

TESTED

THE BIKE REPORT

SNAPSHOT REVIEWS OF
THE HOTTEST RIGS

Three of a Kind (And One Redheaded Stepchild)

FLOATING PIVOT POINTS ARE THE TECHNICAL DARLINGS OF THE MOUNTAIN BIKE WORLD. HERE ARE THREE CUTTING-EDGE DESIGNS CREATED BY THE TOP MINDS IN SUSPENSION. PLUS ONE SUPER FAST CARBON HARDTAIL.





ORBEA

ALMA

If you've ever seen the hordes of orange-clad fans slopeside on the Pyrenees at the Tour de France, you've seen the Basques. Although better known in the road world than off-road, the Basques are fanatical about cycling, right down to Orbea, a Basque cooperative that's been turning out top-flight bikes for 87 years.

The blocky-looking Alma features a massive A-shaped down tube and beefy head-tube area for stiffness, a clear sign of this bike's intent—it's built for the race course, with geometry and a parts group to fit. On the trail, the Alma is a rocket, with instant power transfer to the pedals and no hint of flex. The 71-degree head angle and 73-degree seat angle on our 18-in. test bike provided nimble handling. On one trail that benches a hillside and offers numerous switchbacking grade reversals, the Alma swept confidently into tight corners and roared back out again, all in the big ring. As fast as you want to go, the Alma will match your effort.

There is a downside to swift reflexes: No hardtail, not even a carbon one, feels as forgiving as a full-suspension bike. A better word for the Alma would be smooth—you'll feel every pebble in the trail, but the Alma still manages to float over rocky terrain without pounding back. It rewards finesse, but doesn't punish mistakes like some hardtails. One surprising thing: The Alma isn't crazy-light. Our test rig tipped the scales at 22 lb., 9 oz. That's heavier than some carbon racers and even a few aluminum ones. If you're a bigger rider, you might not care—you'll find the Alma plenty fast. But in this rarified realm, lighter is always better.—*Joe Lindsey*

HITS: Stiff, great geometry and handling; a 29er option is coming
MISSSES: A tad on the heavy side for a carbon hardtail; limited size run
PRICE: \$4,099; \$1,700 (frame only) **WEIGHT:** 22.70 lb. (w/o pedals, size 18 in.) **SIZES:** 16, 18 (tested), 20 in. **FRAME:** Monocoque carbon fiber **FORK:** RockShox SID Team w/ PopLoc remote lockout, 80mm travel **COMPONENT HIGHLIGHTS:** SRAM X.O shifters, rear derailleur; Truvativ Stylo Carbon cranks w/ Giga X Pipe bottom bracket; Avid Juicy Carbon disc brakes; DT Swiss 240 disc hubs and 4.1D rims; Michelin XCR 26 x 2.0-in. tires; Thomson Elite seatpost and X4 stem **CONTACT:** 501/280-9700; orbea-usa.com

IRON HORSE

AZURE WORLD CUP

In accordance with the Third Law of Motion, there's an equal and opposite reaction to every motion. And, according to DW-Link suspension inventor Dave Weagle (see Heroes of Gear, p. 71), a rider's mass is transferred backward under acceleration.

Weagle's designs counteract that movement and simultaneously eradicate suspension bob. When you ride the Azure, which features a DW-Link suspension, the bike resists rider-induced motion using what Weagle calls an "anti-squat" geometry. Then, once the bike enters its travel, the suspension responds to any trail bump, be it small stutters or larger steps and drops. Under braking forces, the concept creates an "instant force" location below the top tube near the front wheel. By pushing this force forward, Weagle's design creates a rear triangle that absorbs braking bumps instead of skipping across them.

Outfitted with a bevy of top-shelf parts, the Azure World Cup is pure high-performance XC. With just 76mm of rear-wheel travel, you're not going to get a bottomless feeling ride, but for the travel it does have, the Azure is highly effective. Power across ripples, pass other riders in the talus and stay seated on rooty climbs. The DW-Link is that good—and dare we say it rivals the legendary Santa Cruz Blur in every performance aspect. While it's aggressive in nature, a 70.5-degree head angle and 100mm-travel RockShox REBA World Cup fork give the bike about a half-degree-slacker angle than pure race machines. That's not to say it's not race ready; it's just a little easier to control on long trail rides when you're tired. If we find fault, it's with the near 26-pound weight. Nonetheless, the Azure rides splendidly, and that earns our unreserved thumbs up.—*Mike Cushionbury*

HITS: Cutting-edge, cross-country suspension design that rivals the best **MISSSES:** Somewhat heavy **PRICE:** \$4,700 **WEIGHT:** 25.90 lb. (19) **SIZES:** 15, 17, 19 (tested), 21 in. **FRAME:** Custom-butted aluminum; DW-Link suspension w/ 76mm travel **FORK:** RockShox REBA World Cup w/ Motion Control, 100mm travel **COMPONENT HIGHLIGHTS:** Progressive 5th Element air shock; SRAM X.O shifters, rear derailleur, Gen-X front derailleur; Avid Juicy 7 Carbon brakes; Race Face Deus XC X-Type cranks; DT Swiss 1540 wheelset; WTB ExiWolf 2.1/1.95-in. tires; Easton EC70 MonkeyLite Low Rise carbon bar; WTB Shadow V Stealth saddle **CONTACT:** 631/232-9259; ironhorsebikes.com

