

## BIKE TEST



WHYTE T129S

£2000-£2500 MOUNTAIN BIKES

# One MTB for everything?

Do bigger wheels expand a trail bike's horizons or just steamroller trail centre singletrack? Editor **Dan Joyce** tests an Orange Gyro S and a Whyte T129s

▶ **TRAIL BIKES** are the mid-weight, mid-travel all-rounders of the mountain bike world. Until recently, the standard trail bike had 26-inch wheels and 130-140mm suspension travel. Now bikes with bigger wheels are gathering momentum.

The arguments for 29-inch wheels for trail use aren't overwhelming. Riding around for fun isn't simply about covering the ground as efficiently as possible, which, other things being equal, a bigger wheel will do better. Some riders enjoy the greater feedback a smaller wheel provides, or else need more suspension for drop-offs than is easy to fit around a bigger wheel. But if you're happy to trade some trail sensitivity for comfort and better rolling performance, a bigger wheeled trail bike makes sense.

The market for 29er trail bikes has been largely driven by the United States, where apparently it never rains. This test is of homegrown examples, from Orange – hand-built in Halifax – and Whyte. Both ought to be better prepared for grim UK conditions.

## Frame and fork

The Gyro has a silhouette that's unmistakably Orange. It looks like that trail centre favourite, the Orange Five, but with bigger wheels. It's not – not exactly. The bike that is, the Orange Five 29, is coming. The Gyro has only 120mm front and 110mm rear travel. It's intended more for barrelling along on than for pin-balling around trail centre black routes. The entry-level Gyro S model (£2500) is painted black as standard; this neon

orange colour adds £100.

Orange's single-pivot swing-arm is an industrial-looking design that has endured the test of time. There's only one set of bearings each side to maintain, and replacing them is a DIY job. The swing-arm has lots of room for mud – or for a fatter rear tyre, up to about 2.5in – and when it does get muddy the slab-sided design makes it easy to hose down. It doesn't suffer from chain-slap. And if Orange ever decided to produce a carbon-fibre version, this design is well suited to that material.

To be a viable alternative to suspension systems that react minimally to pedal input, any single-pivot design needs a decent shock. The Gyro S gets one: a Fox Float Evolution CTD unit, whose initials stand for



ORANGE GYRO S

Climb, Trail, and Descend. You flick a lever on top of the shock to switch between locked, damped, or fully open. The central shock position means that there's no room, and hence no mounts, for a bottle cage.

Like most modern trail bikes, the Gyro uses screw-through axles. The rear is 12×135mm rather than 12×142mm; I couldn't feel any difference in stiffness. The stubby cylindrical head tube houses a tapered-steerer fork, a 120mm Rockshox Recon solo air that won't win any bragging rights on a £2.5k bike but that works fine.

Whyte's T129s is one of a clutch of new full-suspension 29ers from the company for 2013. Instead of the twin-linkage swing-arm that's used for Whyte's 26-inch trail bikes, it uses 'Quad 4' suspension: Whyte's name for a four-bar with a chainstay pivot, like Specialized's. The change is to enable shorter chainstays to be used, together with a longer top tube and short stem.

This design philosophy is used across Whyte's bikes and it's reminiscent of Gary Fisher's 'Genesis' geometry in that it moves the rider back relative to the wheels. Like



**1** A screw-through axle makes accidental wheel ejection impossible

**2** Climb, Trail, and Descend settings make on-the-go shock adjustments obvious

Fisher, Whyte use (in 29er terms) a slacker head angle; unlike Fisher, Whyte don't use a larger offset ('G2') fork to reduce trail.

The T129s frame is rangy enough that I could fit either the small or medium size. I picked small, as the reach was closer to my own bike's and the same as the medium Gyro's. A side effect of the kinked seat tube, which allows the rear wheel to tuck in closer, is that the seatpost extends on a much shallower angle than the nominal 73.5 degrees. Riders less borderline between sizes than me might find themselves sitting too far back if they downsize, and could find the front wheel lifting on steep climbs.

The Whyte's Rockshox Monarch RT3 rear shock sits right under the top tube, so there's room even on the small for a bottle. The shock has a longer stroke than the Gyro's, meaning a smaller ratio between wheel movement and shock movement, which can't hurt its performance. It too has a lever to adjust the compression on the fly.

