



MONGOOSE IBOC PRO



THE FUNKY FIVE HUNDRED

THE TEST TEAM: WHO ARE THESE GUYS?

After two years of bike tests, Nigel Jackson has decided that he'd like to write about other aspects of mountain biking, and has handed the mantle of Test Editor on to Steve Worland. Here then is the low-down on the new wrecking crew.

Steve 'Rugged and Windswept' Worland: Steve has worked in all branches of the bike industry, toured, raced and generally ridden around on bikes since before most of us were out of short pants. His technical knowledge of mountain bikes is extensive.

David 'Pee Wee' Hemming: Britain's fastest downhiller, eighteen-year-old Ravin' Dave is one of those sickeningly good riders who can take a bike beyond its limits and bring it back again. He's promised to try not to break too many test bikes.

Matthew Denby: A relative newcomer to mountain biking, Matthew nevertheless rode his elevated-chainstay Dave Yates to victory in the 1990 MBC Intermediate Finals.





DREDS



Five hundred pounds is about the level where some people will still turn up with a wad of notes. It's the cash in hand withdrawal limit of several building societies and can easily be stashed in the average wallet without feeling that the rest of the high street will have their eyes focused on your pocket as you unlock your decrepit clunker and pedal off down the street filled with the excitement of a new purchase.

Half a grand is also about the level where the wrecking crew's idea of 'serious MTBs' begins to become established. There are plenty of great bikes for less than that, but usually they are simply great in terms of value for money and/or purposeful design. Over £500, we're beginning to keep our eyes open for useful innovation, as well as practical design, quality componentry, weight savings and flair. We'd be surprised to find a bike with all of these attributes in this price range but the bikes we tested certainly rose to the challenge.

Thanks to **AlpineStars**, **Raleigh**, and **Mongoose** for lending us three very different bikes to test. With test crew of Steve Worland, Dave 'Pee Wee' Hemming, Mathew Denby, Steve Behr and his photographic appendages, we wrapped up in anything that wasn't covered in slush residues from the day before, and set out into the frozen wastes of Yorkshire.

MONGOOSE IBOC PRO

In the buzzing underworld of the bike testing fraternity, we need an occasional prod by a conservative yard stick. It's easy to get carried away by flash innovation and market hype. It's our job to decipher it all and look for a good bike underneath.

The **Mongoose IBOC Pro** is a bike which doesn't need to be undressed. Everything on it is black or silver, sensible and unassuming.

THE CHASSIS

Tange chromoly double butted, with very neat TIG welds, wishbone seat stays. 1.125 headset, and oversize fork.

There's no mudguard bosses on the front fork, but otherwise all braze ons are practical and tidy. There are two sets of bottle cage bosses. Cable guides are all slotted, and there's an extra little cable loop to help derailleur cable alignment at the back of the top tube. **Mongoose** seem to have recognised the *SIS*-disabling potential of the extra outer cable involved in top tube cable routing. Two criticisms of the cabling; the bare cables at the side of the top tube rub the paintwork as soon as you encounter bumps and the front derailleur cable pulley needs very frequent lubrication to avoid stiff cable ailments.

GROUPSET

Shimano Deore DX was fitted. With *Hyperglide* sprockets, round *Superglide* chainrings (46,36,26 specced, 24 fitted), low profile cantilevers, and the new smoother action front shifter, we had no complaints about its operation. The 12-26 freewheel specced implies a tendency towards race image, though in fact it was a 12-28, giving a reasonable spread of gears for most types of riding.

After testing, we noticed that there was a lot of fore/aft play in the front cantilevers. The braze on bosses were slightly too long for the cantilevers and might benefit from a little judicious filing.

The bottom bracket axle was nipped. If you get nuts instead of bolts, replace the washers with some vicious looking serrated ones and clamp the cranks on tight.

In another apparent cost cutting exercise our test bike was fitted with *LX* hubs. There's not much difference; *DX* has a nicer QR and a better bearing seal, but it did say *DX* on the spec sheet.

THE OTHER BITS

The 32 spoked wheels stayed true on the **Araya CV7** plain alloy rims. All black 1.95in **Mongoose** tyres performed superbly in very muddy conditions. The wide tread pattern hummed like a solar tractor on the road.

Mongoose's own low profile pedals, with toe flips, performed well. One of the reflectors survived two whole days of testing (is this a record?). Clips and straps were average.

