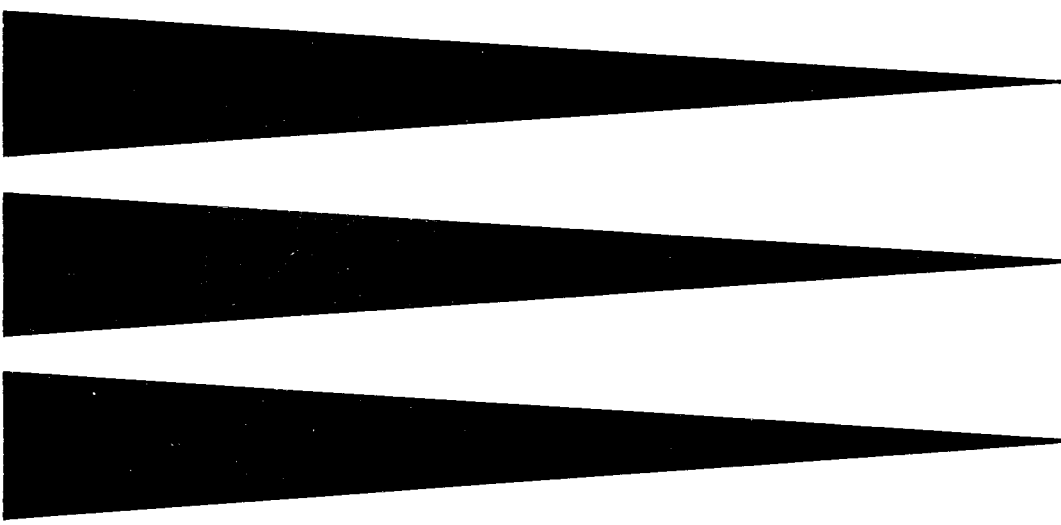




SLINGSHOT LOWERS THE BOOM IN 91



R A C E B I K E S

BOOM TUBE™



SPECIFICATIONS

U.S. Patent 4669747
U.S. Patent 4792150

HEAD ANGLE 71°

SEAT ANGLE 73°

SIZES AVAILABLE 14", 16", 18", 20"

FRAME WEIGHT 4½ lbs.

MOUNTAIN BIKE ACTION

SLING SHOT

*A newer version of
something still new*

Of all the mountain bikes on the market today, it's pretty hard to separate any two as being totally different from the other. That is, of course, unless you're comparing any other mountain bike with a Slingshot. While mountain bikes generally mimic one another in some way, Slingshot's suspension bikes have remained virtually unique. Is it because they are so odd that no other company will give the design a try? Is it because the design doesn't work? Is it an anti-Michigan thing? The only answer that we're sure of is that the made-in-Michigan design does work. The last time we tested a Slingshot we made reference to the bike's marketability for the recreational set. Since that time the boys at Slingshot have proven us wrong. With Utah's Martin Stenger as a hired gun, the Slingshot has an impressive finish record in major NORBA events.

For 1991 "suspension" will be the buzzword of the industry. Many of the big names in mountain biking will be releasing bikes with some type of suspension system. What was that? Did you hear that? Suspension will be the in thing for '91. You can hear the yawn from some small bike shop in Michigan reverberating from shore to shore. While the expected advertising will no doubt be touting this upcoming suspension revolution, people should know that Slingshot has been offering their system for the last four years. Of course, it's not a conventional system, and for a citizenry bred on the conventional it's no surprise that the Slingshot isn't more well known.

THE OBVIOUS QUESTION

What happened to the downtube? Your eyes aren't deceiving you—it is missing. In its place is a steel cable which is one part (of three) that actuates the suspension. The

idea behind the Slingshot flies in the face of traditional theory that a bike must be as stiff as possible to avoid power-robbing frame flex. A Slingshot not only provides a suspended ride but also a system that retains the energy that is put into the frame with each pedal stroke. With this theory the rider is able to get more power out of each pedal stroke. Steep climbs and bumpy flats are where the Slingshot excels.

Our careful eyes tell us that the Slingshot has gone through some refinements over the last two seasons. Though the system retains the single coil spring of the older model, it's no longer found inside the top tube. With the new model the tension cable has been relocated to the head tube junction and the coil spring now finds a home on top of the bottom bracket, essentially turned upside-down from before. This design change not only pares some weight off and smooths the operation of the spring by providing a straighter pull but also minimizes leverage on the coil spring so that there will be less unwanted spring action.

