



Absolutely fabulous!

The Foes Fab LTS offers the ultimate suspension experience, with nearly six inches of travel at the rear – but with Rock Shox Mag 21 SLs yielding only 2.5in at the front, does this represent 'too much of a good thing'?

In the long-travel suspension wars, the Foes Fab kicks butt. Nothing currently out there comes close to the 6in of rear-end movement the Foes supplies – it is closer to motorcycle numbers than bicycle. What we consider state-of-the-art full-suspension machines can only muster half of the travel put out by the Foes' rear cantilever swingarm. If that sounds like heaven then be assured it is. This bike's rear set-up can swallow the biggest bumps you put in its path, but for all its merits the Foes isn't perfect, as we shall explain later.

The Fab LTS is the brainchild of Brent Foes, a man with a background in four wheels rather than two. He comes from the world of off-road truck driving where big suspension is where it's at. So it's no surprise that the Fab has so much travel. The bike begins life as two pieces of stamped 6061 T6 aluminium. The look is not new – the frame resembles, in many ways, that of the Mantis Flying V we checked out in the January issue. The wedge shape is produced by squashing the aluminium sheet over a mould. The

mould gives the 'panels' their form, which is a recessed area towards the head tube for extra strength.

The seat tube, bottom bracket shell and head tube are made from the same 6061 material and are welded into place when the two panels are hand-torched together. This method yields a very strong and extremely stiff frame to hang the rear suspension upon, while actually using roughly the same amount of aluminium as a conventional tubed frame would require. The massive rear swingarm is made in exactly the same way and then CNC-machined pivots and drop-outs are welded into position. Running on Delrin bushings, the swingarm pivots are clamped onto a hard anodised cylinder that runs through the main frame. Just behind the seatpost, a small steel plate bolts into each side of the swingarm to retain stiffness.

Front derailleur duties are operated by a cable running beneath the frame and guided by a small nylon runner. The split stop-cable guides are riveted and bonded to the frame. Down the left side of the

SUPER BIKE

swingarm there is a guide for those that wish to run a rear disc brake. This was a custom option requested by the bike's owner and doesn't come as standard, but is worth considering if you like disc brakes.

The build and the look of the Foes frame is excellent. Chunky welds stand out from the patina of the silver anodised frame. Nonsense plain black graphics tell it like it is. The Fab comes in just two sizes: 16 and 18in. Our model was the 16 incher, measured from the centre of the bottom bracket to the highest point of the top tube. This gave an effective top tube length of 22.25in and the chainstays a length of exactly 17in. The head angle is a standard 71° while the seat angle is a laid-back 72.5°. The bottom bracket is a lowering 13.5in above the deck! This is because all that rear-wheel travel demands clearance.

big air

At the heart of the Fab is a Fox Alps 4 air shock. This is bolted into the frame at the inside apex of the wedge on the front and to the top of the swingarm at the rear. The shock works okay, but is not without its problems. The biggest of these is getting enough air into the unit to properly suspend the rider. A track pump puts in no more than 140psi - this is too soft and insufficient to give a good rate of spring. One of the headaches of air shocks is that the actual amount of air they contain can all be lost when you remove the pump adaptor - very frustrating. Another, potentially bigger, headache is that if you lose all the air out on the trail, you have no more shock. At least a steel spring would get you home. Carrying a CO₂ canister would be prudent, not just for repairing a flat tyre - with insufficient air in the shock you can feel the swingarm movement kicking through the pedals.

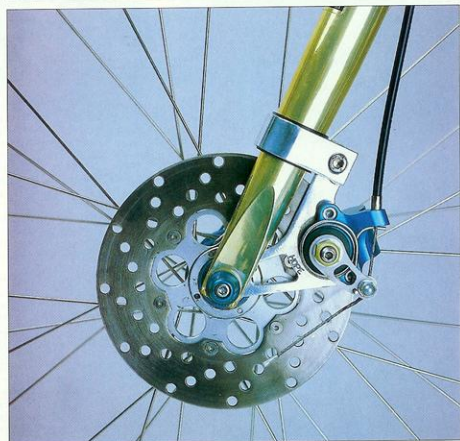
mismatch

The fork fitted to our model was a Rock Shox Mag 21 SL. This is a good choice since it matches the air/oil performance of the Fox shock in the rear. But the problems crop up with the mismatch in travel. The Mag 21 yields a healthy 2.5in of front-end travel, but even that is not enough to complement the couch-potato ride at the back. And since most hits have to go through the front first, it makes sense to have a fork with equal travel. We scratched our heads but cannot come up with a fork to match the amount of rear travel in the Fab. Maybe that should be Brent Foes' next project.

