

Maverick American ML-7

Maverick, a small mountain bike manufacturer based in Colorado, has created quite a strong reputation in recent years by churning out high-end forks and frames. The company was founded by former Rock Shox front man, Paul Turner—the same man who was originally responsible for designing the first lines of Rock Shox forks. His pedigree in the industry is undeniable, and Maverick American's designs benefit heavily from his experience in working with aluminium, magnesium and suspension systems.

Framed

The frame is an impressive piece of work. Maverick American employs a custom 6069 T6 tube set to build the ML-7 frames. The tubes are butted and externally shaped into an oversized square tube near the seat tube junction—curiously this is the opposite of most frames out there with beefed-up top-tube/head tube gussets. An integrated headset is also featured, which eliminates the need for a pressed in headset and saves a few grams over conventional designs. The self-locating bearings sit on an angled plate inside the head tube, and are user-serviceable.

The most noticeable feature is their magnesium 'Mono-Link' that houses the bottom bracket. The Mono-Link is attached to the chain stay and pivots on the down tube. The idea behind it was to create a lightweight suspension linkage system that isolates pedal forces to prevent bob under hard pedalling. The rear wheel moves up and back during the shock's compression, following the direction of suspension impacts. Maverick calls this an 'Upwardly Rear Path'. The rear axle moves up at a 15-degree angle, which is claimed to do a better job of swallowing small bumps on the trail. The linkage maintains a constant chain length under suspension compression, which effectively reduces pedal-feedback.

Clearance Issue

The shock is integrated into the rear triangle to save weight and works extremely well. It only features rebound damping adjustment, but this isn't a major concern. Our test frame suffered from one obvious design flaw relating to the shock. The damping adjustment knob is placed at the top of the shock, but unfortunately it fouls on the upper shock mount so it can't be adjusted without loosening the bolt holding the shock in place. This renders trailside adjustment a substantial hassle, and makes tuning the bike a chore. Once it's set up correctly, it works like a dream, but it's still inconvenient—it's a problem that could easily be fixed by tweaking the height of the damping adjustment knob.

Other than that one minor weakness, the frame design and finish is stellar. Titanium frame builders, Seven, have also licensed the same technology for use on their 'Duo' dual suspension chassis.





Feathery Fork

While the frame turns heads, the dual-crown upside-down front fork is equally unique. The official story is that Turner wanted to spec the ML-7 with a light, six-inch travel cross-country fork, but there were none available on the market. Instead of talking to big-name companies to develop a fork to suit the chassis, Turner turned his hand back to fork design. The result is Maverick's 1,686g (3.7lbs) air-sprung upside-down fork that at first glance seems more at home on a long-travel downhill or freeride bike.

One problem commonly found on lightweight upside down forks is lateral flex. A 20mm oversized through-axle is employed at the hub to help provide a little extra lateral stiffness and is included with the fork. I didn't notice any problems with steering tracking through rough sections of trail, and the front wheel didn't 'pinball' through rock gardens. Even though it weighed only three and a half pounds, the steering accuracy and overall stiffness was substantially better than a four pound single crown fork fitted with a traditional quick release hub.

Maverick has created an elegantly machined pair of quick release retention levers to secure the huge front hub—they allow you to pop the front wheel out of the forks as fast as you would on a traditional fork. Refitting the wheel is a little slower but easy enough to do. The fork also features an integrated stem, which is available in three sizes—70, 90, and 105mm. It not only saves a little weight, but further beefs up the rigidity of the steering system. Travel can be adjusted to give either four or six inches of travel by flicking a single switch. The fork did suffer from a little stiction at the start of its stroke but it works freely after a couple of compression hits. Overall the forks suit the ML-7 frame perfectly—lightweight but comfortable and relaxed.

Dialled In

When I managed to get the bike out onto the trail and got it set up to suit my weight and riding style, I was impressed. Initially the rebound damping was set too fast, and the back end of the bike had the habit of bucking when hitting a large obstacle. After I dialled in more damping, I found the rear wheel stuck to the ground extremely well—especially under climbing. It seemed to do a great job at absorbing small bumps efficiently. Although the ML-7 only features 100mm of rear travel, it's not hard to be tricked into thinking there's more.

Aside from the minor fault of the damping adjuster knob fouling on the upper shock mount, the frame and fork combination is a pleasure to ride. The whole bike works as advertised, and while it's ideally suited to epic cross-country riding and all-round trail riding, it could perform reasonably well at cross country races. The frame tips the scales at a respectable 2,630g (5.8lbs).


Relaxed Attitude

The frame and fork are both lightweight. The suspension works effectively after you've got it set up correctly. All up, the ML-7 deserves its often-touted title as the king of all-round trail bikes—it is up there with the best of them. The combination of lightweight high-end components hung on the Maverick chassis resulted in an impressive 10.9kg (24lbs) total bike weight. It is a very deceiving bike. The oversized bulk of the dual crown fork leads you to think that it will weigh a ton—until you pick it up. Whilst the Maverick

may compete with true XC racing on the scales, its frame geometry lends it more to all round trail riding. It is much more relaxed and stable in its handling than a XC race bred dually.

The frame is available in a range of colours and some custom finishes like the camouflage scheme found on our test unit. Opinions were evenly split between people who absolutely loved the colour scheme and those who couldn't stand it, but there's no accounting for taste.

The ML-7 is available as a frame only for \$4,350 (including a headset), or as a frame and fork combo for \$6,000. The forks can also be purchased separately for \$1,785 and ship with the oversize front hub and integrated stem.

The Australian distributors can also make a Maverick bike with one of their high end build kits to form a complete bike. A number of kits are available to suit various budgets. Our review unit came flush with an XTR group set and various carbon fibre bits, it would set you back over \$10,000, but you're by no means compelled to spend that big. Still, at \$6,000 for the frame and fork combo, the ML-7 will only find its way into the spare rooms and garages of extremely dedicated and cashed-up riders. 

Article by Matt Overington

Photography by John Hardwick

SPECIFICATIONS

Frame	Maverick ML-7 100mm travel
Fork	Dual Crown 150mm travel
Headset	Maverick by FSA
Stem	Maverick Integrated
Handlebars	Maxm MX-5 Carbon riser
Shifters	XTR Dual Control
Front Derailleur	XTR BB Mounted
Rear Derailleur	Shimano XTR
Cassette	Shimano XTR 11/32
Chain	Shimano XTR
Crankset	Shimano XTR
Bottom Bracket	Shimano XTR
Brakes	Shimano XTR Disc
Front hub	Maverick oversized
Rear hub	Shimano XTR
Rims	DT Swiss 4.1d
Spokes	DT Swiss 14/15g
Tyres	Kenda Karma 2.0
Saddle	Maxm by Velo
Seatpost	LP Carbon
Weight	10.9kg (24lbs) - Without Pedals
Price	\$6,000 frame/fork. Approx. \$10,200 as tested.
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