

The *Kilauea* is the most costly bike on test this month, so the first thing we did was to look for clues as to why. The frame and fork are the lightest on test, the gear mechs are *Deore XT* front and rear and the handlebar is a **Bontrager Titec** titanium... but the *Grip Shift* option is one notch down from that on the **Trek** and the crankset is a **Sugino Impel** model, a tad heavier and cheaper than Shimano's *LX*. Superficially, it's difficult to see £150 worth of bonuses over the **Trek** and £100 worth over the **Saracen**, but first impressions can be deceptive.

Kona have a long established and well earned reputation as hard riders' bikes. The weather conditions around their Vancouver base are generally worse than in the UK and the trails can be extreme. The Kona design team base their guiding principles on their own demands, making few compromises to fashion.

### The chassis

Much of the *Kilauea*'s true value lies in the frame and forks. Tange's Prestige Concept tubeset has been used to full advantage within Kona's design parameters. The sloping top tube means maximum standover height, less tubing and smaller, stiffer frame triangles. If there's a disadvantage it's that riders can end up buying a frame that's too small for them. Kona's speccing of a 400mm seat post recognises this, so the 2.5in of seat tube extension is not a problem.

At 4lb 7.5oz, the frame is up there with the lightest chromoly offerings around. You will have to pay a lot more money to save a few more ounces. The finishing detail is good: there's loads of mud room; all the cable guides are slotted, with the gear cables running under the bottom bracket (despite fashion, this system is still more efficient because the cable run is shorter and there's less outer cable); the wrap around seat clamp bolt faces forward, out of mud's way; there's a neat little guide for the rear brake clamped around the extended seat tube; there are mudguard and rack mounting points and two sets of bottle bosses. The bright white paint finish, while not very dirt practical, proved popular among our test riders and appeared very hard wearing.

The *Project Two* has always been one of our fave straight blade forks. It steers without the flinches that characterise curved blade forks but the triple butting ensures that it rarely exhibits the harsh ride that many straight bladers suffer from. Kona also offers **Marzocchi** suspension upgrades. The 410mm length of the *Project Two* ensures a trouble free swap although, with most sus-



## Kona Kilauea

£899

pension forks now measuring around 415mm, we'd prefer to see rigid fork frame geometry settled on forks around 400mm, assuming rake and trail remain constant.

### The groupset

As usual, Kona have rejected the co-ordinated groupset in favour of a mix 'n match approach. We'd be surprised to find that their Vancouver based riders use *Grip Shift*. We're still seasonally split about its benefits. It was OK in the summer months and during our dusty test week in Ibiza but as soon as we went out in the sort of mud that makes it to handlebar level, we started to experi-

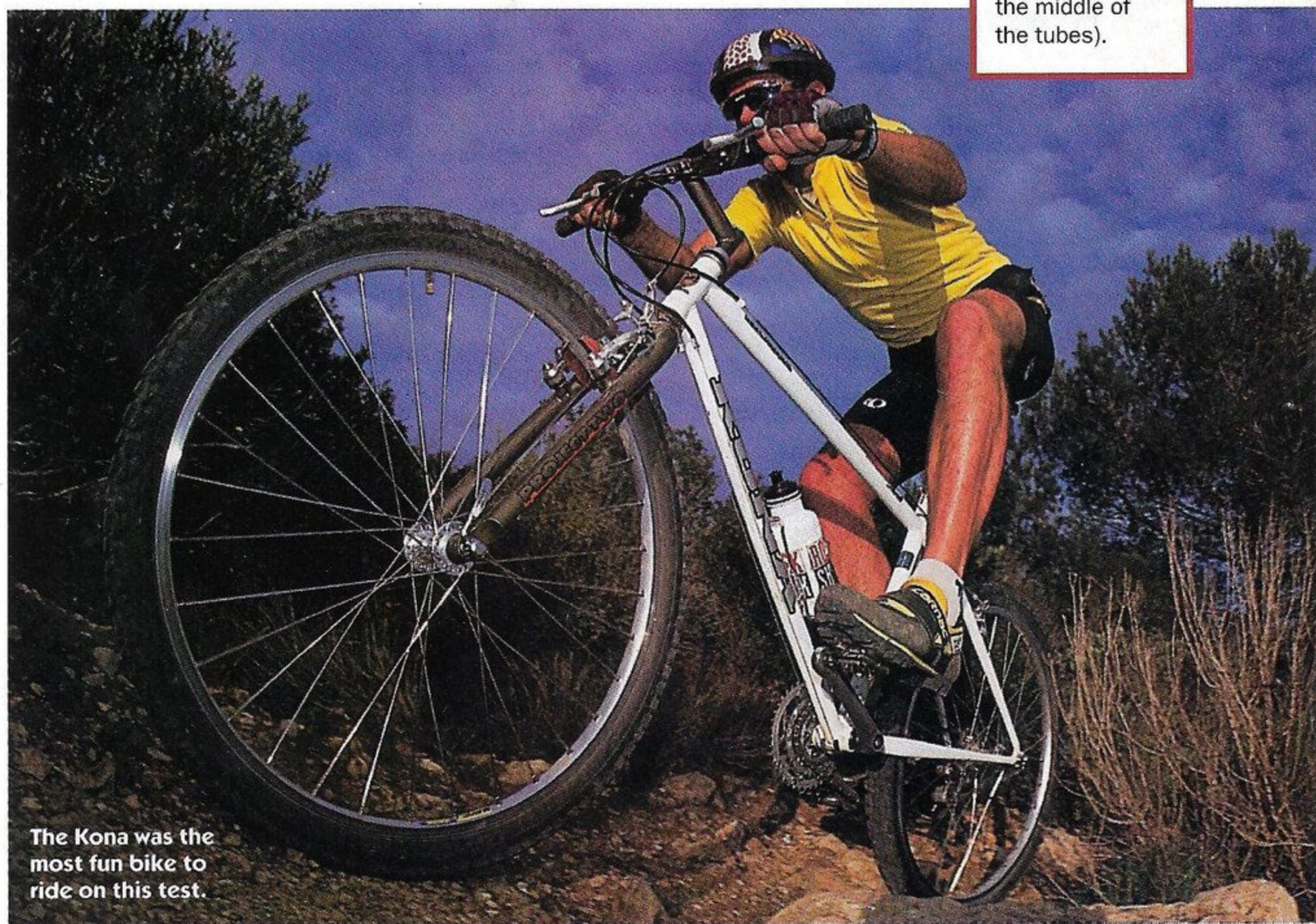
ence tired wrists, blistered palms and gritty mis-shifts. Servicing disassembly became a regular necessity. In short, the new 'clickier' *Grip Shift* is great for clean riding but not a patch on *Rapidfire* for the crud-bound winter months.

