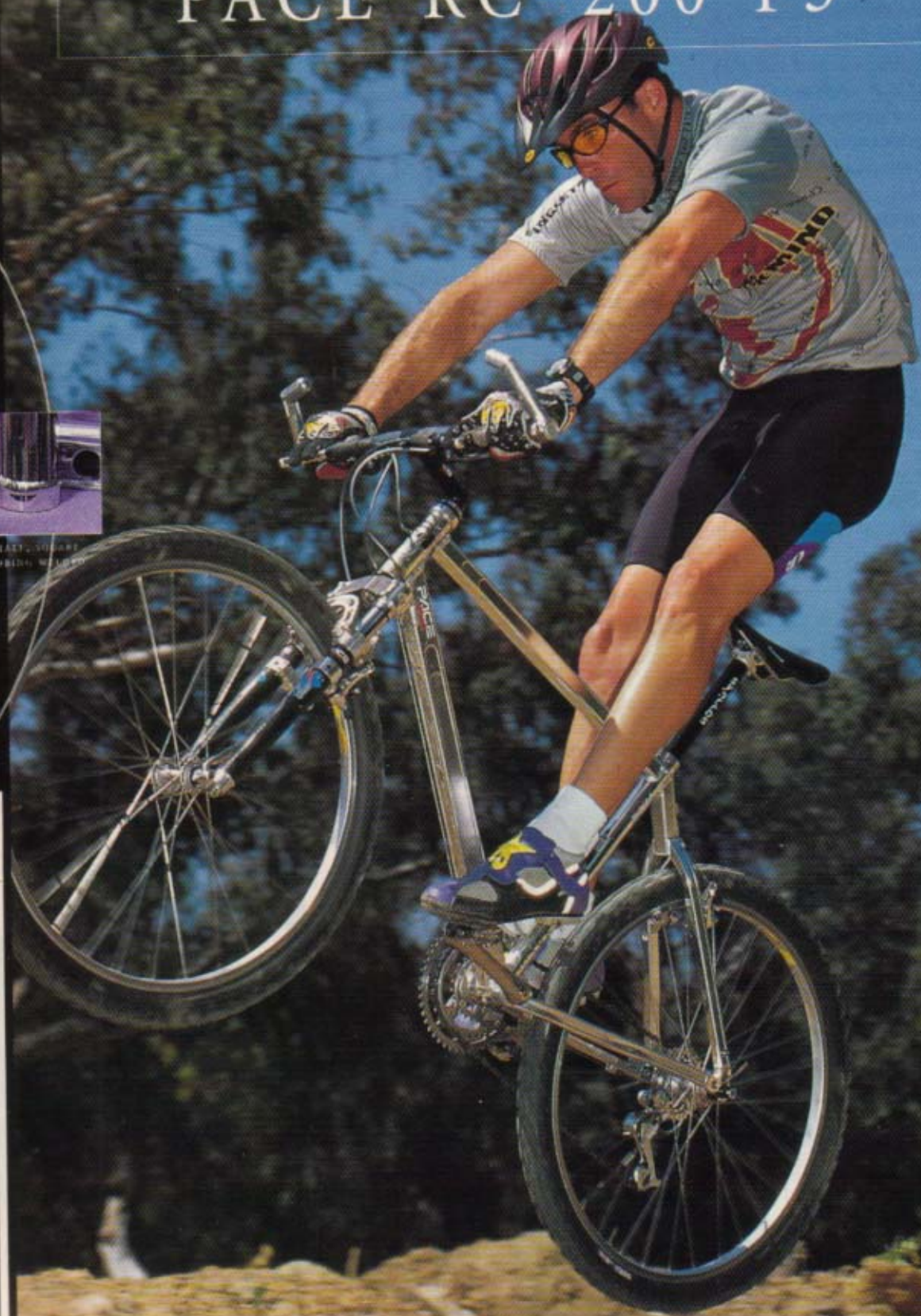


PACE RC-200 F5

ALUMINUM



SMART TUBE
TUBING



HITS: Clean look, great ride **MISSES:** Pricy, oddball fork

THE COMPANY PITCH: Small, square aluminum tubes have the weight advantage of an oversized aluminum chassis but can be precision tuned to achieve the ride of a supple titanium or steel frame.

FREAK FACTOR: 7.3; British-made, \$1,395 frame with weird aluminum tubes

THE FRAME

An aluminum frame is far from zany in today's market. But Pace's externally butted, box-section tubes are as freaky as you want to get.

Pace engineers claim that box-section tubes are stronger in all directions and are easier to butt, bend and swage. (The 7005 aluminum tubes are drawn in Pace's Yorkshire factory, a quality-control luxury few small framebuilders enjoy.) Most round aluminum tubes are drawn with the butts hidden on the inside. Pace draws the main tubes with a constant wall thickness and then machines the ride-controlling butts into the outside of the box-section tubes.

Are box-section tubes stronger? I've heard a lot of confusing techno-garble in the square vs. round debate, but few definite answers. The Pace performs well regardless of its tubes.

Look past the boxiness and you see intelligent design and sharp execution. For example, the rear triangle has a butted seatstay wishbone and swoopy, curved chainstays and seatstays. There's also direct cable routing, buttery smooth welds, completely replaceable rear dropouts, plenty of rear-tire clearance and a clean-looking seat clamp. The RC-200 comes with a Pace-manufactured anti-chainsuck gadget and a down-tube mounted crud catcher.

Everyone who took a close look at the bike noticed the quality workmanship and attention to detail. It's absolutely beautiful.

