



Huw Millions is not normally seen riding bikes that cost less than £3,000 but on this day we persuaded him to kick a leg over the £650 Fusion.

Rocky Mountain Fusion

A £650 Tange cromoly bike from Canada

Most people have heard of Rocky Mountain but few are seen in the UK and certainly not in great numbers. That may soon change. The Canadian company Rocky Mountain has been building its Fusion model on home soil for four years. It is an extremely well-finished, TIG-welded, Tange double-butted, cromoly frame, which weighs 4.4lb. The distinctive sloping top tube is still there as are the seatstays which meet the seat tube above the junction of top tube and seat tube. The Fusion also retains the front-facing seat collar with its Odyssey-style seat clamp. According to Rocky Mountain this does away with the need for further brazing which could weaken an area that has already had a considerable amount of welding.

The seatpost ovalises where it meets the bottom bracket, as do the chainstays. There is a good amount of clearance down there for those typical winter days. There's a beefy looking bridge between these stays which also has a mudguard attachment. (Curiously enough the forks don't have eyelets for a front rack or mudguard.)

The frame and fork are the same as those on the Sherpa, the STX-equipped baby brother of the Fusion that retails at £530 at the start of the range. These are the only models to have 14.5 and 16in sizes.

The frame comes in the grandly named colour of Simply Purple with black forks; a reserved but luscious look. Rocky Mountain use a double powder-coating process. The paint comes in a powder form and is then baked at 400 degrees to achieve a super-tough finish. Less paint is wasted than when spraying so it's a process that is considered to be more environmentally sound. Saracen use a similar process and according to the UK company you could bang two tubes with this finish and they wouldn't flake or crack.

Rocky Mountain pride themselves on their quality control. In the case of the frames they are checked and straightened to a tolerance of 0.5mm 27 times. Each tube and weld is examined individually when being built and then each frame is re-examined for



up to an hour on every bike after building. Last year the company says it destroyed 1,000 frames (10 percent of their production total) after they'd been through the quality control.

The same attention to detail is applied to the wheels. Rocky Mountain have their own specialist wheel division called Wheeltech – a good thing as far as we are concerned. The Force have a regular gripe about wheels that lose shape after a few miles. Get them out on the terrain they were built for and too many do an impersonation of a Pringle (posh crisp, not sweater). And all Rockies have hand-built wheels.

Like the painting and the frame alignment, their wheel-building process is distinctive. After the lacing and truing, a tyre is stuck on, blown up and left overnight. Then the tyre is let down and the wheel tweaked a final time. Ours didn't bend at all, and we're heavy on wheels.

The Sun L20 brushed sidewall rims (made in America) help. We haven't seen many of these; most bikes come with Mavics. We checked out the L20s; they're OEM (original equipment manufacturer – supplied direct to bike companies and not for sale to the public) models weighing in at around 507g. The Sun OEM rims are on average around 50g heavier than their retail equivalents but think of this as extra strength. The cross-section of the L20 is U-shaped and without eyelets. This is not the strongest construction style. Eyelets make building marginally easier and spread the pressure on the rim when tensioned, and most high-performance rims have a box cross-section. So you're not getting top-of-the-range rims but it's difficult to overstate the value of hand-built wheels. They'll save you time and money later.

The brushed sidewall improves braking. The rims are laced with 15g stainless steel spokes to an Acera 36-hole hub and an STX RC 36 on the rear.

The catch with the wheel package comes with the tyres, 2in Rocky Fighters made by Duro (the first time we've come across this make). These were a bit of a let down. Most of the time we had the bike, conditions were wet or muddy and the tyre just couldn't cope. They worked fine up and down hills but left the rider wishing for more rubber when it came to corners. All too easily they would wash out even when you weren't hanging out. Further up the range, Ritchey tyres come specced. Get them on all the range, we say.

Sugino make the 175mm cranks as OEM equipment for Rocky Mountain and have been doing so since last year. Grip Shift handle the 7-speed shifting with their SRT400 model, which worked reasonably well. Shifts down the block were fine but up the block required a slight over-shift, as we've found before, to get in the right gear. Both front and rear derailleurs and the cantis are Shimano STX RC models. Brake levers are Dia-Compe Power Control 3 models which looked a little rough and were too small for some riders. The levers follow the same basic principle as the Shimano Servo-wave system and seemed to perform as well.

Rocky Mountain have some components branded with

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If Einstein was around today, the Fusion would be the bike he'd choose; it's got a cosmic name, a low centre of gravity, Sun rims and goes faster than the speed of light.



