

MARIN PINE MOUNTAIN 1

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LANCE PILBROW



Plus size hardtails seem to be cropping up everywhere these days. Initially thought by many to be just another marketing fad, many thought that the general public would see through this ploy to play on our unhealthy addiction to anything that is new and different. Others of staunch old-school tradition thought they would quickly fade into obscurity in much the same way as they thought full-suspension, disc brakes and those weird up and downy seat posts would... But like those, plus bikes are here, and probably here to stay.

Back in issue 78 we reviewed the more upmarket Marin Pine Mountain 2. It sported Columbus Thron steel tubing, a Fox 34 fork, a full XT drivetrain, a KS dropper post and stylish NAILD rear dropout. But it cost three and a half thousand dollars, and despite being a superb bike to ride and receiving widely positive reviews that's simply more than many people want to spend on a bike. Enter the Pine Mountain 1. Steel frame – check. Massive tyres – check. Price tag – \$1499. That is a price that is going to appeal to a lot of the market.

So what do you get for your money? First of all it's a double butted steel frame (which simply means that it's thinner in the middle and thicker at the ends where it's welded to other tubes), but handily it's the 'Boost' standard, which theoretically gives you a stronger wheel. The fork is a RockShox Recon 120mm with compression/lockout and a rebound adjuster. You get an 11 speed SLX shifter and derailleur and Deore disc brakes, and of course those massive tyres – Schwalbe 2.8" Nobby Nics. Some of the other pieces are less 'brand-name'. You get a Sun-race cassette, JoyTech hubs, and a Marin branded crank, but at \$1500 that's not surprising. Geometry wise the Pine Mountain has a 69 degree head angle, 73.5 seat angle and a 441mm reach on our size large. For our 5'11 test rider the large felt spot on.

To be sure, plus-sized bikes aren't targeted at people wanting XC race machines and the geometry reflects this. Out on the trail it feels comfortable, neutral, and confident.

Sometimes review bikes are on a tight schedule. Often being used as demo fleets, or simply getting shuttled around various publications, you are just getting used to a bike and it needs to be boxed up and sent on its way. Not so with this Marin; we had the good pleasure of being able to thoroughly test this bike over a full five months. What this allowed us to do was really log some serious miles on the Marin in a wide variety of conditions and see where things started to come unstuck. First of all, all those 'cheaper' no-name components mentioned earlier. You don't have to worry about them. The Sun-race cassette shifted just fine the entire test, the hubs haven't needed any attention, and the crankset is still cranking.

So five months in what have we noticed? First of all – we are unashamed to say our love affair with plus-sized hardtails continues. We can't necessarily say the same for full suspension bikes, but when it comes to hardtails this 'plus' thing really works. After a wet summer, followed by a wet autumn, we have been riding in a lot of sloppy conditions to say the least, and here the plus tyres are simply in another league all together. You will find yourself riding with confidence in conditions you would otherwise be cautious in. The Nobby Nics have a widely spaced tread, which provided outstanding grip in all conditions but was particularly noticeable in the wet. Their tread pattern also maximizes their mud-shedding ability, which is good because when a tire this big clogs up it gets very heavy.

Other stand-out components were the Deore brakes. Despite being one of the lower-ranked Shimano products we were impressed with their ability to throw the anchors out and haul the Marin down to speed – no doubt aided by the traction on offer.

The RockShox Recon fork also performed smoothly throughout the test, however the Recon lacks the finer tuneability and damping of more expensive options. Overall though, all the components performed at least as well as could be expected relative to the overall cost of the bike.

If there was one thing we would add on our wish list it would be for the inclusion of a dropper post. Buying dropper posts after-market is akin to burning money. You can expect to pay around \$400 or more, which seems ridiculous when a whole bike costs just \$1500.



LEFT TO RIGHT:

- SLX SHIFTER AND DERRAILER PROVIDE SMOOTH SHIFTING.
- DEORE BRAKES MAY BE LOWER SPEC BUT PACK A SURPRISING AMOUNT OF POWER.
- THE STEEL FRAME STILL HAS PLENTY OF ROOM FOR MUD CLEARANCE DESPITE THE MASSIVE 3.0" SCHWALBE TYRES. BRAZE-ON'S ALSO MEANS IT'S A READY TO TAKE A RACK FOR YOUR BIKE PACKING ADVENTURES





PINE MOUNTAIN 1	
FRAME	Double Butted CrMo, 27.5+
FORK	RockShox Recon Silver RL 27.5+, 120mm Travel,
CRANKSET	Marin Forged Alloy 1x10, Narrow-Wide 32T Chainring,
REAR DERAILLEUR	Shimano SLX
SHIFT LEVERS	Shimano SLX Deore 1x11
CASSETTE	Sunrace 11-Speed, 11-42T
BOTTOM BRACKET	External Sealed Cartridge Bearings
CHAIN	KMC X11L
HUBS	Joytech, 141x9mm/110x15mm
RIMS	Marin Aluminum Double Wall, 40mm Inner, Tubeless Compatible
TYRES	Schwalbe Nobby Nic, 27.5"x2.9"
BRAKES	Shimano BR-M506 Hydraulic Disc, 180mm/160mm Rotors
HANDLEBAR	Marin Mini-Riser, Aluminum, 15mm rise, 780mm width
STEM	Marin 3D Forged Alloy
PRICE	\$1499
SUPPLIED BY	Bikes International

Fortunately there are many cheaper options of dropper post coming to the market now and many brands offering their own-brand dropper post too, so hopefully Marin can include that in future models without increasingly the price too wildly. But like disc-brakes, our riding tastes have been refined to expect dropper posts now, and it's hard to go back!

The other interesting thing about having this bike on a longer term test was our ability to allow a wider range of testers to throw a leg over it and see what they thought. Universally riders came back with positive comments. Of particular note was the comments made by riders who had very little riding experience. They often commented that they were surprised how confident they felt riding it and how much fun they had on the ride overall. This was just as we expected. When it comes to shopping for a entry-level to mid-range hardtail we would have to have a very good reason to suggest to someone not to buy a plus-sized option. For a minor weight penalty you gain improvements in almost every other factor (traction, comfort, braking performance, overall confidence) that makes mountain biking the fun that it is.

We said in our review of the Pine Mountain 2 and it still applies here, from a trail riding perspective there

are a few other significant benefits that should be mentioned. Quite simply, simplicity is an underrated value in mountain biking. How many pivots need servicing on this bike? Nil. How often do you have to service the rear shock? Never. There is a certain attraction in going back to a somewhat 'basic' style of bike.

At literally half the price of the superb Pine Mountain 2 (which we understand sold-out throughout NZ) the Pine Mountain 1 represents many of the same things we loved about the PM2 in a much more affordable package. To borrow airline terminology, if the PM2 is the 'business class' option, the PM1 is firmly in 'economy' but almost proudly so.

Do bikes twice as expensive go twice as fast? No. Do they last twice as long? Definitely not. Are there many things you can do on a bike twice the price that you can't on one half as much? Not really. So for many people we expect the \$1500 price tag represents a very appealing price point at which to get into the game, and the Pine Mountain 1 represents a bike that is going to offer a lot of enjoyment – and maybe even at a price than was less than you thought would have to spend.