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Is The Epiphany The Epitome?

Ellsworth states their trailbike case

There are a lot of new old faces on the trails we ride. These are riders who first caught the mountain biking bug in the eighties heyday, bought an expensive hardtail, and rode the wheels off the thing. Somewhere along that long trail, school or family or work or motocross got in the way, and the bike was retired to hooks in the garage rafters. We don't know if it was Lance Armstrong's last Tour de France win, the increase in fuel prices, or a growing gut that motivated this group to unhook the trusty hardtail, dust it off and hit the trail, but there is no doubt that they are back and their numbers are growing.

A couple of rides on sidewall-cracking, rock-hard-rubber tires and the sound of snapping spokes is all it takes for the reentry rider to finish his ride at the door of the local bike shop. This rider isn't interested in racing cross-country, and if he plans a trip to Whistler Mountain Bike Park, he'll rent a Kona for the weekend. What he is looking for is a bike that does what his hardtail used to do. Everything.

This boomerang gang has actually timed their reentry perfectly. While we hardcore riders who never hung up our knobbies had to sort through ten years of trailbike evolution, these new old riders will have a much easier time, because the modern trailbike is a better defined and more refined bike than at any time since the mountain bike was created. The Ellsworth Epiphany is a perfect example of modern trailbike evolution.

TODAY'S UPGRADE

The Ellsworth Epiphany draws a lot of design cues from its big brother, the Ellsworth Moment, but uses a different (lighter) frame tube spec. Ellsworth's trademark walking-beam links are made from magnesium (instead of the aluminum versions found on the Moment) to shave weight and still provide lateral stiffness. These links get more muscle with the addition of a bonded carbon-fiber bridge. They move on 12-millimeter pivot axles and oversized bearings and, along with the swingarm, are designed to allow massive tire clearance. Cables and hoses are intelligently routed under the top tube to keep them out of harm's way and to give the bike a clean appearance.

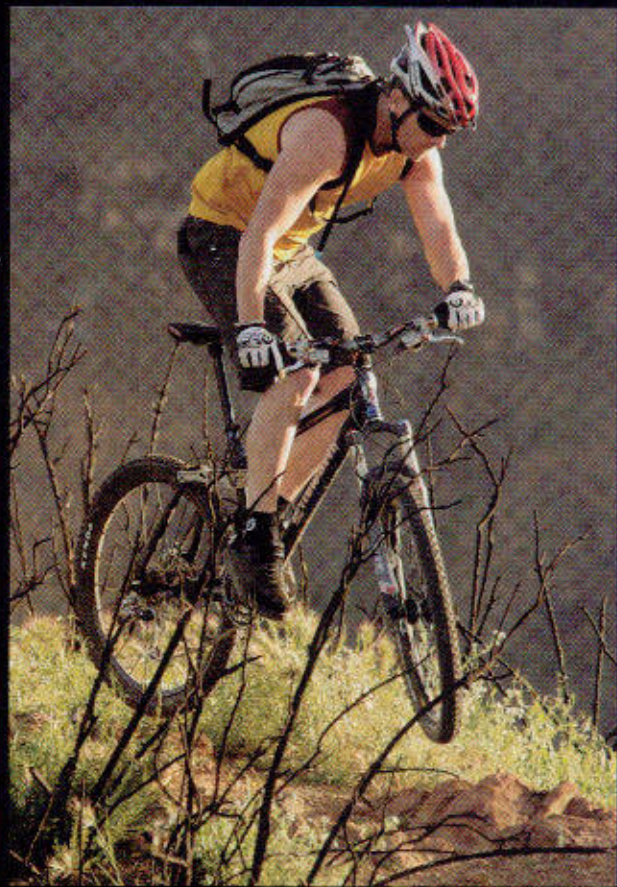
The rear suspension delivers over five inches of travel, so Ellsworth exaggerated the top tube's slant to bring the standover height down to a reasonable height. A small gusset beefs up the seat mast. The front of the frame is on the tall side, because it is designed to work with a five-inch-travel fork.

The Epiphany uses Ellsworth's patented Instant Center Tracking (ICT) suspension. Ellsworth claims their ICT four-bar linkage technology provides amazing pedal power efficiency "by aligning the instant center of the linkage on the chain torque line and continually tracking it throughout the range of travel." Come again? Our ride will translate this Ellspeak, but simplified it means the suspension will remain active to bumps while not reacting to pedaling or braking forces.

HAVING AN EPIPHANY

Can the Epiphany live up to its name? The one way to answer that question is to go out and hammer the beautiful thing.

Getting situated: The Epiphany rider is set in a neutral position between the wheels with a very slight weight bias towards the rear.



Lazy boy: There are bikes that can make you lazy, and the Epiphany is one of them. While others have to pick their lines carefully, just point this Ellsworth and go.

