

FINAL SCORE



Cannondale Flash 1 29er	
Price	R20 000
Weight	10.8kg
Spec highlights	Lefty fork, BB30 cranks; SAVE stays; SRAM gears
Spec lowlights	stem choice
Good	looks the part, acts the part
Bad	fork needs TLC; short-legged riders will struggle with fit
What we'd change	very little, except to get correct stem height and length
Uphill	8.5
Downhill	9
Singletrack	8
Overall ride	8.5
X factor	8
Value	9
<i>'If I had to choose a race bike for the Epic or a marathon, it would be between the Specialized and the Cannondale. It's a tough choice – the Cannondale is more stable, and the Specialized is really fast. I still haven't made up my mind.'</i> – Nic Lamond	

Felt Nine Elite	
Price	R20 500
Weight	11.8kg
Spec highlights	carbon frame details; decent groupset
Spec lowlights	poor bars; heavy wheels
Good	very stable endurance/trail bike
Bad	heavy; not very exciting to ride
What we'd change	swap bars for flat and wide ones with a little sweep
Uphill	7
Downhill	8
Singletrack	7
Overall ride	7.5
X factor	7
Value	6
<i>'The riser bars were from a Christmas cracker, the wheels are weighty and not everyone will like the colour coding. Otherwise, the Felt is a very sure-footed trail-orientated bike with decent comfort and cool frame details.'</i> – Nick Muzik	

Giant XTC 29er 1	
Price	R15 400
Weight	11.55kg
Spec highlights	hydroformed alu frame; Fox shock
Spec lowlights	cockpit; wheels
Good	a light and solid package for a good price
Bad	not the sharpest ride
What we'd change	swap bars for wider ones with more sweep
Uphill	7.5
Downhill	7.5
Singletrack	6.5
Overall ride	7
X factor	6
Value	8.5
<i>'For the price, this was one of the most attractive packages with the superb frame and fork, but we all preferred the ride of the Kona. This is definitely a better buy though.'</i> – Neil Gardiner	

GT Zaskar 29er Pro	
Price	R19 500
Weight	11.85kg
Spec highlights	Fox fork is superb
Spec lowlights	heavy wheels; white saddle and grips
Good	ride quality – the Zaskar legend lives on
Bad	colour not for everyone; a little weighty
What we'd change	stem; wheels
Uphill	6.5
Downhill	8
Singletrack	7.5
Overall ride	7.5
X factor	7
Value	8
<i>'Although the heavy wheels don't exactly encourage rapid acceleration, the Zaskar is predictable and forgiving, which will suit riders who lack technical confidence.'</i> – Rene Groustra	

Kona Big Kahuna	
Price	R16 999
Weight	11.9kg
Spec highlights	balanced and cool-looking frame, wheels
Spec lowlights	fork non-tapered; steerer in a tapered headtube!?
Good	cool factor goes a long way
Bad	not light enough for serious competition
What we'd change	fork
Uphill	7
Downhill	8
Singletrack	9
Overall ride	8.5
X factor	9
Value	7.5
<i>'It's far from the lightest and the fork isn't nearly as good as its rivals', but it's just great fun to ride. When someone asks what you ride, which answer is cooler? TWENTY-NINE Lite 1000-D or Big Kahuna?'</i> – Neil Gardiner	

Merida TWENTY-NINE Lite 1000-D	
Price	R15 995
Weight	12.25kg
Spec highlights	superb tyres; RockShox Recon Gold surprisingly good
Spec lowlights	cockpit
Good	value for money; good all-round ride quality
Bad	heavy; good but not great
What we'd change	replace Recon Silver with Gold; shorter stem; wider bars
Uphill	8
Downhill	7
Singletrack	7
Overall ride	7.5
X factor	5
Value	7.5
<i>'I was surprised to find that it's a lovely climber. On the downs the rear can be skittish at speed but is easily controllable, but it needs a flat sweep bar. I'd recommend it to any 29er convert who wants a quick, cheap bike.'</i> – Lance Stephenson	

Momsen AL329	
Price	R9 500
Weight	12.55kg
Spec highlights	Stan's wheels
Spec lowlights	old-style BB; 160mm front rotor
Good	brilliantly conceived all-round package
Bad	very little at this price
What we'd change	replace Recon Silver with Gold; grips
Uphill	7
Downhill	8
Singletrack	8
Overall ride	7.5
X factor	6.5
Value	10
<i>'We should all stop fussing about what derailleur or what cranks a bike has and think about what's really important in giving a good ride – wheels, fork and frame. At R9 500, this was the hero of the test.'</i> – Nic Lamond	

Scott Scale 29 Team	
Price	R11 500
Weight	12.7kg
Spec highlights	balanced frame
Spec lowlights	RockShox Tora should be a Recon
Good	solid reliable choice
Bad	not the best value compared to the Momsen
What we'd change	fork upgrade may be expensive, so start with the cockpit
Uphill	5.5
Downhill	7
Singletrack	7
Overall ride	6.5
X factor	6
Value	7
<i>'I think we were a little unfair on it at first, forgetting the vast difference between an 11K bike and one for 20K. Once I'd adjusted my expectations I found it to be a capable, good-quality workhorse with a calm trail demeanor.'</i> – Neil Gardiner	

Silverback Segma	
Price	R15 500
Weight	11.05kg
Spec highlights	all, but notably Stan's wheels and RockShox Reba fork
Spec lowlights	160mm front disc rotor; cockpit needs a rethink
Good	best all-round package; decent handling
Bad	fit may not suit everyone
What we'd change	replace the headset cap with a flatter one; wider bar
Uphill	8.5
Downhill	8
Singletrack	7.5
Overall ride	8
X factor	6
Value	9.5
<i>'On paper there is no bike that offers such high spec for under 16K. On the trails it's well behaved on the downs and nippy on the ups. Now all that's left is to get over the fact that it doesn't say Cannondale or Specialized on the side.'</i> – Neil Gardiner	

Specialized Stumpjumper Comp 29	
Price	R20 000
Weight	11.15kg
Spec highlights	superb M5 alloy frame
Spec lowlights	160mm front rotor; non-series cranks cutting corners
Good	superb racer
Bad	not for the nervous
What we'd change	it needs an aggressive tyre on the front
Uphill	9.5
Downhill	7.5
Singletrack	9.5
Overall ride	9
X factor	8.5
Value	6.5
<i>'This is a perfect off-the-peg racer. It feels like a 26" hardtail – with benefits! It's an intuitive ride, just think and it goes. It's certain that Burry helped develop it – XC racers will really get this bike.'</i> – Lance Stephenson	