STILL MORE SUSPENSION

Besides the coil spring and tension cable, the Slingshot also utilizes a 3M Scotchply fiberglass spring at the top tube/seat tube junction. This spring acts like a hinge and keeps the frame from snapping in half. The new model now uses what is called a U-spring on the underside of the fiberglass spring. The thick metal strap prolongs the life of the 3M unit and eliminates half the normal twist of the fiberglass piece. The hinge is replaceable if broken—although we didn't break ours, we tested it severely when we decided to take off the tension cable, just to see what would happen! The boys at Slingshot were totally silenced when we asked about doing this afterwards. A chant of "Why? Why? Why?" was heard over the phone, then they came right out and pleaded with us to not repeat the act. Riding the bike without the tension cable is dangerous to both the frame and the rider—so just say no!

The 26-pound bike (the 19-inch frame weighed 5.25 pounds) uses a mixture of True Temper RC and RCX tubing. The latter, used in the seat stays and bottom top tube, is a lighter-gauge tube. As with any suspension bike frame angles will alter under load. Like so many other bikes the Slingshot shares a 71-degree head and 73-degree seat angle. A healthy 23-inch top tube is mated to 16-3/8-inch chainstays.

SLINGSHOT OR BOOMERANG?

For the going price of \$1800 you can get a Slingshot built up and ready to ride. Our test bike was outfitted with a SunTour XC Pro gruppo with Dia-Compe 986 brakes. This is a performance setup and all the test riders came away pleased with how they worked. Sun Chinook rims are mounted with good old-fashioned Specialized Ground Control tires. Despite their newer Extreme version and the aggressive advertising of other tire companies, the original Ground Control tire remains one of the best for all-around applications.

Out on the trail the Slingshot came away with nothing but positive reviews ranging from mild to excited. One test rider admitted to being leery before the ride, cautious at first, and loving it by the end. He couldn't get over how much smoother the bike was compared to his rigid steel bike. Others were also cautious at first because the bike does react differently than a rigid bike when limits are pushed. Descending on a bumpy fire road brought a brief moment of fear for one rider when the front end felt like it "jumped forward." However, once the test riders became more familiar with the ride they grew more accepting of it. Another test rider said that he experienced a similar situation when he mounted Rock Shox on his bike. He did like the idea of having a suspended ride without adding any extra weight to the bike.

Once again the Slingshot got good grades from the wrecking crew. Its biggest detractor is still its appearance. People will react on looks alone. We thought about letting people ride a Slingshot and a regular bike over the same course blindfolded to get an unbiased reaction. Surprisingly, no one took us up on the challenge. Slingshots will continue to have a hard sell based on their appearance, but once ridden they should be an eager buy. □



**ASK THE
MAN WHO
RIDES ONE
MARTIN
STENGER**



Up and up: Martin Stenger has been racing Slingshots for two years and he's had excellent results against some of the top riders and bikes in the land. We agree with Martin that the Slingshot works especially well when climbing. ▶

• MBA: How long have you been racing the Slingshot, and what did you think of them when you first saw one?

Martin: I started racing for them two years ago. I'm sure like everyone else I couldn't figure it out at first because it's so

different. It didn't seem like it would work, or at least until I gave it a try.

MBA: So what did you think about the ride?

Martin: It's really responsive. It feels soft at first, but then you get into a rhythm with

the suspension. It's really more biomechanical, like Bio-Pace chainrings, which makes for a much different ride. A lot of people think that a bike should be stiff, especially laterally, but each bike has an elastic property where it acts like a spring—stiff bikes are just stiff springs. With the Slingshot you can dial in the spring rate to your weight. Most bikes flex an eighth-inch to a quarter-inch and my bike flexes to just over a half-inch.

MBA: Does it ever get scary on downhills?

Martin: No. It never gets out of control. No speed wobbles or swapping. You have to get used to it moving around a little bit more. I had my best time ever at the Kamikaze last year and that's after racing a Yeti the year before.

MBA: What do you think of rigid bikes now and could you go back to riding one?

Martin: Rigid bikes don't handle as well. On a regular bike I slide out in corners and spin out when climbing. That's where the design works best, in climbing. You don't have to try to make the frame work, it just smooths out the transfer of power to the ground. See, your weight is oscillating as you go through your pedal stroke. At the maximum power leverage the Slingshot stores energy when your cranks are in the 5 o'clock position and returns the power around 7 o'clock. The bike's lateral flex works as a spring, too, and it also returns during the pedal stroke. •

National #10

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