Five hundred quid gets you firmly into serious mountain bike territory, the place where each bike expresses the designer's individual vision of what an emteebee should be. STEVE WORLAND and the Wrecking Crew found three fine bikes for just over the five ton mark. Cycling STEVE BEHR took the pictures.

At the front end, we all particularly liked the soft, ribbed grips. We were divided about the stem. **Mongoose** have gone for a relatively long (just under 23in) top tube (on the 18in bike) and a shortish and highish stem. I liked it a lot, but I like relatively upright riding positions. Others had their reservations. Putting a lower or longer stem on it, with its 70 degree head angle, would probably not upset the riding characteristics too much.

The **Mongoose Comp** saddle was a worthy perch from which to pedal an excellent all round bike which will handle all aspects of MTBing. It performed well up, down and, where Pee Wee was concerned, sideways and in the air, although I doubt that the warranty would cover any of his manoeuvres!

RALEIGH SENTINEL

Only the head badge gives this one away. The main graphics say **DYNA-TECH**, confirming **Raleigh's** commitment to their new market image: dynamic and technical are the operative words.

We were impressed with last year's **Dyna-Tech** offerings. As we took this one out of the box, we liked what we saw. The **Sentinel** is an extremely classy looking bike, the cool deep emerald green front and rear contrasts well with the silver grey main tubes and subtle graphics. I suspect that a lot of shops will have this one in their window, surrounded by a load of rocks and some urban graffiti.

Whilst still at the 'getting it out of the box' stage, it's worth mentioning that it comes with a tool kit, a registered holographic frame badge, invalidated if removed, a frame registration card and a service manual covering most aspects of general maintenance without resorting to technofreak lingo translations and, for those who wonder who built the bike, there's

even an autographed picture of him included.

THE CHASSIS

The tubes are butted chromoly, bonded into aluminium lugs. The top of the seat stays is bolted and bonded into the seat lug, with a neat seat bolt in front of the pin. Cable bosses are sensible, although the headlug mounted gear cable stops are not slotted. The one on the chainstay is, though, so some lubrication can be achieved without complete cable disassembly.

There is only one set of water bottle bosses (we'd like to see two) but threaded double eyelets for mudguards and rack are there and even the guard/reflector holes in the fork are threaded and sealed.

Another nice touch is the unusual chainstay pont. If you're wondering what that is, it's what you'd normally call the bridge, but this one doesn't bridge the gap. It's simply there as a mudguard perch, and the gap left ensures that mud can drop through instead of accumulating above the back of the bottom bracket. It's nice to see this sort of innovation in the small detail of bikes associated with large scale production.

Some bikes just look right, straight from the box and sometimes it's a nasty surprise to find that they ride like dawgs but **Raleigh's Special Products Division** have done their homework. We suspect that the **Raleigh MTB team** have had their

say in the **Sentinel's** design, it rides as well as it looks. We all loved it - no reservations. It belied its 29.75 lb weight with its light and agile feel, reliable climbing and descending and superb handling.

GROUPSET

At £525, this is one of the more expensive bikes with **Shimano 500LX** components. The brake and gear levers are not as robust as **DX**, and although most of us actually preferred the crisp click of the **LX** shifters to the solid but dull feel of **DX** they're not as durable.

The brakes performed well in very muddy conditions. Low profile cantilevers, with plastic **SLR** levers, were fitted. There's a nice little cable-end-tuck protrusion on the canti arm to prevent that inevitable calf flesh tear from a raggy cable end.

Biopace rings were fitted (48,38,28). We didn't even notice the **Biopace** effect. It's very slight these days, nothing like the old rugby ball era.

The freewheel was a 12 to 28 **Hyperglide** unit and the bottom bracket axle was sealed and bolted, although the left hand crank still fell off on our first ride out, a reminder to us to keep a check on the axle bolts on all new bikes. Cranks were 170mm on our 18in test bike.

The **LX** pedals could do with some toe flips. They're a nightmare to get your foot in when wet. Clips and straps fitted were adequate.

THE OTHER BITS

We generally don't like internal cable stems. Aesthetically, they're great, but you can't tell if the cable

Photo: Steve Behr



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is getting worn and possibly about to break. **Raleigh** have colour matched theirs to the frame, with contrasting chromoly handlebars.