Rocky Mountain are not the only company for whom Japanese-based Sugino make chainsets. Their other clients include Ritchey, Cannondale and more recently White Industries.

their RMB (Rocky Mountain Bicycles) logo: the five degree cold-forged alloy stem and the RMB alloy 6061 bars and 300mm aluminium seatpost. The stem looks good – one Force member was even seen caressing it in the workshop. It is reversible if you need a (ludicrously) lower riding position.

Seating arrangements are handled by a Vetta SL racing saddle. Despite the almost complete dominance of the market by minuscule saddles (possibly a hangover from the days of the obsession with super-light weight), it is very pleasing to see the use of a slightly wider version. It was both comfortable and strong; like we said, we're heavy on stuff.

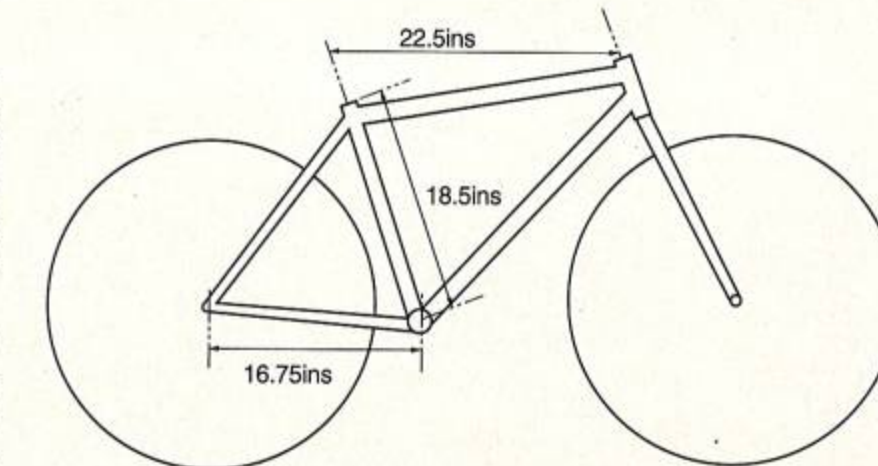
The rise of the stem, the width of the bars (though they could do with some bar ends), even the 22.5in top tube length all indicated a fine racing steed. Our 18.5in model came in at a respectable 25lb 12oz with pedals and rode and felt very similar to its compatriot, the Kona Lava Dome.

For a bike costing only £650 (okay, steady, we know it's not exactly loose change) the Fusion rode impressively, allowing for our reservations on the tyres. It's responsive and rides light. You feel like you are on a more expensive and race-orientated machine. Not as quick as some through the switchbacks, it nevertheless feels very agile and stable and, with the attention to frame and wheels, no doubt a durable basic machine to upgrade and lighten. The only thing that prevented us really ripping it up were the tyres, which was unfortunate, given the bike's potential. And despite the crudity of the brake levers, actual braking performance of the STX RC cantis was good. Trail shock was also dealt with well by the frame, tyres and saddle although we could have done with better cushioning on the bars. Rocky Mountain spec their own brand where the Grip Shift ends and they suck.

Rocky Mountain bikes had a reputation of being expensive. For the first year of their re-emergence in the UK they're trying to ditch this image and keep prices down across the whole range. From the performance and spec of the Fusion there's no reason to think that corners have been cut to make a price point, but we're still not talking cheap. It falls between Kona's Lava Dome and Cinder Cone (£560 and £699 respectively) and is the same price as Orange's STX RC-equipped C16. The Fusion is in with a shout against this stiff competition and if prices stay low, we won't complain. **MBI**

ROCKY MOUNTAIN FUSION

PRICE £650
SUPPLIER Rocky Mountain (GB) (0977) 620523



FRAME
MATERIAL Tange double-buttend cromoly
SIZES 14.5, 16, 17.5, 18.5, 19.5, 21in
COLOUR Simply Purple
FORKS Tange cromoly

GROUPSET
SHIFTERS Grip Shift SRT400
CRANKSET Sugino 20-32-42
BOTTOM BRACKET Shimano cartridge
FREEWHEEL Shimano IG 7-speed 11-28
DERAILLEURS Shimano STX RC
BRAKES Shimano STX RC

COMPONENTS
HEADSET Dia-Compe Aheadset
STEM RMB custom
BARS RMB alloy
SADDLE Vetta SL
SEATPOST RMB alloy

WHEELS
RIMS Sun L20
HUBS Acera X
TYRES Duro Rocky Fighters