

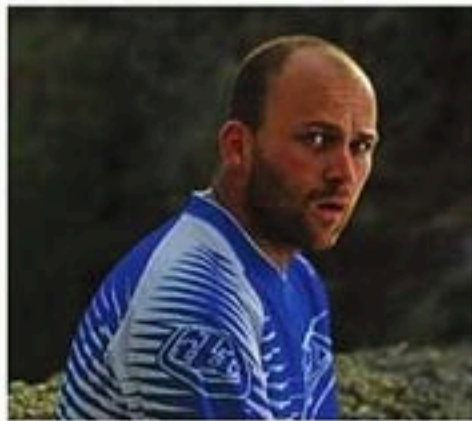
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TEST 2

SS REFINEMENT
FASHIONS A NEW
ERA WITH AND
WITHOUT A LABEL

If you went down the lazy stereotype road, our other featured bike in this issue, the Karpel, could be viewed as a slightly pale, hard and relatively cheap bike. What then this crazy Californian? Buff, tanned and healthy? Or an overweight stoner?

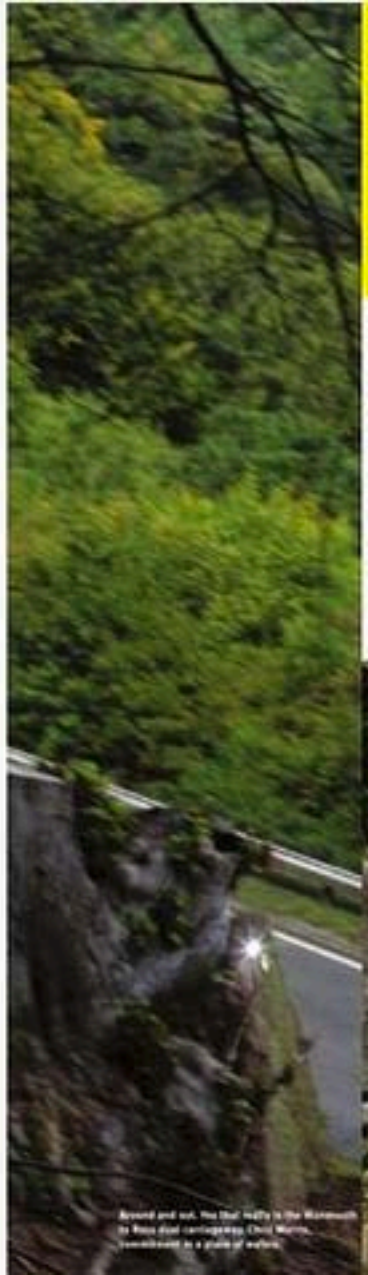
INTENSE SLOPESTYLE 2 TEST



Chris Morris. Slopestyle. Always slopestyle.



Low down, real low down.



Round and out. The dual wally is the Warnow in Rize dual carriage. Chris Morris, commitment is a grade of water.



Six inches of travel has come to sit in a strange place in the UK. On the one hand it is viewed as a 'once a year overseas bike' and on the other is seen as 'too much travel for UK trail riding'. If only it was that simple. The idea of 'park' riding complicates things even further, as many people believe we don't have such places. I suggest those people get out of the house a bit more.

Interesting nevertheless to compare popular 160mm bikes in the UK that range from the spectacular Specialized Enduro sporting a 66° head angle, 46.6" wheelbase and 26lb weight, to the slightly heavier but similarly angled Orange Alpine at 32lb. They have pretty much led the do-it-all bikes up until now, with the 2010 Scott Voltage hanging around the fringes with less trail but more air and big hit potential.

Now in its second incarnation, the Slopestyle, weighing in at 32lb with 'slopestyle specific' geometry, is still pretty close to that Orange and Spesh, just a bit more chunky, just a bit more agile due to exceptional low stand over height. There has been a repositioning of the pivot and upper shock mount too, but still it's very clear that the SS is a bike for hooning around on and a gap exists for more bikes like this here in the UK if people would only chill out and stop comparing it with other 160mm travel bikes built for competition enduro racing or Alpine riding. Yes, this bike could do both if it was lightened for the former, and is certainly a match for the Alpine in terms of hardcore descending.

Initially I truly believed that I loved this bike for all the wrong reasons - I took it trail riding. To make it the uncompromising 'mid-travel bike built for uplifting on mellower downhill trails' the heavy tyres had come off to relieve it of its 35lb weight and make it more lively. Yes, it still needs to be strong to use its travel, and you still need power to climb it or a skilled technician to put it where slightly longer travel bikes go at higher speed. It dawned on me that the SS is very much like the old Enduro of '05 vintage. Only better.




ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHT

SS2 by james ferguson, on Flickr



On the flat and on the downs it's balanced, similarly off the ground. Speed of acceleration is immense, and as soon as the ground dips the bike becomes so much more animated than many so-called mini DH bikes. Strangely the SS climbs capably too due to the means by which power is transferred. The rear travel needs time spending to get the bike working, you have to think/feel your way on the downs as there is a danger of charging wildly into sections expecting DH type cushioning that simply doesn't exist. Stable geometry and steering is outstanding.

Whilst many riders might well go shorter travel for slopestyle tricking the SS is still an amazing play bike whose greatest strengths are in the park and uplift based riding. It also has the potential to be a sharp 160mm bruiser or... well, there are those two to three hour trail rides I've been doing pretty easily, so I'm now thinking about dropping the weight even further and... this could well be the bike for doing everything? It's easy to stick most bikes into a certain category, Intense themselves have given a bold labelling to this bike, but then here is the very machine that doesn't need this. In fact it's the best Intense I've ridden in ten years. And that's it, designed for a healthy dose of hedonism, the Enduro has been replaced by the Slopestyle. So much for stereotypes. 



One special bike