



Mountain
BIKING
OFFICIAL TEST

FASTER THAN THE SPEED OF LIGHT

What's Parkpre Up To?... Doin' That Titanium Thang!

On board Parkpre's Pro/Elite you've got tons of room (as demonstrated by Marc Fekkes), and great handling. You've also got a lightweight titanium frameset that weighs in right at 3.1 pounds, but sure doesn't feel like it, at least when it comes to flex.

Parkpre could have been treading dangerous territory when they sent over their new Pro/Elite titanium frame for evaluation. You see, we'd already been extremely impressed with the handling and ride characteristics of their Tange Ultimate Ultralight Prestige chromoly Team 925 frame. (In fact, one of our staff members is riding one as his full-time personal bike.)

Coming into the test, we looked at it like this: the good news was, the Pro/Elite uses geometry that's identical to the 925. The only bad news was (and is) that we're just not so dazzled with titanium that just the mere passing over of a titanium wand on a frame makes it seem suddenly magical to us. In fact, there has been a case or two of titanium frames that we've been far less than excited about, where small diameter tubes or long head tubes had led to a very whippy, unpredictable frame. We were hoping that this wouldn't be the case with the Pro/Elite.

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Looking over the frame before the ride, we were impressed . . . there wasn't a single thing that raised a red warning flag. The frame's built by Litespeed, and construction appears top-notch from top to bottom. Clean, precise weld beads abound, and there were great looking details in areas like the brake bosses and dropouts. The seatstays and chainstays are both tapered, and have a single bend in each. Nothing fancy, but simple and clean at the same time. Both sets of stays have braces just ahead of the tire to help keep things stiff in the rear end.

The tubing diameters for the top and downtube are beefy indeed, with a 1-1/4-inch top, and a 1-1/2-inch downtube. These mate up to a head tube that's ready 'n waiting for a 1-1/8-inch headset. The seat tube doesn't go unnoticed, since its been ovalized at the lower end where it meets the bottom bracket. The bottom bracket shell itself is a narrow 68mm.

The measurements go like this. On paper its designed with 72 degree steering and seat tube angles, but by the time a suspension fork is installed, these angles relax to about 70.5 degrees for each. The top tube on the 19-incher that we tested is a longish 23 inches, which, when mated with the new

shorter 4.5-inch head tube (which was the only change from last year's 925 geometry) gives you easy capabilities for low stem height, and a very aggressive rider position.

The wheelbase is 41.4 inches, the chainstays' length is 16.9 inches, and the bottom bracket height is a fairly tall twelve inches. The bike has a sloping top tube, which gives it a low, mean look.

The front

"Bartender, make me a Butted Lite." The IPC Butted Lite stem found on our test bike may look like an Answer's ATAC stem, but it's constructed of chromoly. You can get one of these stems, complete with twin titanium pinch bolts, and titanium stem wedge bolt, for around \$55. The rest of the command center on our test bike included an Answer HyperLite handlebar, Shimano XTR shifters and brake levers, and Onza grips and bar ends.

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Nuthin' but pure performance. The Parkpre Pro/Elite holds up the heritage of Parkpre's chromoly 925 frame quite nicely. Not too surprising, considering they share the same frame geometry.



derailleur cable routes along the down-tube, while the rear brake and derailleur cables are routed along the top of the top tube. A small noodle routes the rear brake cable smoothly in its intended direction, and an aluminum collar with an Allen key release provides the seatpost clamping. Weight for the frame is 3.1 pounds.

YOU CAN DRESS IT UP AND TAKE IT OUT

The Pro/Elite is designed to be sold as a frame and fork package, for riders looking to upgrade their current chassis, or who want to pick and choose their own components to finish off the bike. The one

we had our paws on was dressed out in style, and it wouldn't be all that tough to duplicate. We didn't say *cheap*, though.

Components were all Shimano XTR (which are available from Parkpre as a parts kit for around \$1000). The fork on our bike was an Answer Manitou 2, though Parkpre also offers the option of a Tange ShockBlades LT.

There were also goodies like Onza bar ends, Answer HyperLite handlebar, a Kore seatpost, Avocet O2 saddle, World Class titanium bottom bracket, Araya RM-395 rims, an Onza Racing Porc tire up front, and a Panaracer Smoke in the rear.

One component we found pretty interesting was the IPC Butted Lite stem, which is a chromoly stem that bears a striking resemblance to an Answer ATAC aluminum stem. In fact, Parkpre claims that it's the same weight as an ATAC, but costs only \$54.95, which includes titanium dual pinch bolts and stem wedge bolt. The one on our bike had a 145mm extension, and a five degree rise.



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The construction on the Litespeed-produced frame appeared excellent, with clean, precise beads, and nice detail work like the brake mountain bosses.