The rims were dark anodised **Rigida Laser 400**, with 36 spokes. The brake surface anodising was gone by the end of the test, but the wheels are still running true despite this being my favourite post-test bike of the moment.

The **Vetta** gel saddle and **Cheng Shin** tyres (like **Ritchey Force**) performed well. We argued for 10 minutes about whether we liked the handlebar grips or not - some like hard, some soft; these are somewhere in between Jeyes and Andrex.

Raleigh have fitted their own chromoly black seat pin. It works.

That's about it. To summarise, our few criticisms relate to minor aspects of the bits on this bike. For the price, you're getting an excellent chassis on which to upgrade as the small components wear out. The bits that matter are good.

Our test team this month were all well used to 'fast' bikes. Riders looking for a gentler ride could find the relatively flat riding position of the **Sentinel** a bit too racy. If you're the sort who may want to fit a basket on the front, this is not the bike for you, but if you're gonna go for it, this is a bike to go for it on.

ALPINESTARS CRO MEGA DX

First impressions: This bike seems to have been designed for the riding conditions common to many parts of the UK at this time of year. Massive mud clearances mean that anything lifted from the trail is deposited a few feet further on. Instead of taking the trail home with you, you simply advance it slightly, a far more environmentally acceptable proposition than pressure-hosing several kilos of it off the bike into your back yard.

THE CHASSIS

There are loads of bikes on the market with 2in of clearance between the rear wheel and the seat tube. Not many of them have a rear end length of only 15.9in, though, achieved with a curved seat tube which then drops, almost vertically, through wide, raised chainstays into the bottom bracket. The result is a bike shape which climbs well, never clogs and, if Mike Klossers' performance at the Worlds' Downhill was anything to go by, descends like a precision-programmed lemming.

If this all sounds great, let me slip in a few minor gripes. When standing on extreme climbs, using the granny ring and some heavy muscle, the bottom bracket sometimes flexed enough to cause the front changer to graunch into the side of the tyre. This was easy to avoid by using less body power when honking but it appears to rule out the possibility of fitting wider tyres, a great pity as the rest of the frame clearances call out for trying some 2.5inchers. The tyres fitted are **Ritchey Force** 1.9in, reasonable in dry conditions but inadequate in mud.

The elevated chainstays are wide enough to get a second water bottle in between their extensions to the down tube, but also wide enough for a couple of us to occasionally catch our heels on the up-stroke. This depends on your pedalling action though. Mathew rides raised chainstays all the time and didn't find it a problem.

The headset is a 1.25in oversize unit with straight-bladed tapered chromoly forks ending in investment cast dropouts, with no mudguard eyes. The large space

above the tyre means that a suspension fork could be fitted without radically altering the geometry.

The rear brake and derailleur cables are top tube routed, with inner cable sleeve protecting the paint between slotted guides. Top tube cable routing must be regularly serviced, because there are more twists and turns and more water and dirt traps than with under-the-bottom bracket routing. If outer cables are not cut and positioned perfectly, the gears will cease to cooperate. Fears of under-the-bracket dirt clogging are over emphasised... where there's dirt, there's also water, which combines well with gravity to prevent underside accumulations.

GROUPSET

The **Shimano DX** set is well finished and generally operates smoothly and efficiently. The bike we tested had last years' front shifter and wider profile cantilevers. We are told that everything will be up to date on the bikes in the shops.

The brakes were slightly compromised by the front and rear cable hangers. The front one was a headset mounted guide fitted directly below the stem. We moved it round to one side to avoid the cramped cable route of its normal position. The rear hanger was simply a stamped piece of aluminium hanging off the QR seat bolt. It did the job but its loose positioning absorbed some of the power when the brake was applied.

Round chainrings were 46, 36, 24 (spec sheet says 26 but we're not complaining), with a 12 to 28 freewheel. The other round bits, the wheels, stayed true and the fact that they are 32-spoked on **Ritchey Vantage** rims helps to keep the overall weight of the bike down to about 29.5 lbs.



THE FUNKY

THE OTHER BITS

The bars and stem are called 'Megalite'. We weighed them and they're not, they're about average for a bike in this price range.

A Turbo-style saddle on black seat pin is comfortable enough. They're held firmly in the frame by a forged aluminium collar. The hexagonal grips are soft but hard wearing, pedals are adequate but one toeclip fell apart after a few days. Maybe we just got a bad sample.