Elsewhere, we had no moans whatsoever. The 22,32,42 ringed **Sugino** crankset supplied positive shifts and a perfect gear range in co-operation with Shimano's *XT* 8 speed cassette cluster. The *KSS* plastic cupped cartridge bottom bracket looked a bit cheapskate on a £900 bike, but has proved functionally adequate in the past. The **Ritchey** brake calipers are a little lighter than the equiva-

### Jargon Buster

#### Butting

Tube designers can move material to where its needed (at the ends of tubes) and remove material from where its not (in the middle of the tubes).



The Kona was the most fun bike to ride on this test.



The Kona Kilauea would be just as at home on the start line of a race as it is on your fave trail.

lent **Shimano** units, they work just as well, they're easy to adjust and we love the pads. With Kona's own Dia-Compe-like levers, stopping power was excellent, but we didn't particularly like the idea of a fork crown mounted cable hanger. The one on the test bike shifted slightly under pressured braking until we tightened it.

### The wheels

The wheelset was average for the price, reasonably well built but still in need of some spoke re-tensioning after the first couple of rides. The **Mavic 237S** rims are not among the lightest but their deep eyeletted construction is robust. Kona have budgeted a little by supplying their own front hub. It's heavier than Shimano's *XT* hub, but it appears sound. We like Kona's new *Mr Dirt* and *The Cleaner* treads. They're big and grip-



Ritchey cantilevers were a cool addition.

py enough to tackle almost anything in their way. Kona have also followed the market trend in spec'ing lightweight butyl tubes for '95. Last year most tubes weighed in at around 200g. This year they're between 100g and 170g.

### The other bits

Titec's **Bontrager** titanium bar was a nice surprise, but we wish it was wider than 22in. It's OK as it stands but, once the almost essential bar ends are fitted, you're down to a straight width of 21in maximum. We appreciated the long comfy **Kona** grips fitted outside the *Grip Shift*. Many riders prefer to move their hands across to shift rather than be on them all the time. Kona's *Velocity* stem is well made and quite light for an adjustable unit and we've always liked Kona's *Impact* Allen key adjustable headset.

We fully appreciate the trend towards

two bolt secured seat posts. Fine adjustment is easy and the whole assembly is far more secure than single bolt units. At 400mm long, the post on the **Kona** allowed masses of adjustment, and there was 2in of sliding adjustment on the saddle rail. Riders around 5ft 9in felt most at ease with the ride set-up on our 18in test bike. The saddle was a comfy slim leather covered **Kona Race Lite**, but the pedals were horrible resin affairs.

### The ride

Of all this month's test bikes, the **Kona** was by far the most stable downhill. We tried to work out why. The tyres help, the direct steering fork helps, the low stand-over height improves bail-out confidence and the bottom bracket height was lower than the other bikes on test. Even the soft feel of the titanium handlebar gives that extra little boost of handling confidence. But the *Kilauea* is by no means a pure downhill. That front end handling confidence transfers readily to fast technical singletrack riding, the grippy tyres and long top tube are a real bonus when climbing and the stable handling makes the *Kilauea* a great bike for riding the slow, tricky stuff.

The **Kona** is a good all-round machine that would be at home on the race circuit. The ride is always comfortable and only the *Grip Shift* option lets it down in the filthy conditions we've experienced recently. In comparison to some of its market competitors, it is little overpriced, especially as most riders would need to buy bar ends and pedals if they haven't got them already... but we had more fun on the **Kona** than on the other test bikes as soon as the terrain got radical.

## KONA Kilauea



Great riding frame and forks, grippy tyres



Grip Shifts developed gritty mis-shifts in the mud. Naff pedals

Frame	●●●●●○
Fork	●●●●●○
Drivetrain	●●●●●○
Brakes	●●●●●○
Wheels	●●●●●○
Tyres	●●●●●○
Trail comfort	●●●●●○
Handling	●●●●●○

Value for money ●●●●●○  
Overall ●●●●●○

Wreckermended upgrades:  
Bar ends, new pedals