

## ORANGE ALPINE 160 £2,958.99

Last year Orange offered a light air-sprung Alpine 160AM and the burly coil-sprung 160FR. For 2010 the FR spec has been dropped and the 160AM is now simply called the Alpine 160.

### Frame

Structurally, the Alpine 160 frame is identical to last year. A CNC-machined head tube, ISCG bottom bracket and Maxle dropouts are united using a mix of Reynolds custom tubing and seam-welded monocoque constructions. Departing from Orange tradition, the swingarm on the Alpine 160 is triangulated, where a box section tube braces the underside of the elevated monocoque swingarm. Another break from the norm is that the cable routing on the swingarm is now external. This means that the gear outer no longer migrates rearward, but sadly, it rubs the fork crown. So the Alpine 160 would definitely benefit from the two uppermost cable guides found on the Five down tube.

Swapping to the new Maxle Lite shaves 42g in weight and the revised design is much neater than the original. One final note on the frame is that the yellow finish isn't quite as vibrant as it appears in the pictures. This is due to the pearl clear coat, so if you want a punchy yellow, Orange can do it with a standard clear coat. Still not happy? Well you have 19 custom colours to choose from.

### Suspension

It would be all too easy to think of the Fox 36 Float R on the Alpine 160 as a downgrade, compared to the more expensive 36 Talas. After all, you do have one less knob to play with. Joking aside, if grip, control and fresh hands at the bottom of every run are what you crave then the 36 Float R delivers. Out back, the new Boost Valve



### ANGLE FINDER

Head angle	Seat angle	BB height	Chainstay	Front centre	Wheelbase	Down tube
65.2°	72.9°	349mm	432mm	736mm	1168mm	679mm

equipped RP23 hasn't stolen any of the Alpine 160's thunder — and it's still one of the best performing long-travel air-sprung bikes we've ever tested.

### Wheels

Freehub engagement on the Hope rear hub is fast, solid and noisy, and because the hubs can be converted to fit any of the current axle standards, the wheels aren't locked into one bike.

Mavic EN321 rims are strong enough for downhill racing and combined with a brass nipple the wheel package is a good 400g heavier than those on the Specialized; worth noting when comparing the overall weights of the bikes.

### Components

We used the upgrade option on the Orange website to add a Gamut Dual

### NEED TO KNOW

**FRAME:** 6061 Aluminium, Reynolds tubes, Fox RP23 Boost Valve XV Air Can, 160mm

**FORK:** Fox 36 Float R, 160mm

**SIZES:** 16, 18, 20in

**WEIGHT:** 14.5kg (32lb)

**CONTACT:** [www.orangebikes.co.uk](http://www.orangebikes.co.uk)

Ring chain device to the Alpine 160. The device was silent, kept the chain in place and best of all we didn't have to fit it ourselves. In hindsight we should also have upgraded the stock FSA Chisel headset to a Hope for an extra £50. It's not that the FSA unit doesn't work well; it is just that the sealing isn't great and is unlikely to go the distance.

### Performance

Last year we tested a size 16in Alpine 160 and the only disadvantage we can find of up-sizing to an 18in is that the rear end of the bike needs skidding or hopping round flat, tight switchbacks. But in every other situation, especially climbing, the extra room up front felt better.

On the ups the Alpine 160 is no mountain goat, but taking into account its descending credentials it can hang with the other bikes on test. There is no detectable pedal feedback on rough climbs, and the soft initial suspension response of the Fox 36 Float means that the Alpine 160 never stalls out. That said, you do have to keep the steering in check due to it having the slackest head angle on test.

Point the Alpine 160 downhill and it's basically a short-travel 224. It allows you to hit new trails with the confidence of a local and to ride roughshod over pretty much anything. To say that you can tear it up on the Alpine 160 is an understatement, and it wasn't long before it was renamed the Wild Boar.

### Verdict

Sometimes it is hard to gauge what a bike has been designed for, or why it has been made at all. With the Alpine 160 there is none of this guesswork; the name is self-explanatory. But what the simple moniker doesn't convey is how the Alpine 160 lets you attack trails with a heady mix of raw aggression and Zen-like clarity — with the end result being an adrenaline fuelled confidence boost and a grin from ear to ear. With the addition of Maxxis tyres and all of the upgrade options, the only limiting factors of the Alpine 160 are the rider's fitness and skill levels. If you are having a bad day on the Orange Alpine 160 you'll need to look elsewhere for excuses, as it definitely isn't the bike.

