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DOWNHILL

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# downhill

## Intense M9

**Price** \$3,000 (with Cane Creek rear shock)

**Price Range** \$2,950–\$3,000

**Weight** 37 pounds (as shown)

**Final Take** Unforgiving speedmetal riffs that left us feeling like the headliners at a Clash of the Titans concert. Not for jazz-handed line dancers or clean-cut teenyboppers.

The Intense M9 is to bicycles what Slayer and Sepultura are to speedmetal. It is like being assaulted with double-bass drums, tearing amphetamine-fueled riffs and screaming chainsaw vocals, all while punching the speakers until your ears bleed and your knuckles are raw.

The Intense M9 is the latest in Jeff Steber's long line of thoroughbred downhill race machines, and the caliber and reputation of this bike preceded it. We opened the box like excited little children, but as soon as the bike was built up we felt like it was time to man up—this thing *screams* speed.

Every one of our testers exclaimed loudly that this bike made them noticeably faster on our test track. It not only felt comfortable at high speeds, it also willed each of us to continuously push our limits. The Intense got up to speed freakishly fast and wanted to stay there. It was a wild ride that got the heart racing and the adrenaline flowing, yet somehow didn't feel scary or intimidating. It simply felt as if the bike was helping us go faster than we previously thought we could.

The Intense blew over trail ordnance that, on other bikes, had testers second-guessing their line choices. The Boxxer World Cup and Cane Creek Double Barrel suspension that we bolted to this custom build did an exceptional job, but the geometry (we ran the headtube at 64 degrees—the supplied Cane Creek AngleSet headset allows for further adjustment) and super-stiff frame need applause too. Our test bike came coated in a thick layer of dragon's-blood paint, that complemented the detail in the craftsmanship of the frame. Rather than big swoopy hydroformed tubes, as is the popular trend in frame design, the M9 frame looks like it was made with pure industrial purpose in mind.

This bike taunted us to take risks, wreak havoc and ride with a devil-may-care attitude. On many bikes, you're forced to push and squeeze every last ounce of performance out of the rig. A spin on the Intense, on the other hand, leaves you feeling as if the bike itself has unlimited potential and that if there's a weak link in the equation, it's probably your skill set that's to blame.

The M9 is a true World Cup-level race bike. If you want to go fast, this is the bike to have.



Simple as that. The Intense is unapologetic in its single-mindedness to get to the bottom of the track in the most brutally honest way possible, laying waste to the trail and leaving the rider wide eyed and gacked up on thrills in the process.

For these same reasons, the Intense is not, perhaps, the ideal bike for the all-rounder or the less committed of downhillers. The M9, for instance, proved a bit of a handful on tighter terrain. It is not a lightweight machine and that becomes clear on long, pedaling

sections and in tight switchbacks. If you downhill once in a blue moon, prefer to ride the “stunts” on the local shuttle trails or take in the view, this probably isn't the bike for you. If, however, you like to turn the view into a blurring mess of speed lines, the M9 must go to the top of your list.

Every single bike in the downhill category was thoroughly enjoyed by all the testers—there's not a dog in the bunch—but this bike made every one of us feel faster and more capable. —Seb Kemp

## tester's choice



I thought the Ibis Mojo HD was the most versatile bike of the test, despite having no cockpit levers, bells, whistles nor pre-flight checklist. The Rocky Mountain Element surprised me by being the bike I most wanted to ride inappropriately. The Tallboy still remains one of the most fun bikes I have ever ridden, and likely will go down as a classic. The Intense M9 made me feel like pummeling my eardrums with the sound of rock and root being splintered. But my favorite bike? Man, that's hard. Diving headfirst into a swimming pool full of grizzly bears would be easier. Ultimately I'd go with the Ibis Mojo HD because it looks like thunder but smells like all four seasons in one day. —Seb Kemp

From a mechanical point of view, the Santa Cruz Tallboy stands beautifully above the pack. The pivots are engineered with reliability, serviceability and aesthetics in mind. It's smart: Santa Cruz uses axles with expanding heads and conical wedges to lock them. Tightening the axle preloads the angular contact bearings (similar to adjusting a headset), and installing the wedge expands the head of the axle, keeping it from backing out. Plus, they thread cleanly into the drive-side links from the non-drive side, which means there's no need to remove the crank (or anything else for that matter) to perform a complete pivot overhaul. Thanks Santa Cruz, from mechanics everywhere. —Ryan Palmer

With all of these bikes to choose from, you'd think picking a winner would be hard. It really wasn't. On gut-check wow-factor, and considering the kind of riding I like to do these days—noodling up the trail at a leisurely pace with friends and then having fun on the downhills—I had to choose the Scott Genius LT. It is comfortable on the climbs and sure-footed on the descents. It is well-balanced in the air, and its handling when thrown into turns is nothing less than inspiring. Riding it is like bringing a machine gun to a knife fight. I can't wait to ride it again. But to avoid further target fixation, the Cannondale Jekyll Ultimate, Rocky Mountain Element MSL and Jamis Dakota D29 all deserve a sincere nod. —Joe Parkin



It wasn't hard for me to choose a favorite from our quiver—my favorite chose me. I'm still adjusting to life without Vancouver's North Shore at my disposal, and it's true, I'm really a downhill at heart. Now that I've traded in the wet roots and rocks of the Shore for the golden hills of Southern California, I've been lusting after a bike that can truly be pedaled anywhere, but will rip the trail to shreds when pointed downhill. The Banshee Spitfire is just that bike. Every time I throw my leg over it, excuses melt away and anything seems possible. It's true that lust has now turned into love, and it doesn't look like I'll be getting off the Spitfire anytime soon.

—Anthony Smith

With so many bikes designed for such a variety of conditions, it's really hard to choose an overall favorite. But if I were to pick the bike that brought out the broadest spectrum of emotions, it would have to be the Intense M9—a speed demon that could help even the most derelict of trailer-park trash kick their meth habits. The M9 is so relentlessly fast it forced me to ride outside of my comfort zone, and in the process I almost kept up with Seb and Anthony on our downhill track. For all-around trail riding, however, I'd be hard-pressed to choose between my two other great loves: the Santa Cruz Tallboy and the Rocky Mountain Element MSL. —Brice Minnigh

I thought this "pick your favorite bike" exercise would be easy. Surely one bike would just haul off and lay the pimp hand down on every other model in this month-long test. The truth? It was a bitter dogfight, with some models out-climbing the pack and others killing it on the descents. Still, if I had to pick just one bike, it would be Rocky Mountain's new Slayer. The bike does everything well. North Shore-style downhills? Cross-country death marches? Somehow the Slayer manages both like a champ. It scoots up climbs with gobs of traction and makes me feel far more competent on descents than I could ever hope to be. Light, burly, well-executed—this is the one. —Vernon Felton