



MY FIRST... MOUNTAIN BIKE



There's so many different kinds of mountain bike (mtb), from dedicated downhill, enduro and jump bikes, to more trail/cross-country (XC) bikes. It's the latter the majority use and that new riders should consider, as they can handle just about anything: road or off-road, easy gravel trails or more technical terrain. Cube's Acid hardtail (£1,199) is a great example of what to look out for...

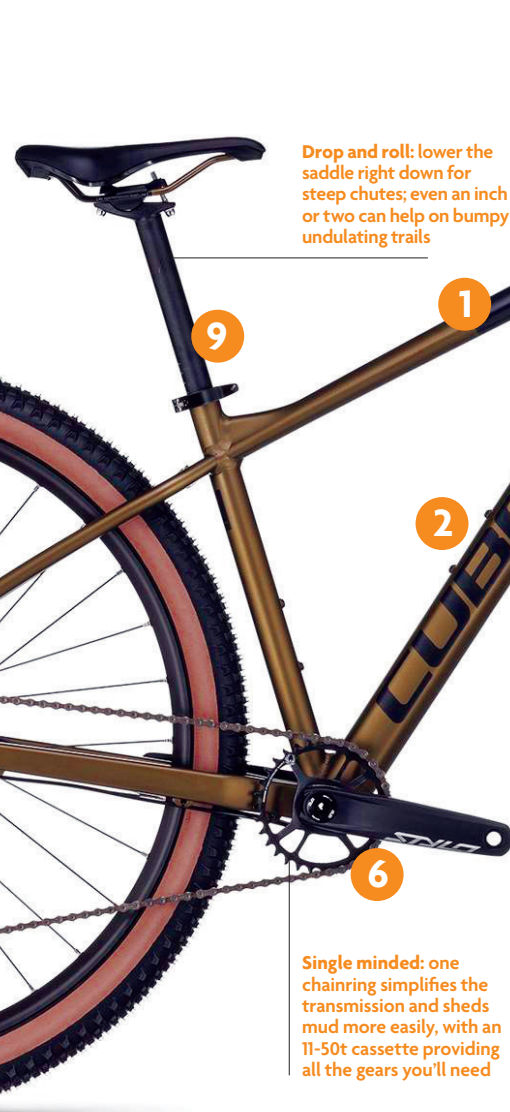
1. FRAME

There's two main types of mtb: 'full suspension' (with suspension front and rear for the very bumpiest trails) and 'hardtail' (with suspension at the front only). A good hardtail can do everything that a modern gravel bike can and more, from the daily commute to off-road bikepacking — their enduring popularity lies in that all-round versatility.

As with road bikes, top-end mtbs are made from carbon, but titanium, steel

and aluminium frames are common too. Mid-priced hardtails, like the Acid, tend to use aluminium as it's tough and, thanks to manufacturing advances, reasonably light.

Mountain bike geometry has undergone a revolution in recent years, with the designers' mantra being 'longer and slacker'. So modern mtbs now have considerably longer reach



Drop and roll: lower the saddle right down for steep chutes; even an inch or two can help on bumpy undulating trails

Single minded: one chainring simplifies the transmission and sheds mud more easily, with an 11-50t cassette providing all the gears you'll need



measurements and far slacker head angles than their predecessors — both these bring greater control and stability to the fore, particularly welcome on tough descents.

Plenty of 'standover' height and clearance for chunky tyres are also hallmarks of today's mtb.

2. MOUNTS/BOSSES

Hardtails should have mounts for two bottle cages and space for a framebag (see page 62). And ideally there will also be mounts for a rack and mudguards — the Acid has mounts for Cube's own semi-integrated carrier (2b).

3. SUSPENSION FORK

Suspension is the defining characteristic of an mtb and how much

'travel' (the amount the fork compresses/extends) you need or want depends on the type of riding you'll be doing. For general recreational trails 100mm is ideal, as on the Rockshox Judy Silver here.

Some bikes have coil springs inside the fork but, more commonly, they use air and pressure is set using a small shock pump. A bonus feature of the Acid's fork is that it has a 'lockout' feature (3b), remotely controlled by a switch on the bars, that firms up the suspension for road sections or fireroad climbs.

4. FAT TYRES

2.3in to 2.5in width tyres are usually specced, with prominent lugs on the edge to aid cornering stability and widely-spaced knobsles to help shed mud. Smaller knobsles are generally faster and best in drier conditions.

5. BIG WHEELS

Most hardtails now use 29in wheels, though 27.5in are used on smaller frame sizes, with rims often 25-30mm wide to best suit those fat tyres. 32 spokes provide extra strength (racers opt for 28 or even 24).

6. LOW GEARS

A single chainring, with 32 or 34 teeth, is de rigueur; the days of the front derailleur are long gone, so you'll only find one gear shifter on the bars. Meanwhile cassettes just keep getting bigger, with dinner plate-sized inner rings (50t pictured) to cope with steep uphill.

7. DISC BRAKES

Hydraulic disc brakes are now found on even cheap bikes and offer incredible 'one finger' stopping power even in awful weather conditions. Note the bigger disc rotors too — usually 180mm front and 160mm rear.

8. WIDE BARS

Compared to narrow (400-460mm) road bike bars, mtb bars can seem monstrous (700-800mm is normal). But the added steering control they provide, especially on jarring, rugged terrain, really does inspire confidence.

9. SEATPOST

Many hardtails come with a standard seatpost and a quick-release seatpost collar, allowing you to drop the saddle for steep chutes or long challenging descents. Upgrading to a 'dropper' seatpost when your skills improve allows you to do that as you ride (the Acid has integral routing for cables).

