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PARK PRE HAMMER

No holds barred



Going for broke: Thanks to the Shimano DX upgrade on shifter and brake levers, the Park Pre works better than your typical Shimano LX bike. The geometry on our test Hammer was the steepest production head angle we've ever tested. The brochure claimed 72°, but the bike was 73°. That's steep!

■ You've probably never heard of Park Pre Bicycles, but if the Hammer is an example of their workmanship you will soon. The Park Pre Hammer is a \$590 off-road bicycle that has features normally found on \$1000-and-up iron. Park Pre has only been building production mountain bikes for one year, but before that they were a supplier of forks, cast lugs and miscellaneous bike bits to other bike manufacturers. Using their years of interaction with the American marketers and Taiwanese bike builders, Park Pre decided that they could do a better job than the big names they were working for. The result is a four-bike lineup comprised of the Catalina city bike, Catalyst trail bike, Hammer off-road bike and the upper-end \$950 Sledgehammer.

PRODUCTION FRAME WORTH SPENDING TIME WITH

A close look at the Tange MTB chromoly frame will reveal construction touches that rival the best of the custom builders. The cable guides are slotted, sleek and form-fitting to the top tube (although the front derailleur cable does run under the bottom bracket). Normally on under-\$600 bikes you find cable guides that are pieces of slotted tubing welded with a blob on the top tube. Not so the Park Pre Hammer.

The Hammer's seat cluster is an impressively designed work of art. The seatpost slips into the cluster via an investment cast lug that functions as a reinforcing collar for the seat tube, rear brake cable hanger, fast-back seat stay lug and seatpost binder mount. The rear brake hanger is among the cleanest rear brake routing systems we've ever seen.

Tange MTB chromoly tubing, which has been the workhorse tubing of the off-road industry for the last seven years, is TIG-welded together with what we can only assume are good welds. We can only guess because the TIG welds have been fillet-finished. Extra material is applied over the welds, filed, sanded and polished to give the Park Pre the look of a fillet frame. A few years ago a fillet frame was considered to be the ultimate construction technique. In the rush to mass-produce frames, most of the time-consuming fillet artistry has been abandoned. The Park Pre is one of the few production bikes still harkening back to the sleek welds of the old days. Classy touch.

Beefy 1.125-inch curved and slightly tapered fork blades are enhanced by Park

PARK



Model: Park Pre—Hammer.
Price: \$590.
Frame sizes: 15", 17", 19", 21".
Gruppo: Shimano Deore LX.
Manufacturer: Park Pre Bicycles, 5245 Kazuko Ct., Moorpark, CA 93021; (805) 529-5865.

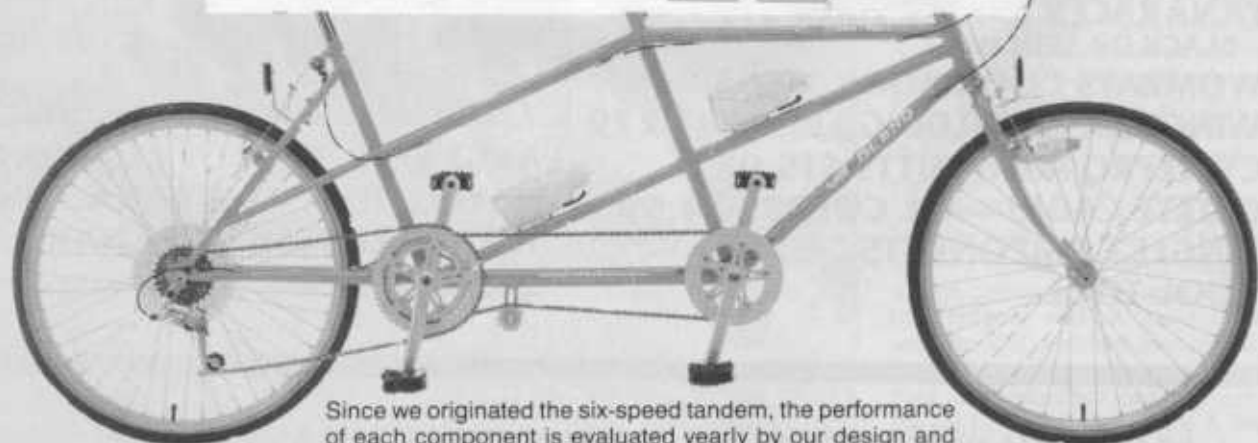
Pre's own investment cast cantilever bosses and Koski-style front dropouts. Other nice touches in the chassis department are an ovalized seat tube at the bottom bracket,

chromoly stem (with double binder bolts for the handlebars), moderate tire clearance for mud riding, good-quality paint, double water bottle mounts and very sturdy rear dropouts.