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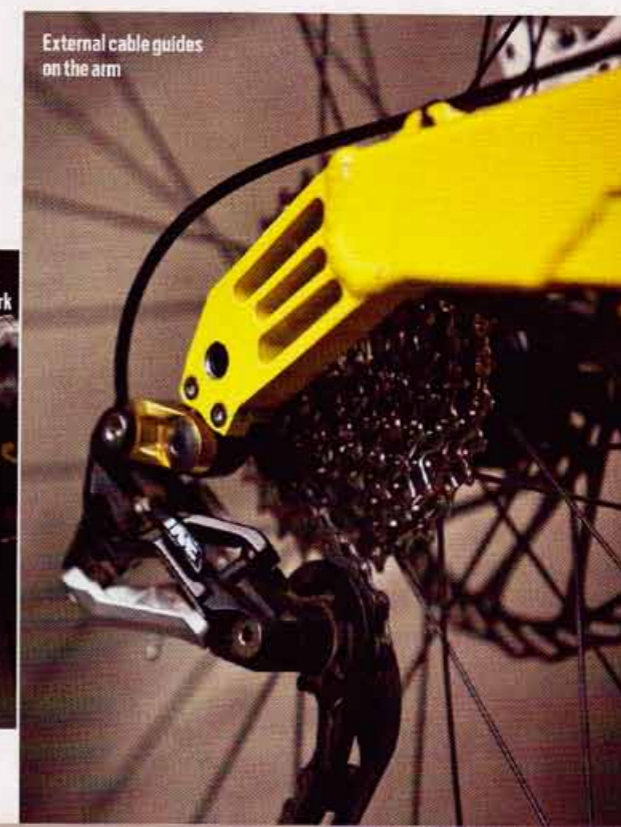


ORANGE ALPINE  
160 £2,958.99

Budget pleaser:  
Fox 36 Float R fork



External cable guides  
on the arm



## Conclusion

While it may have sounded like just another excuse to escape our Croydon headquarters, taking all of the bikes to Italy for a week to evaluate them on more challenging trails proved invaluable in separating the all-mountain men from the boys.

But before we even got to the riding part of this group test, the Commencal Meta 6 was on the back foot. Not only is it the most expensive bike of the four here, but it is also the heaviest. Ride-wise, the new dropouts have improved rear-end stiffness to a level similar to the Orange, but handling and suspension action aren't as good as the less-expensive version we tested last year. It's not that the Meta 6 is a bad bike, it just seems to fall short when compared to the competition.

For uphill, and more importantly across dale, the Lapierre is the best of the bunch. However, it faces stacks of competition from the capable trail-bike segment, including its stablemate, the Zesty 514.

The new arrival to the category is the eagerly anticipated Specialized Enduro SL. After a short stint as a 150mm-travel trail bike, the Enduro SL is back with 10mm more travel and a gravity focus. It ticks all the right boxes, too. At 30.7lb it's relatively light, the reconfigured rear suspension is plush, the bike feels super solid and the build kit is ready to roll. Sadly, the reliability issues with



Italy was great proving ground for our 160s



Orange left its rivals coughing dust

RockShox's Lyrik IS fork lets the package down somewhat. Before the fork packed in we got a taste for the Enduro SL's potential, and if it had a Fox 36 Float R like the Orange, we would have had two wild boars tearing through the wilds of the Italian countryside rather than one.

Big mountain, all-mountain, back country, enduro, call it what you like, but for us, the key thing is that if the bike comes with 160mm of travel and weighs over 30lb, it had better let you make the most of it. In that respect the Orange Alpine 160 is easily the best bike here. Okay, so it won't win any

hill-climb races, but it can hang with the best of them only to leave them coughing in a cloud of dust on the descents.

Out of the box it's not the highest spec for your money, and the finish isn't as slick as the Specialized or Lapierre, but everything is fit for purpose, which is more than we can say for the majority of bikes we test. So, if you want a 160mm bike that rides like a lightweight short travel Orange 224 on the descents and a portly long travel Five on the climbs, look no further — the 2010 Orange Alpine 160 is undoubtedly the best do-it-all bike money can buy.