



Thorn Raven Enduro

Price: from £1999.00

From: SJS Cycles 01278 441500

www.sjscycles.com

Tested: four months

No, it's not a singlespeed. This bike has a grand total of 14 wide ranging gears and they're all contained within the big Rohloff hub in the rear wheel. Understandably the first thing most people want to know is what it's like riding with a Rohloff hub instead of a pair of derailleurs and a cassette. But before I answer that query I'd like to talk a bit about the Thorn Raven Enduro's frame as it always seems to get scant mention in other reviews and the frame is far more important to the feel of the bike than the gear system.

The model we rode was the '534S XL' which has low standover height but a long-ish top tube and designed for 80mm forks. This model is intended for people with short legs and long bodies but we thought it was also a great shape for regularly proportioned people around 5'10". The low standover meant for great manoeuvrability (helped by the ultra-short 16" chainstays) and a lot of seatpost showing (extra comfort-giving flex) but the long top tube and steepish angles helped to keep the front end from getting carried away. Even the odd-looking mega-sweep riser bars seemed to work well with bike. Every tester who had a go on it commented on its nippy and neat handling – it is a very fun bike to ride.

The bike is no lightweight by any means (at a surprising 29lbs) but it carries its weight exceedingly well. A lot of people understandably assume that having a lot more weight in the rear wheel makes it feel like you are dragging an anchor around but it doesn't. The only time we noticed the extra weight is when trying to unweight the rear wheel over slippery roots (where it tended to wash out a bit eagerly). It arguably doesn't have the same level of zingy feel as other Reynolds 853/725 frames but it is noticeably more springy than aluminium and 4130 cromoly frames. I can't help but feel the frame would make for

a really ace singlespeed if you are so inclined (frames cost £599 including EBB, headset and seatpost).

Nice touches on the frame include: disc-specific stays, four top-mounted top tube cable guides (that keep noisy 'hose slap' under control and permit comfy shouldering), stainless steel brazed dropouts (that are Rohloff specific negating the need for a separate stay-mounted torque arm) and Crud Catcher mounts on the down tube. Tyre clearance isn't very good however – you won't get anything bigger than 2.1 in the back. Hopefully Thorn can address this issue in future models (even it means adding half an inch to the stays or something).

But what about the Rohloff? The bottom line is that it works. But it's not perfect... yet. The good things about it are obvious: it will work even when covered in thick mud, drivechain wear is minimal, there's no rear mech to smash on rocks, there's no chainslap and you can change gear when not pedaling (we didn't realise how much we used this feature until we got back onto our 'normal' bikes and really missed it!). There are other benefits too: the indexing is dealt with inside the hub so cable stretch isn't so much of an issue and the rear wheel is dishless with shorter spokes which means it is very strong. The things we didn't like so much about it was the muffled feel of the twist-shifter (and its hard-to-read display) and the fairly agricultural sound and feel of the hub gearing. Both of these aspects improve with mileage as things bed-in but for the first few months it will be a bit rough. Once it is bedded in though this bike could be the perfect partner for all you maintenance-phobic, mech-smashing, mile-munching, fun-loving 'real' riders out there.

Ben Haworth.



Slap-free, full cable guides



0-14 in one twist



Simple sprocket works well in gunk



The Thorn's eccentric BB



A QR and thumbscrew to remove wheel