

ORANGE P7

The P7 is a new model in the Orange stable, and it's a sort of celebration of seven years of Tange Prestige tubes. Reassessment is probably a more apt word than celebration, because there will always be riders who lack the ride finesse that the superlight Prestige tubes are designed for. When steel frames drop much below 4.5lb, their long term durability has to be considered as part of the buying equation. The elegance and slim lines of the top line Prestige tubed frames should reflect the physique and handling technique of their trail pilots. In short, clumsy fat gits should avoid Prestige tubes.

Orange have introduced the P7 because they think there's a gap in the market for a slightly stronger and stiffer version of their Prestige model. They've achieved their aim simply by going slightly oversize in the main tubes, and the weight penalty is only slight. Like the Prestige, the P7 is aimed at racers and hardcore trailsters and, like all Oranges,

- Seventh generation Prestige Orange
- 4lb 7oz frame, 24lb 7oz race-ready bike
- £955 including SPuDs
- Classy champagne 'Ti' finish

it's available with any groupset and componentry. Our test bike was a 19in LX equipped version, retailing at £860 plus £95 for XT SPuDs.

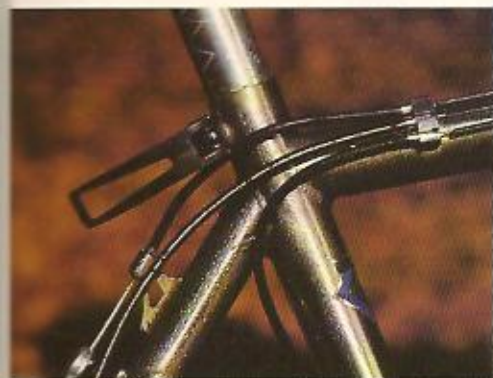
Frame At 4lb 7oz, the P7 frame is well within the bounds of acceptability for a top line steel frame. The titanium look is extremely classy, achieved by polishing the steel then using a slightly tinted lacquer instead of the usual powdercoat. The tubes are double butted, described as Series 8, Micro Butted, and simply practical in their build configuration, with reinforcing rings at the top and bottom of the 1in head tube, wishbone seatstays, heavily ovalised chainstays with no forward bridge (more mud clearance) and triple cables over the right hand side of the top tube. All cable guides are slotted and there are two sets of bottle bosses with

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Wishbone seatstays (and heavily ovalised chainstays with no forward bridge) offer more mud clearance for the worst conditions.

