

# Bike test

## In the frame

Far right: by Rob Powell. Others: Dan Joyce



distance is longer. With a longer reach than a Jones, the riding position is more like a typical trail bike's.

There are fittings for everything and all cables are external, aside from the dropper post's, which enters the seat tube just above the bottom bracket. The fork has been beefed up for this year's production run to help it survive bigger jumps and drops. I don't mind its 1.74kg weight but Andy says it'll be about 250g lighter next year.

### Components

Apart from the Junker bar, the components are mine so I won't discuss them much. The handlebar? It's huge, with an orangutan width of 820mm that I cut down to 780mm. It's made from chrome-moly steel and, being braced as well, is probably indestructible. It comes with a shim to fit 31.8mm stems. I added inner bar-ends to provide an additional hand position for fire roads and headwinds.

The EBB insert can be rotated to move the bottom bracket. This lets you tension a singlespeed chain. If you run gears, you can adjust the bottom bracket position to change pedal-to-ground clearance or the effective chainstay length. (I've put a 'c', for circa, by numbers in the geometry diagram that only reflect one BB position.)

I initially fitted 170mm cranks and 32/20 gearing. Then I tried 155mm cranks and 30/20 gearing, which was much better. You lose some leverage with short cranks but, with a lower gear ratio, that didn't make

hills harder. Being able to pedal with a higher, more fluid cadence was a huge improvement everywhere else.

### Ride

Forget what it what looks like: the Dirt Tracker handles much like a contemporary trail hardtail. It's slower over big stutter bumps, as any rigid bike would be, but it corners superbly.

I think this is a combination of: enough but not too much trail, thanks to the longer-offset fork; steering geometry that's unaffected by suspension compression; a wide bar; the fork's shorter A-C height; and the extra traction from big tyres that, on wide rims, don't squirm unpredictably.

The result is a bike that whips along swoopy singletrack, carrying speed through corners instead of obliging you to brake into them and accelerate out. That's nice for any bike but is priceless if you're riding singlespeed, where maintaining momentum is key to keeping up with mates on gears.

The Dirt Tracker can comfortably be used for bigger days out. Off-road rides of 40 miles or so didn't leave me battered - unlike last issue's hardtails. That's largely down to the big, plush tyres, the higher handlebar and the fact that the seat tube isn't as steep as the virtual angle suggests; the bend in it means the seatpost angle is only 73°.

The eccentric bottom bracket worked well. It was easy to orient and never budged when riding, although it did need nipping up very tightly to prevent creaking. ●

**Above left:** That's a 30-tooth chainring. A 32t will fit fine. A 34t should with a wider chainline  
**Above:** While this descent isn't tricky, the Stooze went everywhere my friends' 140mm full-suspension bikes went

## Other options



### SINGULAR SWIFT MK5 STEEL FRAMESET £950

Smart steel hardtail with an EBB that will take 29x3in tyres, luggage and a 100mm suspension fork. Geometry (69°HA, 73°SA) is more XC. Sizes: M-XL. [singularcycles.com](http://singularcycles.com)



### SURLY KRAMPUS FRAMESET £1,049.99

The original 29+ MTB. Gnot-Boost dropouts fit most axles and it can run a 120mm suspension fork. 69°HA, 73°SA. Sizes: S-XL. [surlybikes.com](http://surlybikes.com)

### Verdict

The Dirt Tracker lives up to its billing as a trail MTB you could go bikepacking on. It's not quite as comfortable or versatile as the Jones Plus LWB, which also works as a commuter or tourer. But for mountain biking you don't have to recalibrate your brain like you do with Jones's unconventional geometry, and I think it offers a more engaging singletrack experience. It's also much cheaper.

While a hefty, rigid mountain bike won't suit everyone, for some it could be just the simple but capable off-road bike they're looking for. It rekindled my love of singlespeeding.