

# RUNNING WITH THE WOLVES

## MARIN WOLF RIDGE 9 REVIEW

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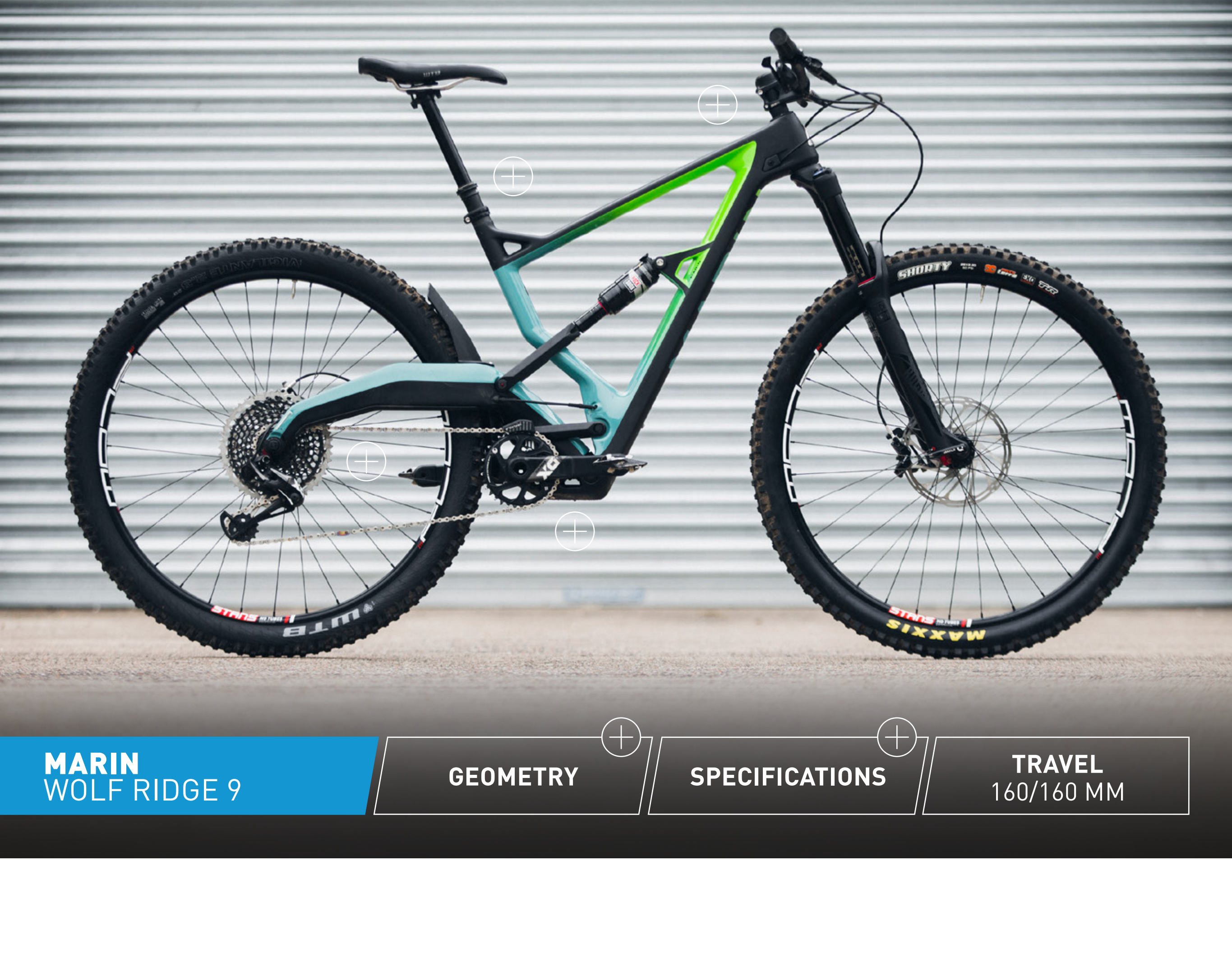


TEXT & PHOTO TREVOR WORSEY

When did mountain biking become a fashion show? Did we miss the memo? When the Marin Wolf Ridge hit the media channels, rather than enlightening talk of kinematics and performance, the forum Kardashians united in cries of “Ugly, hideous, kill it with fire!” Yes, it looks ... well, different, but if the R3ACT suspension works, if it’s amazing – that should good enough for us.