The oversized FSA riser carbon bar and Lizard Skins lock-on grips feel right from the start. An SDG I-Bean saddle and seatpost finished off the rider's cockpit on our test bike.

Cruising along: There is always some movement in the rear linkage while you are pedaling, because the four-bar suspension remains active under power and during braking. This slight rhythm does not make a noticeable difference in power output. Some of the wrecking crew made calf contact with the walking-beam links when positioned rearward on the saddle. The contact was minor, but riders with large calves should take note.

Turning: The Epiphany gets it right in the turning department. It blends a certain quickness found in cross-country race bikes with the stability you expect from gravity-oriented bikes. It walks the tightrope between jittery and sluggish handling without breaking a sweat. There is a learning curve to riding Fox's TALAS X Trail Tune fork (with Fox's inertia valve

technology), and the fork offers a giant range of external adjustments. There is no one setup that will work for everyone. This is a fork that you need to adjust for you.

In the rough: Who cares how the Epiphany turns? You don't need to be choosy about lines on this bike. It soaks up anything in its way. Go ahead and ride in the middle of that rain rut. Peg that stone. Plow into the roots. The high bottom bracket allows you to pedal rock gardens without high-siding from pedal contact. The key for front and rear suspension compatibility in the rough is to reduce the fork's travel (accomplished externally) slightly, because inertia valve forks tend to run a little higher and the Epiphany's rear suspension tends to settle through the bumps.

Climbing: The bike is an amazing climber. Our build on the Epiphany came in at just under 28 pounds (riders have built 25-pound Epiphany's using ultra-light cross-country components), so you wouldn't expect a strong ascender. Wrong. This thing is a tractor. Moving to the saddle's nose, reducing the fork travel a few twists, and committing to the effort will give you results hard to believe. The nasty, steep, loose wall that can only be cleared when you're fresh can now be rolled over at the end of an epic ride.

Braking: The Ellsworth ICT suspension is certainly noticeable under braking. The suspension is there to soak up the rough and maintain tire grip. It allows you to dive deeper into corners, brake over obstacles you would avoid on a lesser bike, and maintain traction on shaky terrain.

Jumping: The Epiphany will handle any jumps encountered on a trail ride. It is not intended for excessive stunt riding or sky shots.

EPIPHANY INFIRMARY

Did we find anything that bugged us about the Epiphany? If you have the habit (and it's a bad one) of taking a quick glance back to check your current gear selection, the Epiphany's walking-beam link blocks your view. The same link requires the Fox shock to be inverted due to clearance issues. This makes it a long reach to the shock's ProPedal lever.



Factor in fun: The Epiphany forces you to have a rockin' good time as you sail the trail. The predictable response from the chassis instills the confidence to open it up.

We've ridden a prototype of an SDG I-Beam saddle that has a new and improved nose area. The one on our test bike was not one of them. The Epiphany begs you to get on the saddle's nose to clear the impossible. This saddle exacts a price for doing so.

WELCOME BACK

The Epiphany is a dream come true for that guy who is coming back to the sport (or for the trail rider ready to step up from the mid-priced zone). It can blur the line between a cross-country race bike (some racers looking to improve on their descending times have opted for the Epiphany over the Truth) and an all-day-everyday trailbike.

You could build up your Epiphany as light as 25 pounds, but spot us a few extra pounds to accommodate some fatty tires, beefy components and cushy suspension and we'll ride our Epiphany the way it was intended. This is a bike that smoothes the trail, rewards its rider for the effort he puts in, and is ready to welcome any serious rider back into the fold.

ELLSWORTH EPIPHANY

Price **\$2395 (Frame and shock)**

Country of origin **USA**

Weight **27.7 pounds**

Hotline **(760) 788-7500**

Size tested **17"**

Bottom bracket height **13.7"**

Chainstay length **16.9"**

Top tube length **23.5"**

Head angle **70°**

Seat tube angle **73.5°**

Standover height **30.5"**

Wheelbase **43"**

Suspension travel (front) **3.5" to 5.9"**

Suspension travel (rear) **5.25"**

Frame material **Aluminum**

Fork **Fox TALAS X Trail Tune**

Shock **Fox Float RP3**

Rims **Mavic CrossMax XC**

Tires **Kenda Nevegal (2.1)**

Hub **Mavic**

Brakes **Avid Juicy Seven**

Brake levers **Avid Juicy Seven**

Crankset **FSA Carbon Pro Team Issue**

Shifters **SRAM X.0 Triggers**

Front derailleur **SRAM X Generation**

Rear derailleur **SRAM X.0**

Chainrings **FSA (44/32/22)**

Cassette **SRAM 9 speed (11-34)**

Pedals **Shimano 959**