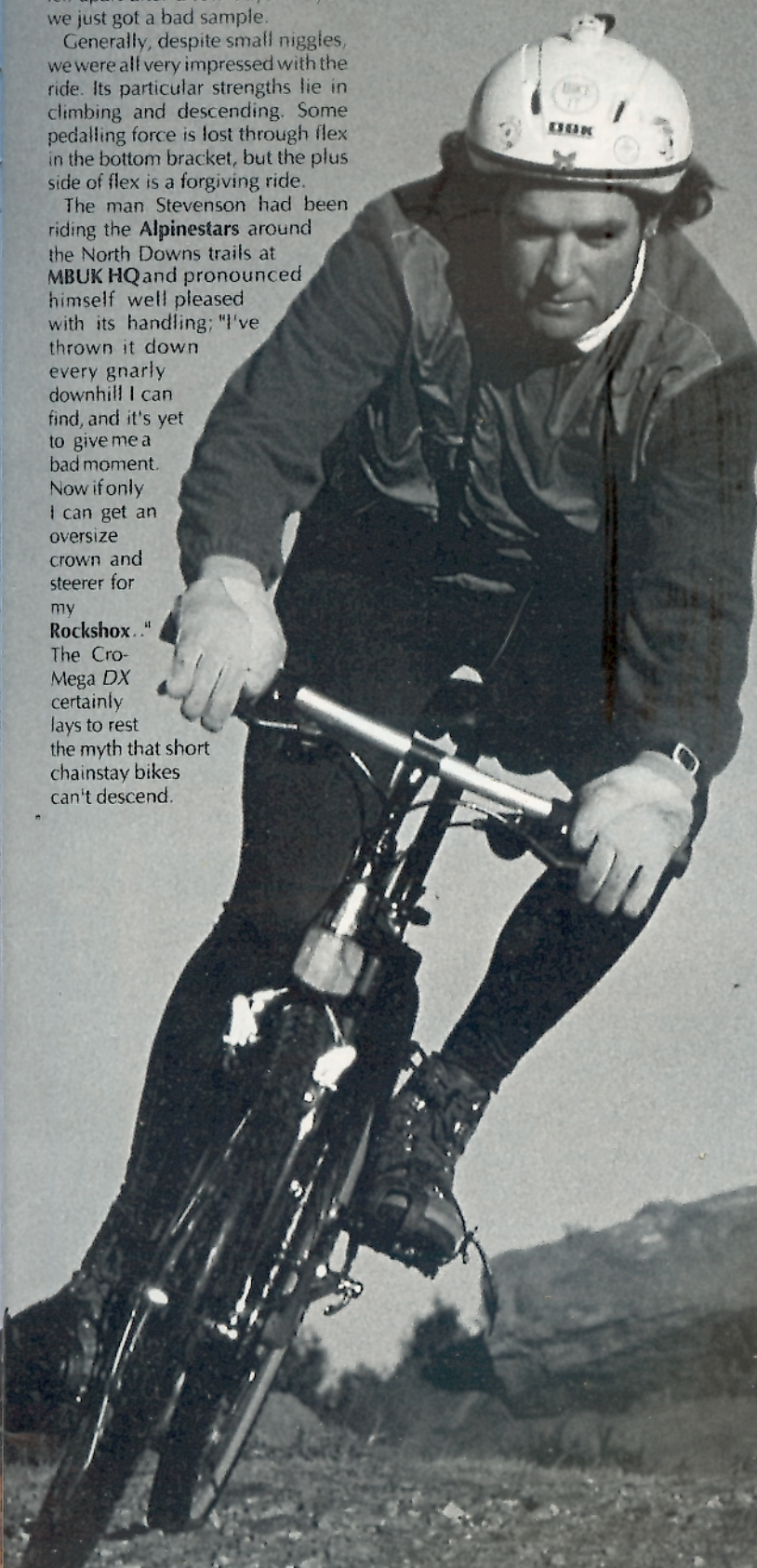
Generally, despite small niggles, we were all very impressed with the ride. Its particular strengths lie in climbing and descending. Some pedalling force is lost through flex in the bottom bracket, but the plus side of flex is a forgiving ride.

The man Stevenson had been riding the **Alpinestars** around the North Downs trails at **MBUK HQ** and pronounced himself well pleased with its handling; "I've thrown it down every gnarly downhill I can find, and it's yet to give me a bad moment. Now if only I can get an oversize crown and steerer for my **Rockshox**."

