

## Trail hardtails

What's the most mountain biking fun you can have for £1,500 or less? Dan Joyce tests a Merida Big Trail 500 and a Voodoo Loco to try to find out

Trail hardtails are a very British kind of mountain bike. It's no coincidence that the Big Trail 500, from Taiwanese brand Merida, is described as "a UK-inspired singletrack-crushing hardtail" and that the designed-in-the-UK Voodoo Loco is billed as "a true British, steel, hardcore hardtail".

### Frame and fork

Progressive geometry has progressed a long way now. The Merida Big Trail 500 and Voodoo Loco have unsagged head angles of 64° and 63.5° respectively. With low-offset forks, the trail figures are huge, providing imperturbable steering. Wide bars and short stems give you the leverage to wrestle the bikes around corners and to counteract the increased wheel flop, where the front wheel might otherwise 'flop' more into tight turns and oversteer, or veer off course on slow climbs.

Steep seat angles – Merida 76.5°, Voodoo 75° – tip you forward and weight the front wheel, helping to prevent snowploughing on downhill corners and accidental weaving uphill. Those seat angles also mean a more upright riding position than you'd expect from the nominally long reach figures, which only show bottom bracket to head

tube distances. Short chainstays, meanwhile, make it easier to keep the front wheel up over drop-offs and to take tighter lines through corners.

The net result is a forward-biased riding position that weights the fork (and your hands) but, with a long front centres distance, minimises the likelihood of diving over the handlebar. I've written 'position' rather than 'positions' as the two bikes are very similar, despite the Voodoo's mixed ('mullet') wheel sizes. The Voodoo is slightly shorter in the chainstays and slightly longer in the top tube, while the Merida is a little taller and steeper.

The Merida's frame is aluminium, with a nice selection of fittings: two bottles (if you use side cages and small bidons) on the down tube, bolts for an under-top-tube bag, and mounts for a Merida Long Fender rear mudguard. It also has ISCG05 mounts for a chain guide.

The Voodoo has a chrome-moly steel frame finished in a lovely pearlescent racing green. There are gussets rather than flared tubing for



**Middle:** Shimano CUES is fine but it lacks the overall range and shift quality of Deore  
**Bottom:** Rowdier riders will appreciate the chain guide