



## In the frame

### Other options



#### WHYTE SECTA RS £1,499

Aluminium 29er with 63.5° HA, 76° SA, 130mm RockShox Psylo Gold RC fork, 1x12 Deore, four-piston M420 brakes and a size-specific dropper (S: 150mm, M: 170mm, L-XL: 200mm). [whytebikes.com](http://whytebikes.com)



#### SARACEN MANTRA ELITE LSL £1,499

Reduced from £1,899 at time of writing. Aluminium frame with 64° HA, 75° SA, 140mm Marzocchi Bomber Z2 fork, 29in/27.5in 'mullet' wheelset, 150mm dropper (S: 125mm). [saracen.co.uk](http://saracen.co.uk)



Left: Rob Powell. Others by Dan Joyce



Left: Mounts for a chain guide are a surprising omission. Only the seat tube has internal cable routing

more left me with aches in my hands, shoulders and lower back. This might be steep seat angles, short chainstays, single-grip-position bars and tyres that are firmer than I'm used to. But it could just be riding hardtails on choppy trails for hours at my age.

I'd address comfort by converting to tubeless and dropping pressures. Wider tyres would also help. I tried a 29x3 front wheel on both bikes. It worked well, but then the floated feel of 3in tyres at around 10psi is what I'm used to. While you may not want to go that wide, I'd recommend at least a 2.6in front tyre for either bike.

For longer rides, especially all-day ones, an alternative hand position would help. You could fit S QLab Innerbarends to the existing bars or swap them for a wide, flat bar with a loop, like the Alpkit Sonder Confucius.

Riding differences between the test bikes were relatively small. The Merida climbed better, despite its higher bottom gear. I think this is less to do with seat angle differences and more to do with its large diameter rear wheel, which found traction in

situations where the Voodoo's 27.5in wheel slipped and stalled.

The Voodoo impressed me more on twisty singletrack and technical descents. Yes, it has that smaller rear wheel, shorter (by 5mm!) chainstays and a slightly roomier effective top tube. But I think it mostly comes down to the fork. The Marzocchi Bomber Z2 is a functionally better trail fork than the RockShox Psylo Silver RC. While both track well and absorb bigger hits effectively, the Marzocchi is plusher over bumps large and small, and the Rail damper allows more on-the-fly fine-tuning. ●

### Verdict

The Merida Big Trail 500 and Voodoo Loco are both well-designed, well-specified, contemporary trail hardtails that are also good value for money. The Voodoo is particularly keenly priced at £1,250 – or £1,175 with the 7% discount you get as a Cycling UK member ([cyclinguk.org/halfords](http://cyclinguk.org/halfords)).

The Merida has better thought-out details such as frame fittings, and its 29er wheels all round do climb and roll better than mixed sizes. But the Voodoo has the better fork. Its steel frame is more practical (largely external cables), probably more durable and certainly prettier. And Shimano Deore trumps CUES. While you won't go wrong with either bike in terms of riding fun, the Voodoo Loco is outstanding considering its cost. I wouldn't be surprised if it sells out.