldn't reward our former enemy, how the Russians wear funny hats, how there's no good Mexican food in Moscow, and how . . .

IT'S A MYSTERY

What angle does Raleigh use to sell their Russian titanium mountain bike? Raleigh Product Manager Doug Barchek says simply, and without hesitation, "Val-

Us versus them: Our MTi-200 weighed in at 25 lb. and handled most of the obstacles thrown at it. Test riders felt the rear end was a bit on the soft side. Unlike the American-made bikes that are made from 3/2.5 tubing, the Raleigh uses a commercial grade that's chemically treated to make it stronger. ►

ue." In fact, Doug is equally as quick to admit that the bike does not share the inherent beauty of its American counterparts. No, the Raleigh MTi-200 does not stand equal to the weld quality made famous by Merlin, and don't expect to see your image reflected on the top tube as you can on a polished Litespeed. "We realize that our bike is not as pretty as those bikes," admits Barchek, "but we're not going after that market. We designed the





The big question: Raleigh is touting its Russian titanium as an inexpensive alternative to the American-made bikes. The high-end parts list drives the MTi-200's price up to a not-so-inexpensive \$2999. They do offer a lower-priced alternative in the MTi-100 for \$1575, which sounds like a good deal.

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MTi-200 to stand on its own in terms of performance, and to exceed all others in terms of value."

That's all fine and dandy, but if it's not made from 3/2.5, what is it made from? Doug was only able to tell us (via a pre-written statement) that the Russian titanium "has been modified by the controlled amounts of dissolved oxygen and nitrogen in a solid solution which is used to harden and strengthen the material." In other words, the titanium is (most likely) of a commercially pure grade which is treated to make it more like the proven 3/2.5. Sandvik engineer Steve Meredith said that "oxygen is a powerful strengthener in titanium, and while it can increase the tube's strength, it also decreases its ductility." However, as opined as the American vendors were about the Russian material (many have visited Russia to talk about bike production), none could be certain on all the details of the Russkies' program.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Apparently, Raleigh formed a partnership with the Russian government for an exclusive arrangement to use their titanium. Once taken from the Russian factories, the titanium tubes are shipped to Ra-

leigh Special Products Division in Nottingham, England, where they are set up on by a combination of human and robotic plasma ARC welders (humans handle the small rear triangle joints and the robots handle the front triangle).

Raleigh makes the bike available in 14.5-, 16.5-, 18.5- and 20.5-inch sizes, measured center to center. Our 18.5-inch test bike actually measured in at 19.5 inches when measured center to top. The bike had 16.75-inch chainstays, a 42.25-inch wheelbase, a 12-inch-tall bottom bracket and a 22-3/8-inch-long top tube. Head and seat angles measured in at 71 and 73 degrees, respectively. Our test bike weighed 25 pounds.

JUST ASK COMRADE TOMAC

Though it might have taken them a couple of years to catch on, Raleigh is now making good use of the John Tomac name. Until recently, the only bike they offered with Tomac's name applied was the \$6000 carbon fiber/titanium signature model. In the April issue of *MBA*, we tested Raleigh's MT-500 which, although not a Tomac-endorsed bike, shared the geometry used by the Tomes. Only the bikes that Johnny T endorses can get his name on the frame. You will find the modern cowboy's script signature on the top tube of every MTi-200, because Johnny not only endorses the bike, but he has also already won some races on one (Australian downhill championships,

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Milano mountain bike supercross). Although Tomac has about as much concern for the needs of the masses as does Donald Trump, it's nice to see his name on a bike that's intended to be an affordable race bike.

With Tomac's name plastered on the bike, Raleigh decided to use as many of the same products as does the Tomes. To that end, you will find an array of Tioga products on the bike, including their new Revolver crankset, Psycho tires, DL2000 aluminum handlebars, Power Stud bar ends and a Tioga Alchemy headset. You will also find a Rock Shox Mag-21 fork, along with a SunTour suspension hub and Mavic 231 rims.

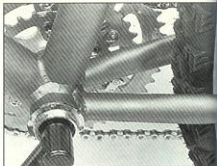
WHAT KIND OF VALUE?

So after all this talk about what a great deal the Russian titanium is, just how much is the MTi-200? We think it's kind of expensive at \$2999. No doubt the parts list is what helps elevate the price, but for \$100 less you can get the made-in-America 3/2.5 Diamond Back Axis with a comparable parts group, only without the suspension fork. Take that, you commie pinkos! However, Raleigh also sells a lower-line model, the MTi-100, which is equipped with a Shimano LX/XT gruppo and retails for \$1575. Now that's the sort

of price we had in mind when we heard Russian titanium was going to be able to provide lower-priced titanium mountain bikes. Too bad we didn't get to test one of those. Both bikes do share the same frame which uses a (rare) monostay rear end, doesn't use a chainstay bridge and enjoys ample amounts of chainstay crimping for increased tire and chainring clearance.

When it came time to mix the Russian titanium with the American soil, the bike fared well. We rode the MTi-200 alongside a carbon signature model and found the 1.5-pound weight difference a real advantage on the titanium model. The bike handled well, but test riders thought the carbon bike was both stiffer and a tad more precise. When traversing diagonally across a series of rain ruts, the MTi-200 rekindled opinions of older titanium bikes in that the rear end felt on the soft, somewhat mushy side. As with a few bikes we have ridden that have the Dia-Compe Aheadset, we suffered loosening problems with the Tioga threadless system. We also got a bit of creaking out of the splined Revolver crank. Most riders would have also preferred a slightly lower rise stem. The SunTour suspension hub was a cool spec and did as it was supposed to and noticeably tightened up the front end.

When pressed for their opinion, *MBA* test riders welcomed the MTi-200 into their stable. Already light at 25 pounds,



Beauty contest: No, the Raleigh's welds are not as even as any of those found on an American-made bike, but for the lower price, you are not supposed to care. We liked the chainstays' bridgeless design, but we didn't like the creaking noises of the Tioga Revolver cranks.

the bike could easily be made even lighter, though there was little to be done about making the rear end any stiffer. Like we said earlier, we would like to have gotten our hands on the lower-priced MTi-100, because that bike really reflects the concept of a titanium bike for the masses. Despite opinion (from both Raleigh's and Boris Yeltsin's competition) that any deal with Russia is questionable due to the political instability, the flow of Russian titanium is open for the time being, and Raleigh is selling the bikes. Borscht, anyone? □