There are more bearings in a four-bar system compared to a single-pivot. For a bike that's ridden in British mud and grit, that's a



disadvantage. Whyte, however, offer lifetime warranties on their sealed cartridge bearings. Excellent! Speaking of mud, there's enough room in the rear triangle if you stick to tyres no bigger than 2.2in.

Like the Gyro, the T129s uses screw-through axles front and rear. The fork is a Reba, a tier higher than the Recon. It's a solo air unit too, and the performance is pretty similar.

## Equipment

The Orange is made in Britain, so the frame presumably carries a premium over the built-in-the-Far-East Whyte, limiting the budget





WHYTE T129S

for components. I've mentioned the fork. Gearing is 10-speed Shimano Deore, with a Race Face triple chainset and an SLX rear derailleur. I didn't mind this, even at £2,500. You're lucky to get a year out of chainrings, cassettes, chains and jockey wheels. Deore works fine and doesn't cost silly money to replace.

I would have preferred a compact double chainset over the triple provided. I didn't need a 42 chainring, and shifting on a triple isn't as clear cut as a double. Unfortunately, the Gyro's swing-arm position limits the maximum size of a middle chainring (triple) or outer (double). Officially, nothing bigger than a 32 is recommended. A 34 will fit.

The T129s is half a kilo lighter than the Gyro. That's essentially the difference in wheel weights, including tyres. So the Whyte has a nice reduction in rotating weight and unsprung mass, which ought to contribute to a livelier ride. The rims are tubeless ready. Currently they're shod with shallower-treaded rubber than the Gyro: Maxxis Ikon/Ardent tyres rather than grippier Continental Mountain Kings. These rolled well and seldom failed to find traction.

Gearing on the T129s is mostly Sram X9, with a compact double

38-24 chainset that I would swap for a 36-22. Brakes are the same Avid Elixir 5s as the Gyro S. One bonus addition on this £2,000 bike is the Rockshox Reverb dropper seatpost. A handlebar lever lets you lower the saddle for tricky descents and raise it back to pedalling height afterwards.

**The ride**

Both bikes feel unstoppable downhill. As well as big wheels and full suspension, they have lots of stabilising trail and long front centres. Consequently there's no anxiety about going over the bars. I logged some rides with a GPS and was unsurprised, even in wintry conditions, to post Strava 'Personal Records' on both bikes. The Gyro was quicker down a technical, switchback descent, the T129s on longer descents where I was pedalling.

In some ways, that reflects the pros and cons of the different suspension systems. The Gyro's single-pivot feels like it's more active, in a good way, when you're freewheeling. It also feels more active, in a bad way, when you're pedalling. Jerks and tugs tell you that you're sometimes working against the suspension. I wanted to flick between shock

3 The four-bar suspension is 'new'. Lifetime pivot warranty isn't

4 Press to get your saddle out of the way on difficult descents



**Also consider**



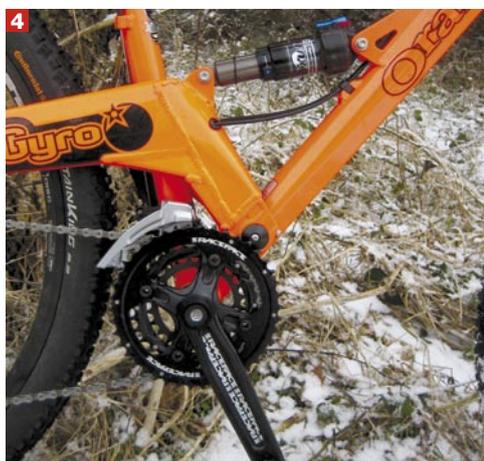
1) **Trek Rumblefish Elite £2400**  
One of the first 29er trail bikes. The 120mm Fox 32 Float fork has Fisher's G2 offset to sharpen slow speed handling. [trekbikes.com](http://trekbikes.com)



2) **Giant Trance X 29er 1 £2000**  
With its set-and-forget Maestro suspension, 120mm Fox 32 Float fork, and dropper post, a close rival to the T129s. [giant-bicycles.com](http://giant-bicycles.com)



ORANGE GYRO S



settings frequently to limit this, so would have liked a remote lever on the handlebar. If you stand up to pedal without reaching down to put the shock into Climb mode, the bike wallows. If you sit and winch, on the other hand, the Gyro climbs tenaciously, digging in where I'd normally expect to spin and stall.

