

RAGLEY MARLEY

£899.99 / 27.5in /
ragleybikes.com

HIGHS: Just jump on and get shredding.

Simple as that

LOWS: Would be even better with a single-ring drivetrain. Needs an XL frame size

If it was painted orange, instead of the Rasta tricolour, and wore a RockShox fork up front, it would be hard to distinguish the Ragley Marley from Whyte's 901, such is the similarity in frame silhouette. But can it deliver just as much fun for even less money than Whyte's accomplished test-winner?

SUSPENSION

Manitou's Minute Comp fork might look back to front, but it's got a 15mm thru-axle (albeit an infuriating one to operate) and adjustable damping. There's an air pressure chart on the left leg to help you get started, but the weight brackets are so broad you'll need to experiment to find an accurate set-up: an o-ring on the stanchion would help in this regard. Still, the Minute Comp performed well. It's not the most sensitive fork on test, but the damping feels controlled through deep holes and braking bumps and it never knocked or rattled, no matter how hard we rode.

COMPONENTS

Sure, there are other bikes with better bits than the Ragley, but the sum of its parts is what really counts. You get a well-shaped 740mm bar, 50mm stem and file tread lock-on grips. The wheels use excellent WTB SX23 rims with a broad platform for seating the tenacious Vigilante front tyre and zippy, drag-free Trail Boss rear.

The Acera brakes perform far in excess of their meagre price tag and the drivetrain gets a Deore clutch rear mech to reduce chain slap.

PERFORMANCE

From the very first time we jumped on board the Marley we were jamming. It just felt so right. Fork travel is ideal for a hardtail at 130mm, and the slack

SPECIFICATION

Frame Custom-butted 6061 aluminium

Fork Manitou Minute Comp, 130mm travel

Wheels Novatec hubs, WTB rims, WTB Vigilante/Trail Boss 27.5x2.3/2.25in tyres

Drivetrain FSA Gamma Drive chainset, Deore shifters, r-mech and f-mech

Brakes Shimano Acera, 180/160mm

Weight 13.49kg (29.74lb)

Sizes XS, S, M, L

Size tested L



head angle means it never gets too twitchy on steep trails or under hard braking. The low bottom bracket allowed us to carve corners like no other bike on test, helped by the meaty front tyre and composed fork. Despite carrying a bit of extra weight, the seat angle was steep enough to let us tackle climbs without fuss, and the low-profile rear tyre helped cover ground efficiently.

Whether you've never ridden a mountain bike before, or the scars on your shins and callused palms tell of a life in the saddle, the Ragley Marley will let you find your limits and push them further. It quickly becomes an extension of your body, not only physically — allowing you to ride intuitively — but mentally, as a voice in your ear telling you to pedal harder, brake later and jump further.



A backwards-looking fork? Not a bit of it, the Manitou has well controlled damping



Plenty of clearance for a fatter rear tyre and tabs for a chain device

VERDICT

We said it in the Bike of the Year test last October, and the hardtail test in December; it would only be a matter of time before someone used Whyte's game-changing 901 as a template and brought out an equally inspiring bike at an even lower price point. Well, six months down the line, here it is. And while it's not hard to replicate the numbers of a well-designed frame, Ragley has also put together an almost flawless spec for £100 less than the competition. In the three years we've been doing the Hardtail of the Year test, we've never had a bike that's as fun to ride as the Ragley Marley; it's that good.

10