



£799

## RIDGEBACK TEAM RS

While it's so easy to poke fun at MTBs becoming fashion accessories, great looking machines like the **Ridgeback Team RS** can't help but stimulate a certain pride in ownership – the kind of pride that might usually surface during a first outing in a cool new jacket. Granted, Electric Purple paint jobs and Butterscotch tyres may not be everyone's cup of *Maxim*, but the combination does exude a certain style. Add a **Halsion Inversion** fork and you've got an **STX RC** specced machine that looks ready to tackle

any trail you'd care to throw it at. So what's it like under the decals?

### The chassis

The frame tubes are tagged 'Tange X Lightweight Double Butted'. We'd have omitted the X; a 4lb 12oz frame is simply reasonable at this price. It gives sensible strength characteristics while still being light enough to offer that 'more lively' ride feel, which starts to fade as chromoly frames drop below the 5lb mark.

Construction standards on the **Team RX** were excellent, with good

clean welds and a bundle of unassuming features that pointed to a good understanding of rider needs. Two sets of bottle mounts and rack/guard eyelets were there, the seat tube was butted externally for extra seat post support, and the clamp bolt faced forwards, out of the mud spray. Tyre room between the stays was plentiful and the cable guides were well placed and slotted for ease of lubrication. **Ridgeback** are one of the few makers who run their gear cables under the bottom bracket. We approve; we understand the trend for triple top tube routing but under-bracket cables seem to promote slick shifts for longer, despite their dirt line positioning.

The **Halsion Inversion** is one of our favourite budget forks. Its bracing against steering deflection is excellent, the elastomer stack skewers can be accessed and serviced (cleaned and re-greased) in less than two minutes, and most riders seem happy with the fork's soft action. The three-quarter boots, covering the slot for the upper legs to slide over the brace, seem to do a fine job of keeping the crud out. Finally, its 410mm length, while laying back the frame angles in situ, gives a 'standard' 71/73 degree geometry once the elastomers have started to function beyond the initial rider weight sag.

### The groupset

Most rigid forked bikes at this price are getting into eight-speed **LX** drivetrains. Put on a suspension fork and you have to budget elsewhere. We've been impressed with the performance of all **Shimano's** mid-range groups this year, so that step back from **LX** to **STX RC** is no big deal.

The **STX RC** drivetrain boasts what we've dubbed the full 'Inter Galactic Glide' set. Shifts are smooth and quiet – disconcertingly so at times ('Was that a shift or did I not push far enough?'). Gone are the days of snappy clunks and lever feel telling you exactly how far up the cassette you are; many of our testers are now admitting to being drawn to those little windows to check how many gears are left. The gear ratios were fine for all but those fast cruising situations when the 15- to 18-tooth cassette jump is annoying. The brakes were sharp and no hassle to adjust when the blocks started to ridge under the rim. We're looking forward to seeing more non-arc brake systems next year.

### The wheels

Complaints centred on **Tioga's** very smart looking Butterscotch *Psycho* tyres. They're a sure-fire winner in the coolness stakes but they're nigh on useless on wet rocks or tar seal.

The Ridgeback's frame and forks tip the scales at 8lb 10oz – lighter than four bags of sugar. And it rides sweeter too