The four-bar suspension of the T129s reacts very little to pedal input. So while the shock can be adjusted on the go, I tended to leave it alone and didn't miss a remote lever like I did on the Gyro. The suspension softens the vibration from choppy trails without interfering with your pedalling rhythm, so it's an easy bike on which to wind up the pace on the flat as well as downhill.

## Summary

The Gyro S is an imperturbable trail bike for the more wheels-on-the-ground rider. If you measure your fun in fast, fear-free descents and in

cleaning difficult climbs, it's well worth a test ride. I think it would be at its best in rockier terrain, like Snowdonia and the Peak District, where its big wheels won't easily be balked. It's pitched as a 'mile munching' bike too, but unless they're steady miles I'm not so sure; it feels its weight, and club rides saw me dropping off the back until the terrain tipped the right way.

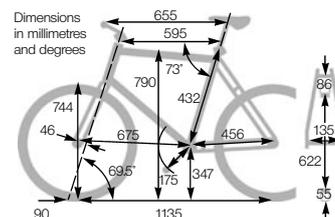
The Whyte T129s is a more engaging all-rounder. It combines the confidence-inspiring handling of the Gyro with a more refined and rewarding ride under power. On paper, this even slacker angled 29er looks like it might handle like a barge, but the short stem and wide bar keep a tight rein on the steering, while the short-at-the-back, long-at-the-front frame gives a riding position that feels poised rather than 'perched on'. It's fun and it's fast. I would have no qualms about riding it anywhere. Whyte's £1750 T129 and XC-oriented M109 look equally compelling.

**4** Orange single-pivot simplicity means durability too. (Incidentally, the neon orange paint looks redder in dim light. It's not just the camera's colour balance!)

**5** The multi-pivot Whyte is less affected by pedalling forces

## Tech specs

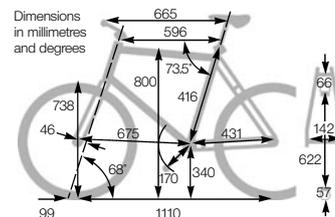
Dimensions in millimetres and degrees



### ORANGE GYRO S

**Price:** £2499.99+ **Face Ride XC**  
**Weight:** 13.94kg (inc. 376g pedals) **24-32-42 chainset, 73mm Race Face X bottom bracket.**  
**Sizes:** M, L, XL **Deore shifters, Deore front mech, SLX rear, 10-speed 11-36 cassette, 30-speed, 20-112in.**  
**Frame & fork:** 6061 aluminium main triangle. Aluminium swing-arm. Fox Float Evolution CTD shock. Rockshox Recon Gold TK solo air fork, 120mm, Maxle, tapered.  
**Wheels:** 55-622 Continental Mountain King II tyres, Mavic TN319 29er rims, 32×3 2.0mm spokes, Formula 15QR front & 12mm rear hubs.  
**Transmission:** Race **Braking:** Avid Elixir 5 disc (180f/160r).  
**Steering & seating:** Orange HotRod 700 handlebar, Race Face 70mm stem, Cane Creek tapered steerer h/set, 30.9mm Race Face seatpost, SDG Falcon saddle.  
**Contact:** orangebikes.co.uk

Dimensions in millimetres and degrees



### WHYTE T129S

**Price:** £1999.99 **12mm×142mm rear.**  
**Weight:** 13.4kg (inc. 376g pedals) **Transmission:** Sram S1400 GXP 38-24 chainset, Sram GXP bottom bracket, 10-speed 11-36 cassette. Sram X-9 shifters, X7 front derailleur, X9 rear. 20-speed, 19-100in.  
**Sizes:** S, M, L **Braking:** Avid Elixir 5 discs (180f/160r).  
**Frame & fork:** 6061 aluminium front triangle with bottle mount. Aluminium rear triangle. Rockshox Monarch RT3 shock. Reba RLT fork, 120mm, Maxle, tapered.  
**Wheels:** 56-622 Maxxis Ardent front tyre, Maxxis Ikon 57-622 rear. WTB ST119 rims, 32×3 1.8mm spokes, Whyte hubs, 15mm through-axle front, **Steering & seating:** 710mm bar, 70mm stem, FSA Orbit ZS tapered steerer h/set, 30.9mm Reverb seatpost, Whyte saddle.  
**Contact:** whytebikes.com