Looking at today’s choices on the market, when it comes to bikes there’s very little to separate different designs. Homology is the new reality, and designs differ by just degree here or a mm there, most separated only by marketing hype. Innovation is slowing – unless that is, we whisper about E-MTBs. However, sometimes we come across a bike so different that it’s hard to make assumptions. Yes, in a world of beautiful bikes it certainly is the ugly duckling, but does it ride like a swan? Aesthetics are personal opinion, but performance is absolute – if the innovative R3ACT suspension really works, then surely we can forgive the “unique” styling. The numbers certainly add up: a lofty 160 mm of travel from a 29er weighing in at 14.13 kg (size Large) sounds like the bike is ready to rock and roll. But what is it? Marin claim the Wolf Ridge is the ultimate all-around mountain bike experience, but is it a long-travel plough bike, agile trail missile, or just a design folly?



MARIN WOLF RIDGE 9

GEOMETRY

SPECIFICATIONS

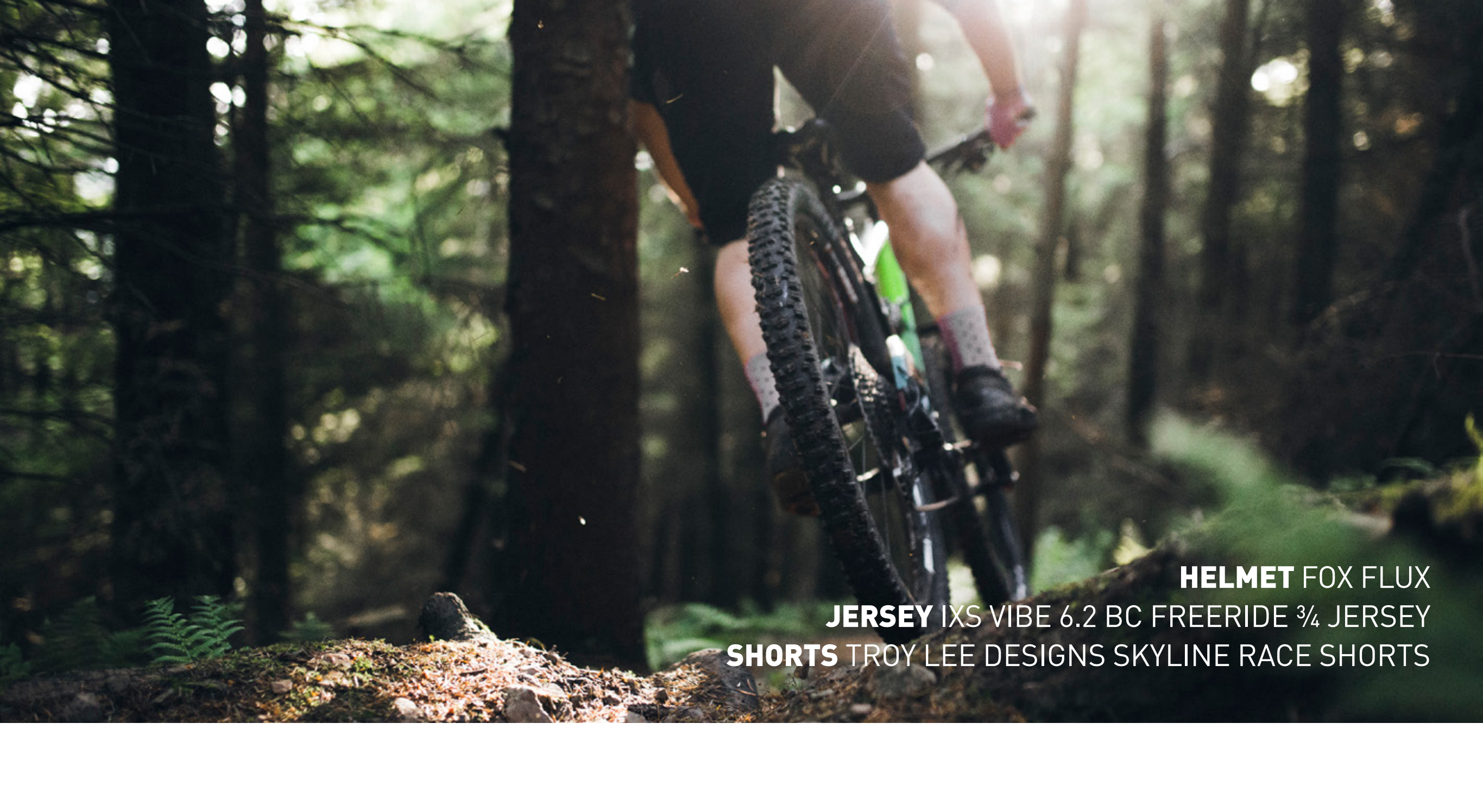
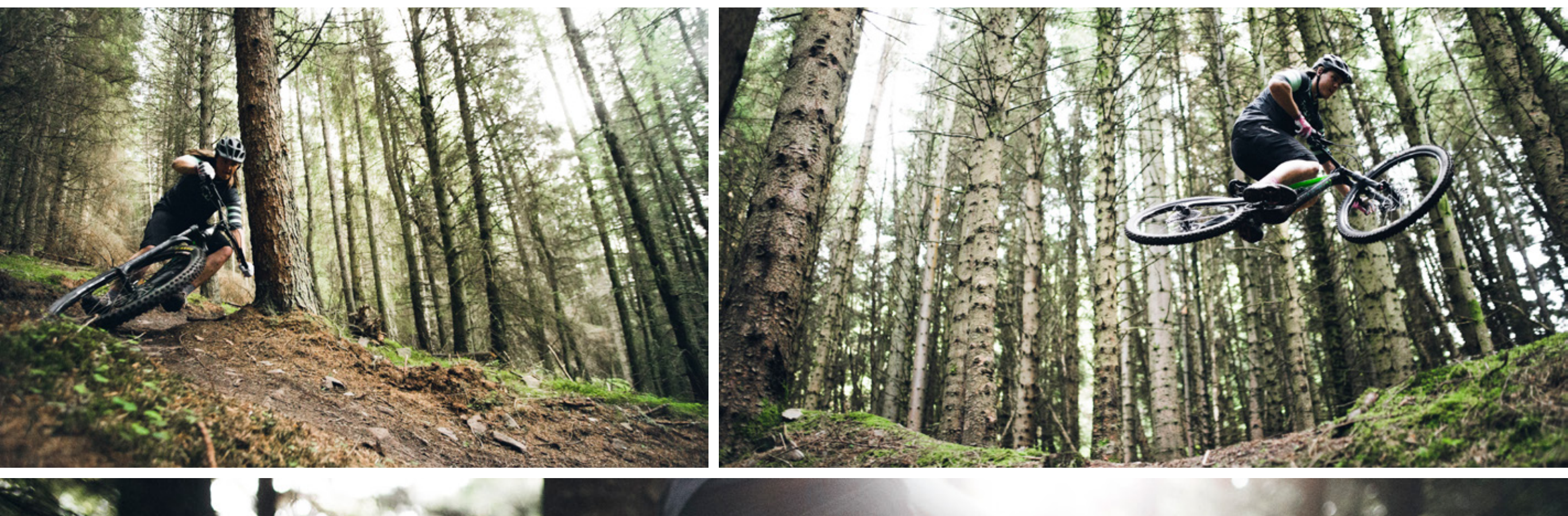
TRAVEL 160/160 MM

The Marin Wolf Ridge 9 certainly looks a lot cooler in the flesh than it does in photos. The green/blue fade paint gives the bike a futuristic look, and the finish is exceptional. Like a mullet haircut, the front triangle is all business, iconically Marin, with styling cues taken directly from the Attack Trail range; at the back, however, it’s a true party. There the quirky R3ACT suspension system dominates with its huge mono-stay. Hidden inside is a large integral sliding stanchion that connects the front and rear frame structures, changing the kinematics through the stroke. Designer Darrell Voss has been playing it close to his chest when he talks about the function of the system, outwardly avoiding techno-speak. Instead, he promotes judgement based on the ride feel.