Our test bike came with Hope disc brakes, front and back. One of the beauties of disc brakes is there is no shoe to rub on the rim and take off the anodising. Therefore, the tasty blue Ambrosio C22 rims stayed as cool-looking as when they were made. What's more, they were laced with double-butted DT Swiss spokes to blue titanium Hope hubs (cassette version in the rear and oversized suspension version up front).

The top drawer wheel package is capped off with a Specialized grey Umma Gumma Cannibal on the back and a Shockmaster in the same rubber at the front. We'd guess that these tyres were chosen for

Blitzkrieging down a gnarly descent at 60mph is one of the best things about mountain biking - one of the hardest things is stopping at the bottom. A decent set of cantis will do the job but when you really need to drop the anchor, try some disc brakes. These British-made models from Hope offer finger-tip control, good modulation and acres of stopping power.





their colour (which sets off the rest of the bike beautifully) rather than their performance, because we can think of other treads that would cut a sharper line. But tyres are not quite as important on full-suspension bikes, where extra traction is afforded by the wheels being in contact with the ground more of the time.

Keeping the wheels in the drop-outs (the double-sided tangs on the Rock Shox are still a pain) was a pair of Control Tech skewers with Allen key fixings. This meant we could torque down the front for added rigidity and better tracking.

The colour theme continued throughout the Fab, with a blue Club Roost Go Fast bar (the choice of downhillers and dual-sialomists this year it seems), and blue Dia-Compe SS-7 levers. Grip Shift SRT 500 shifters worked the chain over the gears, although we would have preferred a more hand-friendly outer (static) grip than that which Grip Shift manufacture. We find this model a little oversized for a good hand-to-bar interface, but know that Grip Shift is on the case and sorting it out for next year.

The bar was clamped in a 135mm Ahead Kooka, a stem we saw at Las Vegas last year, but until now we hadn't seen it in this country. This item is machined from 7000 series aluminium and has a beefy box-girder look. Double bolts for both handlebar and steerer make it a very secure fit.

To match the stem, a set of very cool Kooka cranks graced the bottom bracket. These are particularly stiff. They are CNC-machined from 7075 billet aluminium into a classic I beam section and we know they come in 4most spider patterns. The offset 'spiral' spider certainly looks the part. Bolted onto the cranks were Pace chainrings of 36 and 48 teeth. These mate to an 11-28 cluster, worked over by XT derailleurs. The gearing is obviously meant for a gravity hog



TECHNICAL FOES FAB LTS

FRAME

6061 T6 aluminium monocoque with Fox Alps 4 air/oil shock
Colours Silver, red, blue
Sizes 16, 18in

FORK

Rock Shox Mag 21 SL

GROUPSET

Shifters Grip Shift SRT500
Brakes Hope disc front and rear
Crank Kooka 175mm
Chain Sedis ATB
Bottom bracket Shimano
Freewheel Shimano HG 7-speed 11-28T
Chainrings Pace 48, 36T
Derailleurs Shimano XT

COMPONENTS

Headset Dia-Compe Aheadset
Stem Kooka Ahead 135mm
Bars Club Roost Go Fast
Pedals GT Power Series platforms
Saddle Flite B
Seatpost Ringlé Mobypost

WHEELS

Rims Ambrosio C22 blue-anodised
Hubs Hope Titanium front and rear
Spokes DT Swiss double-butted
Tyres Specialized Umma Gumma
Shockmaster 1.95 front, Specialized Umma Gumma Cannibal S 1.95 rear

SUPPLIER:

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since we would need a 26 or, preferably, 24T granny ring for the steep grundy climbs.

The Foes made downhill less of a 'hang-on' and much more of a 'hang-out' experience. The tall bar put us in the correct position for control. The disc brakes yielded massive handfulls and stopping power when called upon to do so. The feel at the lever is not unlike a well set-up canti; you can feel when the rear wheel is about to lock, and ride accordingly. The downside of the discs is that they do tend to rub and cause drag. On the deepest runs, holes and bumps we discovered we could sit down and ride it out. This made cornering a blast, leaning the bike and squatting hard into the suspension to make the rear wheel bite.

The rear of the Foes is stiff as suspension bikes go. There is little sign of movement, although the Fox shock does top-out a little and gives the bike a free-floating back end. We would swap the Fox for a steel spring unit and suffer the weight penalty. The rear end gave us big traction when climbing – the wheel followed the contours like a caterpillar track.

As a frameset, the Foes is a shining example of workmanship and design. But the biggest failing is that the fork cannot match the rear travel. We know Marzocchi has a new downhill fork coming out and this would be a better option at 3in of travel, but that is still half the Foes' back-end movement. A fork with 6in of travel would raise the front end of the bike and affect the geometry. Where do you go from here, Brent?

Too many cooks...? Not on this bike there ain't. Kooka cranks and a Kooka Aheadset stem are perfect ingredients for one of the trickiest recipes we've ever tested. But it doesn't come cheap – a complete bike costs £3,000.