NEXT GE

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COMPONENT COMPATIBILITY

We hate Shimano LX shifters and brake levers. That may seem harsh, but it is a relative statement. When you compare the quality of the upper-end Shimano XT and DX components to the LX parts, you can easily build up a small grudge. A quick glance at the Park Pre will reveal Shimano LX derailers (front and rear), LX cranks and LX cantilever brakes. It is a foregone conclusion that LX shifters and plastic brake levers will follow suit. Not so! The Park Pre boys upgraded the shifters and brake levers to Shimano DX parts. Awesome!

With DX brake levers and DX under-the-bar shifters in place, the LX derailleurs work with an air of superiority over their namesake brethren. Park Pre should receive kudos and laurels for spec'ing the Hammer with the DX upgrade.

Tires are aggressive-looking and decent-performing 2.0 Blubber Comps slipped over lower-end Araya RX-7 rims (in a functional silver color) and laced to Shimano LX hubs.

IT'S A WELL-BUILT PIECE

There is no doubt that the Park Pre is a well-built piece of equipment, but how does it ride? It didn't take ten feet before the first test rider came back to ask for a few adjustments. In the ensuing weeks every test rider wanted to make changes to the Park Pre's setup. Most asked for a shorter stem. The stock 4.75-inch-reach stem is long, and there is no doubt that the Hammer would be bet-

ter suited with a considerably shorter arm. Second on the request list was to have the Avocet saddle slid farther back on its rails. Our 18.5-inch frame (measured center to top of top tube) had a 22.5-inch top tube length, 11.5 inches of ground clearance, 16.9-inch chainstays and 1.7 inches of fork offset. We'd slide the saddle back and agree that it needed a shorter stem when test riders asked for one, but we never told them why the Park Pre had them in a quandary—but we knew!

The Park Pre has the steepest head angle of any off-road bike we have tested. The 73-degree head angle is steeper than the 72.5-degree seat angle. Combine the steep, upright head angle with a long stem, 1.7-inch fork offset, medium-length top tube, ultra-short 41-inch wheelbase and the result is a twitch-o-matic. What the test riders felt, and were trying to compensate for, was the radically aggressive steering response. The Hammer wants to turn. It tucks under when you whip it, snaps from root to rock on single-track and demands respect on downhill of even the most modest incline.

It would be easy to say that this is a jammers' bike, but it's more than that. It's a road bike. More than likely the Park Pre had no intention of making the frame this steep. If they did, they are riding at a plateau far above mortal man. Park Pre planned the Hammer to have a reasonable, but still ultra-steep, 72 degrees. They promise that the



Rear brake: No chintzy cable guides for the Hammer. Park Pre used a special casting that doubles as a seat tube reinforcer, fast-back seat stay mount and built-in rear brake cable guide.

glitch on our test bike will be fixed before they unleash a production run on the trails of America.

This bike is too well made to be held back by an anomaly on the production-line jig. Park Pre claims, and we believe that they will follow through on it, that all production-line Hammers have a 72-degree head angle. The results would instantly make the Park Pre Hammer one of the best buys in off-road riding. □

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STRATOS

tall bottom bracket, a 22.75-inch top tube, a 16.9-inch chainstays and a 41.75-inch wheelbase.

As usual, setup on the Rocky Mountain was spot on. Made in Japan, the frames are sent to Canada where they are aligned and assembled. The 32-spoke wheels are all hand-built by Wheeltech and use 14-gauge DT spokes with Wolber AT-18 rims. Ritchey Megabite tires are the rubber choice. The Stratos has good wheel clearance up front and fair clearance in the rear.

CANADIAN ROCKIES

Every time we get a Rocky Mountain to test it ends up getting pretty well abused. As with all the others, the Stratos did a good job in standing up to the wrecking crew. The bike is a bit pricey for the Shimano Deore DX gruppo, but you're not getting the usual made-in-Taiwan mountain bike, either. With the advantage of the sloping top tube, shorter riders were able to ride the bike and still enjoy the longish top tube length. A 28-pound bike is light enough to throw around in the singletrack, but not so light that it gets airy on fast descents.

Rocky Mountain has a reputation with the wrecking crew of building innovative and reliable mountain bikes. The Stratos lives up to that tradition, all the while retaining the increasingly rare appearance of being an aluminum bike. □

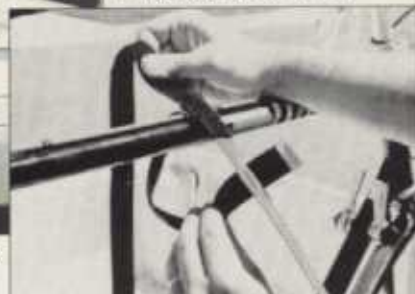
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