FIRST RIDES

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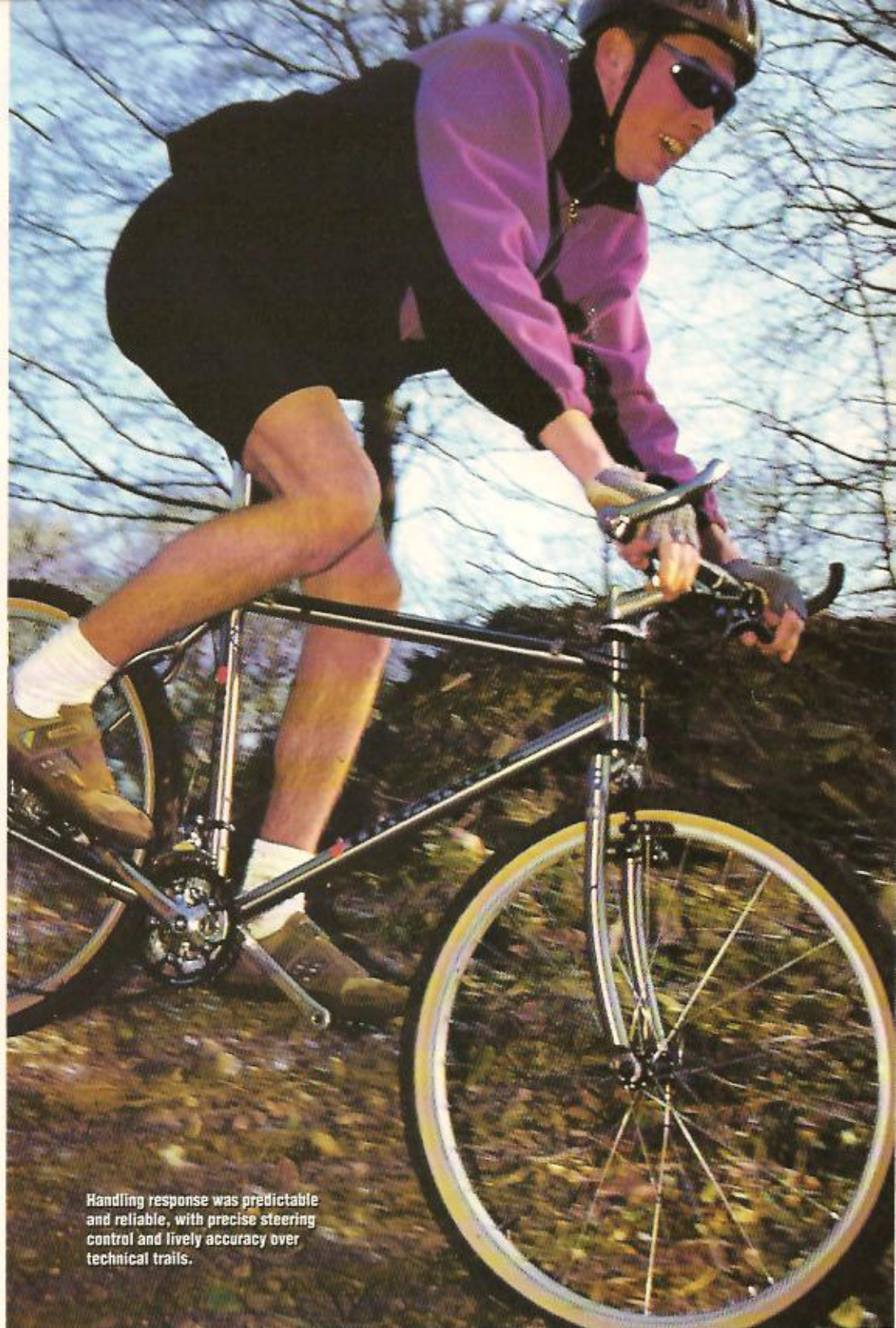
but Orange tell us the production fork will be a little longer in the leg, with the frame designed to accept front suspension more readily.

aluminium bolts.

We measured the frame angles at 71.5° head, 74° seat. The box crown fork fitted was short, so fitting even a short leg suspension fork would lay back the angles by at least a degree. Top tube length was a competition biased 22.75in, with a 135mm stem and long saddle adjustment rail adding to the stretch potential if you need it.

Detail A Deore LX groupset looks reasonable value on an £860 bike, but we'd be tempted to go for the 8spd upgrade to an XT hub, derailleur and shifters. It adds another £90 to the price, but it's well worth it for the extra gear range, particularly if you're looking for a race bike. Our test bike would retail at £955, because it came equipped with XT SPD pedals. The rest of the componentry was all top quality stuff, with Mavic M231 rims and butted spokes, Specialized Cannibal tyres, Orange marked bars (143g, but only 21.5in), stem (231g), bar ends and saddle (213g) and a long Kalloy seatpost and q/r bolt.

Ride To be honest, the difference between the P7 and the last Orange Prestige we rode was almost indiscernible to all three riders who spent time with



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the bike. The small hint of extra rigidity seemed only relevant in that we knew about it and, without the benefit of a long term test, we will just have to believe Orange about the extra strength.

Handling responses were as predictable and reliable as we've come to expect from Orange, with precise steering control, superb stability at speed and a lively accuracy when negotiating technical trails. The only time we noticed a difference between the P7 and a standard Prestige was on the bumpy downhills, where the ride called out for front suspension at times. We suspect that this was mainly down to the fork fitted, and Orange tell us that the production fork will be a little longer in the leg, with the frame designed to accept front suspension more readily without a geometry upset. ■

SUMMARY

The ethos behind the P7 is interesting. It's been suggested by MTB writers recently that we've reached a time to reconsider the strength to weight ratio stakes. Both frames and componentry are being assessed anew and we may well see the P7 frame approach spreading elsewhere. Until radical departures in material technologies occur, we suspect that the 'standard' light steel race bike will be judged using bikes like the P7 as yardsticks. After all, is it really worth pining over those few grams instead of cutting down on the cakes and buns?

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