The geometry is your basic ho-hum race-ready configuration. Our 19-inch test frame featured a 23-inch top tube, 71/74 degree head/seat angles, 16.75-inch chainstays, 42.4-inch wheelbase and 11.5-inches of bottom-bracket clearance.

THE DRESS

Perhaps realizing that making a profit is damn hard when you only sell frames, Pace also makes a healthy selection of hardware to hang on the RC-200, including a suspension fork, front hub, stem and handlebar.

To complement the forgiving ride of the frame, Pace's American importer, Cycle Sport International, outfitted the RC-200 with a Pace RC-35 MXCD suspension fork. The 3.1-pound MXCD fork has a machined 6082 aluminum monobox crown with 4130 chromoly stan-

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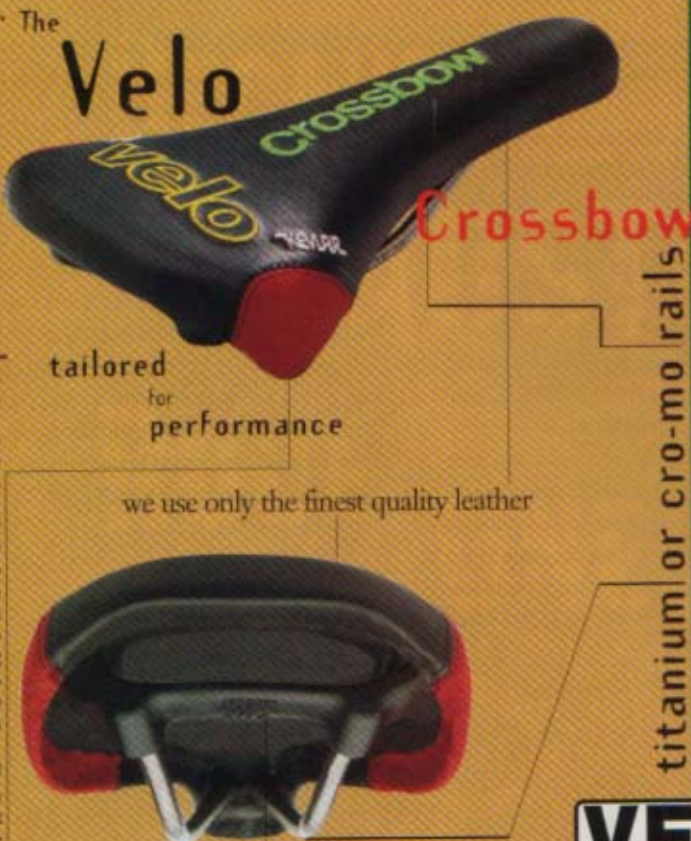
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The \$575 fork is elastomer-sprung. A stack of eight elastomers sits in each leg. For \$50 more you can get Pace's micro-adjustable RC-35HC hydraulic cartridge for rebound control. The cartridge sits neatly in the top of the fork's right leg and has an easy-to-dial aluminum adjuster—at 0 you get smooth small-bump action, at 20+ the rebound slows for the big hit. Our testers labeled the RC-35HC the simplest, easiest-to-use cartridge available.

Pace claims 2.5 inches of travel for the fork, but even after the two- to three-week break-in period suggested by the company we never got more than 1.75 inches. Even so, most riders were satisfied with the performance of the MXCD, finding it to be a near-equal to a Judy XC or Mach 5.

My biggest complaint about the Pace fork isn't the performance but the ridiculous way the fork is connected to the frame. Our test bike came equipped with Pace's optional inverted threadless headset system. The stem is welded to the top of the steerer tube and all adjustments are made on or under the fork crown. This is a really bad idea. All the stem and headset adjusting bolts are hard to access and certain to be filled with mud flying off the front tire. Also, the stem can't be moved up or down once the steerer length is determined. You can also forget about easily swapping the stem for a different size or brand. Luckily, Pace also makes standard threaded and non-threaded steerers.

THE RIDE

Oversized aluminum frames have given the material a roughhouse reputation, but the

small cross-section and careful tuning Pace uses on the RC-200 give it a ride that has more in common with a stout titanium or steel frame. This makes the RC-200 a true freak—an aluminum bike we didn't mind riding all day.

After testing the bike in the tight singletrack of Barbados and the open fire roads of San Bernadino, we found the ride difficult to pigeonhole. The best description is "balanced." The Pace takes what you throw at it. You can find bikes that will outperform it in extreme situations, but for the broad band of use that most bikes see, the RC-200 is a smokin' good ride.

THE VERDICT

Most riders wished for more travel and precision from the fork, and the bolt-on seat clamp developed a nasty squeak after a few weeks, but otherwise we were lovin' the RC-200. It's freak, it's fun, it's a damn good all-around bike.

PACE RC-200 F5

DISTRIBUTED BY: Cycle Sport International, 4644 Don Julio Blvd., Sacramento, CA 95842; 916/348-8347 **PRICE:** \$1,395 (frame only) **FRAME MATERIAL:** 7005 externally double-buttressed aluminum **SIZES AVAILABLE:** 16.5, 18, 19 (tested), 20.5 in. **WEIGHT:** 24.75 lbs. complete; 3.8 lbs. frame only **FORK/TRAVEL:** Pace MXC/1.75 in. **SHIFTERS:** Shimano XTR (old style) **DERAILLEURS:** Shimano XTR (old style) **BRAKES:** Shimano XTR M-System **HUBS:** Pace RC-50 MT-Lock **RIMS:** FIR 123 **TIRES:** Michelin WildGripper Lite 26x2.0 in. **STEM/HANDLEBAR:** Pace/Renthal RC+130



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