Does it work? OK, we will say it: the R3ACT mono-stay performs like nothing else we have ever ridden. From the first pedal stroke you can feel something different is going on. It’s a difficult feeling to explain, but the rear feels both connected to but also independent of rider weight. The back of the bike tracks the ground and responds to hits with a unique composure, seeming to accelerate forward with every hit. When it comes to pedalling efficiency, even fitted with a basic RockShox Monarch Debonair shock instead of the retail model’s FOX X2, the Wolf Ridge is a triumph of kinematics. Believe the hype, as this is the most efficient 160 mm bike on the market!



PUT DOWN THE POWER AND THE MARIN WOLF RIDGE STIFFENS AND HURLS YOU FORWARDS, BURSTING OUT OF CORNERS AND PUNCHING UP STEEP CLIMBS LIKE A DOG CHASING A RABBIT – IT’S ELECTRIC.



HELMET FOX FLUX  
JERSEY IXS VIBE 6.2 BC FREERIDE ¾ JERSEY  
SHORTS TROY LEE DESIGNS SKYLINE RACE SHORTS

Without any platform damping added, hammering on the pedals up a steep climb results in zero bob, wallow, or hesitation from the wide mono-stay ... just grip and brutal acceleration. Unfortunately, when seated, while the 462.2 mm reach is comfortable, the lazy 73.5 degree seat tube angle pulls on the proverbial handbrake, leaving us feeling like we were pedaling from the back seat (especially longer-legged testers). Our test model was fitted with an inline dropper post, but the retail version will be supplied with a rear offset dropper, which will only make things worse. It’s not terrible, but it’s a shame that the R3ACT is not working to its full potential.

Efficient climbing is only half the equation, however. Good suspension needs to be wrapped in potent geometry to really exploit the downs, especially with 160 mm of travel. It’s here where the impressive rear suspension performance proves to be somewhat of an Achilles’ heel for the Wolf Ridge. The rear suspension is SO good that you want more from the bike. The excitable handling of the Wolf Ridge 9 is incredibly accurate, darting from line to line outrageously quickly and changing direction faster than a UK politician. Off-camber lines can be hit with razor-sharp accuracy and when shown some tight radiuses it will cut a line through them like a surgeon. Ultimately, all the geometry qualities that make the bike so impressively nimble and playful mean that when white-knuckling down rough trails, it needs a racer’s mindset and big skills to hold rugged lines at full speed.



AS AN AGGRESSIVE TRAIL BIKE, IT’S UNQUESTIONABLY AN INCREDIBLY POTENT TOOL, BUT AS A ONE-BIKE-TO-RULE-ALL IT DOESN’T QUITE DELIVER.



The Wolf Ridge delivers 180 mm bike potential channeled through a chassis that feels borrowed from a 140 mm bike. While we wouldn’t say that a 66.5 degree head angle is steep, a degree or so less may have calmed the enthusiastic handling and provided a better match for the rear (a George Foreman to its Muhammed Ali). We know the RockShox Lyrik RCT3 160 mm is a powerful fork, so we were surprised when it felt constrained. Overall, we would love to see what the R3ACT would be capable of in a more aggressive package. Also, for those who live on very rocky trails we would not recommend the Marin, as the belly hangs low, and we picked up chips to the carbon within the first ride. Only time will tell if the R3ACT system is as durable as claimed.

### CONCLUSION

The Marin Wolf Ridge left us at a quandary. In many ways the bike is a revelation, leagues ahead of the competition. It’s so damn efficient you could race an XC World Cup on this thing. As a trail bike, it’s extremely rapid and delivers sharp and engaging handling at any speeds. Whether this makes it a great bike depends a lot on where you live and what you ride. However, marketed as the one bike to do it all, it does need rider skill to push hard. The R3ACT system has taken Marin to the next level, but to unleash its full potential the geometry needs to step up too.

- Class-leading efficiency
- Insanely good cornering

TOPS

FLOPS

- Lazy seat tube angle
- Exposed underbelly

MARIN WOLF RIDGE 9

PRICE €6,999

WEIGHT 14.13 KG

TRAVEL 160/160 MM

MEHR INFO