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TAMING THE GREAT GRAY BEAST

The handling was everything we expected, considering the identical numbers to the 925's geometry. Climbing? Just motor. We liked the feel of being a little further back behind the pedals (which seemed to make it easier to power), and at the same time, with the low and stretched out rider position, the front end didn't get too light. Out of the saddle climbing gave the rear tire a chance to get

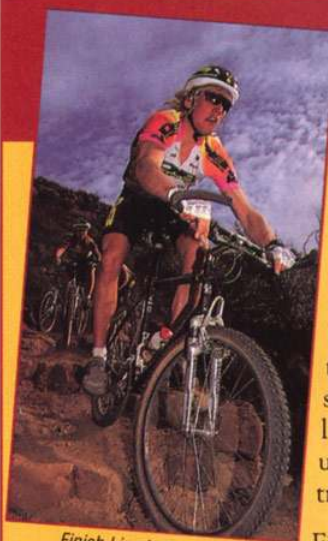
a little loose, but after a slight rearward weight shift (and not a big enough one that it required that your arms be burning after a minute or two in that position) things got hooked up superbly again.

Cornering is another strong suit. Any bike that allows you to pick the line you want into a corner, and then readjust it to carve even *tighter* inside, all without getting sketchy in the fast stuff, is okay with us. The Pro/Elite rages in corners. Carving? No problem. Want to readjust your intended line in mid-turn? No problem. Look ahead to pick out the line you want, tap the brakes to break the rear end loose, and flick it around to where

you want it to go.

Probably the best part of the handling, though, was the fact that it wasn't hampered by a wimpy feeling frame. There was never any sense that head tube was wagging out in the breeze, which can be really irritating. Even when bashing through rock-infested . . . er, actually, *solid* rock sections, the bike never wiggled a bit. But at the same time, the combined efforts of the Manitou up front, along with the shock-damping characteristics of the titanium frame itself, allowed us to really fly through some potentially white knuckle sections with no fear. The solid handling, plus the great ride quality of the

The titanium Pro/Elite frame is packaged with Manitou 2 forks for a price (around \$1680) that seems almost low compared to some of the high-digit custom-caliber frames. While the new Manitous are much-improved, we'd still like to see the addition of a positive stop to prevent the front tire from bottoming against the crown under heavy loads.



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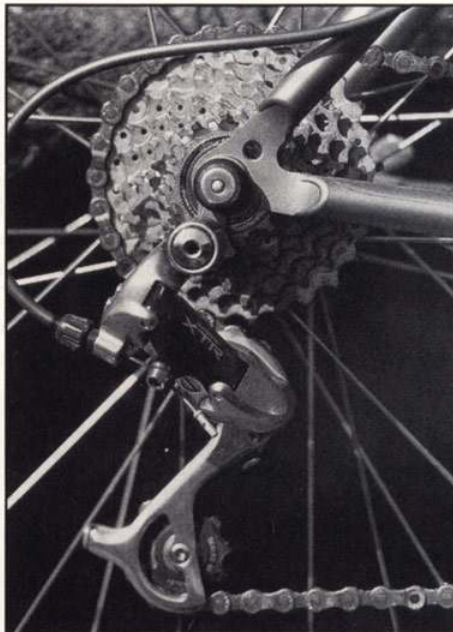
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titanium, makes for a great combination. Kiss those early fears of ours good-bye.

PUTTING A PRICE ON FUN

Maybe one of the more interesting things about the Pro/Elite is its cost. Nothing with a titanium tag comes cheap, but when we learned that the combination of the frame, along with a Manitou fork, was \$1680, we were surprised. When you figure that the suggested retail for the fork is nearly \$400, the frame almost starts sounding like a relative bargain. In fact, the really interesting part is, the chromoly 925 frame and fork last year was right in the ballpark of \$1000.

For those in the market for a titanium frame with a great mix of handling and ride comfort, plus an aggressive ride position, we think Parkpre's Pro/Elite is one sweet machine.



Shimano XTR kits are available from Parkpre, though the bike isn't really packaged as a complete bike. This allows riders to swap over their components, or to pick and choose the components they want to mount on board.

MFG. OR DIST.: Parkpre Bicycles
5245 Kazuko Ct.
Moorpark, CA 93021
(805) 529-5865

APPROXIMATE SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: \$1680
(frame and Manitou fork)

COLORS AVAILABLE: Standard titanium

SIZES AVAILABLE: 15", 17", 19", 21"

SIZE TESTED: 19"

FRAMESET:

Head/Seat Tube Angles 72 degrees (70.5 effective with suspension fork installed)

Top Tube Length 23"

Chainstay Length 16.9"

Wheelbase Length 41.4"

Bottom Bracket Height 12"

Frame Material(s) Titanium

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AFTER THE RACE...

Gee, BANZAI BILLY- I'M SURPRISED AT HOW WELL YOU HANDLED THOSE HURDLES, ESPECIALLY FOR A MOUNTAIN BIKER!

OH H, I'VE HAD SOME EXPERIENCE IN THE PAST.

KEEP OUT
NO TRESPASSING

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