The **Cro-Mega DX** certainly lays to rest the myth that short chainstay bikes can't descend.

The chunky image and block graphics of this bike will not be to everyone's taste though it was widely liked around the office but, considering the innovative frame design and quality componentry, this bike is excellent value for money at £549.

Many thanks to **Pace Research Cycles** for receiving and setting up these bikes for us.



MONGOOSE IBOC COMP

FRAME: Tange Double-Butted Mono Stay Chromoly
FORKS: Sealed 1.125
HEADSET: Shimano DX
HUBS: specced (LX fitted)
RIMS: Araya CV7 32s
SPOKES: 14 gauge
TYRES: Black Mongoose 1.95
CRANKSET: Shimano Deore DX 46,36,26
BOTTOM BRACKET: Nuted
PEDALS: Mongoose low profile
CHAIN: Shimano
FREEWHEEL: Shimano HG 12-26 seven
DERAILLEURS: Shimano Deore DX LX
SHIFTERS: Shimano Deore DX
HANDLEBARS: Chromoly flat 23 in
HANDLEBAR STEM: Chromoly Mongoose, top cable routed
GRIPS: Pro Class Kryton
BRAKES: Shimano DX
SEAT: Mongoose Comp Lycra Gel
SEATPOST: Alloy 300mm
WEIGHT: 30.25lbs
SIZE TESTED: 20 in
GEOMETRY
HEAD ANGLE: 70°
SEAT ANGLE: 72°
TOP TUBE LENGTH: 22.75 in
WHEELBASE: 42 in
REAR END: 16.75 in
BOTTOM BRACKET HEIGHT: 11.75 in
PRICE: £532
DISTRIBUTOR: Hot Wheels International

RALEIGH SENTINEL

FRAME: Dynatech 2055 tubeset
FORKS: Spinner chromoly
HEADSET: Tioga Avenger 1.125
HUBS: Shimano LX
RIMS: Rigida Laser 400
SPOKES: 14 gauge stainless
TYRES: Cheng Shin 1.95
CRANKSET: Shimano LX 28,38,48 Biopace
BOTTOM BRACKET: Shimano
PEDALS: Shimano 500 LX
CHAIN: Shimano
FREEWHEEL: Shimano HG 12-28 seven
DERAILLEURS: Shimano 500 LX
SHIFTERS: Shimano LX
HANDLEBARS: Chromoly
HANDLEBAR STEM: Cromoly internal cable
GRIPS: Hard rubber
BRAKES: Shimano LX
SEAT: Vetta Gel
SEATPOST: Dynatech 29.75lbs
WEIGHT: 17.75 in
SIZE TESTED: 17.75 in
GEOMETRY
HEAD ANGLE: 70°
SEAT ANGLE: 73.4°
TOP TUBE LENGTH: 22 in
WHEELBASE: 41.25 in
REAR END: 17 in
BOTTOM BRACKET HEIGHT: 11.75 in
PRICE: £525
DISTRIBUTOR: Raleigh

ALPINESTARS CRO-MEGA DX

FRAME/FORKS: Double Butted 4130 chromoly
HEADSET: YST 1.25in
HUBS: Shimano DX QR 32 hole
RIMS: Ritchey Vantage Expert
SPOKES: 14 Gauge
TYRES: Ritchey Force 1.9in
CRANKSET: Shimano DX 46,36,24
BOTTOM BRACKET: YST bolted
PEDALS: Alpinestars SL
CHAIN: Shimano HG
FREEWHEEL: Shimano HG Cassette 12-28 seven
DERAILLEURS: Shimano DX
SHIFTERS: Shimano DX
HANDLEBARS: Alpinestars 6061 Aluminium

HANDLEBAR STEM:

Alpinestars 7005 Aluminium Hex
GRIPS: Shimano DX SLR
BRAKES: Alpinestars Turbo
SEAT: Kalloy
SEATPOST: 29.5 lbs
WEIGHT: 19 in
SIZE TESTED: 19 in
GEOMETRY
HEAD ANGLE: 70.8°
SEAT ANGLE: 73.4°
TOP TUBE LENGTH: 23.2 in
WHEELBASE: 42.25 in
REAR END: 15.9 in
BOTTOM BRACKET HEIGHT: 11.25 in
PRICE: £549
DISTRIBUTOR: AlpineStars UK Ltd

Photo: Steve Behr

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