



Marin Nail Trail



Marin, it's a name that is synonymous with mountain biking. Situated on the northern side of San Francisco bay, Marin County has long been credited as the original breeding ground for the very first knobby tyre enthusiasts, thanks in no small part to guys like Joe Breeze. Joe and his buddies, Tom Ritchey and Gary Fisher, are all associated with the birth of the modern mountain bike. A guy called Bob Buckley wasn't far behind these trail-blazers and in 1986 he founded Marin bikes.

Down Under, on the other side of the world, it would be safe to say that while many mountain bikers would know the Marin name and the history associated with the area and the brand, it's not a brand that's particularly hot on the lips.

Recognising the limitations of its reputation, in 2012 Marin began a substantial shakeup of its management, with respected industry veteran Matt VanEnkevort taking over the reigns as CEO. Along with internal restructuring and significant reinvestment back into research and development, VanEnkevort and his team have injected fresh ideas and much-needed enthusiasm back into the company.

The 2014 range represents the fruits of that labor, with the release of new branding, new suspension platforms, a new logo and a new overall direction to bring the Marin name back to where it belongs.

Part of that new direction for 2014 and beyond includes heavy investment into the 27.5" wheel size. On review here is Marin's mid-level alloy hardtail, the Nail Trail 27.5

The Bike

The Nail Trail is based upon the same geometry as the carbon-framed Team CXR, but comes in a more affordable aluminum package. Sitting a little over the \$2k mark, the Nail Trail occupies a popular and incredibly important part of the market as, for most people getting into mountain biking seriously, this really is the starting point.

The challenge for Marin was not just to build a bike that is relatively light and comfortable, but also one that inspires confidence and is durable enough to withstand the less subtle riding style of a beginner. The other challenge was to do it on a budget, without exotic materials, complex suspension dampers, tubeless wheels or high-end drivetrains.

Despite the modest price-point, the AL-6061 frame on the Nail Trail is very nicely finished, having been hydroformed, heat treated and butted. It's built with an hourglass tapered head tube up front matched up to a 100mm travel RockShox Reba RL fork. Along with the modern alloy frame, our Medium (17") test bike came with modern geometry figures including a 69-degree head angle and 59.7cm top tube length aimed to increase high-speed stability over a traditional XC hardtail.

The 650B wheelset consists of double walled and eyeleted Alex XD-Comp rims laced with DT Champion straight-gauge spokes and Marin-branded sealed bearing hubs. While the wheels are pretty porky at 2kg, the lightweight folding bead Racing Ralph tyres from Schwalbe help to keep rolling resistance low.

Shimano takes care of a mixed 2x10 drivetrain, with the new Deore double crankset featured up front and a Deore XT Shadow Plus rear derailer out back. The SLX shifter pods are bolted onto the M615 hydraulic disc brakes via the I-Spec bracket which neatens up the cockpit while still allowing lateral adjustment of the shift levers.

Our Medium sized test rig tipped the scales at 11.5kg, which is respectable for a bike at this price point.

The Ride

Setup on the Nail Trail is refreshingly simple and it's a very easy bike to get comfortable with. Because of the mid-sized wheels, Marin have been able to spec a gentle rise on the 720mm wide bars and unlike a 29er you don't have to flip the stem just to get the grips down to the right height. A twin-bolt seatpost is exceptionally easy to adjust for correct saddle tilt, and the flat profile on the Selle Royal saddle was universally comfortable amongst testers. The rest of the Marin-branded cockpit is all quality, including the thin and tacky (in feel rather than quality) lock-on grips.

As you would expect from an alloy hardtail, acceleration is good and the bottom bracket feels rock solid under pedalling. The Nail Trail isn't overly harsh though, and that's due to the butted seat stays and high volume Schwalbe tyres, which roll ever so slightly smoother than their 26" counterparts. The riding position is neutral like a trail bike, with the long front centre, 73-degree seat tube angle and 30cm BB height placing you smack-bang in between the wheels.

The overall ride quality feels more dynamic than your average XC bike, and ducking into twisty singletrack is where the Nail Trail begins hits its straps. The wide bars encourage you to really lean the bike over through the corners, and the tight turning circle from the 27.5" wheels leaves you with little fear of under-steer. It's an incredibly easy bike to flick around. Response time from the grips to the front tyre is quick, and that's the result of a team performance from the solid wheelset, QR15 thru-axle, tapered head tube and stubby stem.

It's worth noting the impressive 1.58kg weight of the Reba RL forks, which come in around 200 grams lighter than an equivalent Fox model. The RockShox unit mirrored our previous experience with Reba Solo Air forks though, in that we needed about 10psi more air pressure than recommended to prevent the fork from bottoming out.

Although you do find yourself bouncing around on rock-strewn descents, the Nail Trail remains remarkably composed thanks to the slack head angle and generous wheelbase length, and so it encourages you to just hang onto the grips and let the bike go. I reckon that with some more aggressive tyres and a dropper post, you could get into, and out of, some pretty slick situations on the Nail Trail.

In something of a common theme with our test bikes, the SLX brakes were stand-out performers with heaps of power and a super smooth feel from the cam-actuated lever mechanism.

While the Nail Trail comes packed with value out of the box, there are a few areas where it could be improved. The FSA headset is unsealed, so you'll need to clean and grease the caged ball bearings if you wash your bike frequently or ride in wet conditions. The 10-speed Deore cassette, while having a usable wide range, tips the scales at a whopping 460 grams, so an upgrade to an XT unit when it wears out would help drop rotational mass. And she ain't the most efficient climber. You'll have to exaggerate your lean over the bars to keep the front tyre sticking on steep switchback corners. The trade-off, though, is having confidence everywhere else on the trail. In my opinion, this trade-off is well worth it.

We're glad that Marin erred on the side of strength and stiffness with the stock hoops, but if you're on the lighter side or you're getting into racing, a set of Stan's ZTR Crest wheels will strip off nearly 500 grams of rotational weight for less than \$800

The Verdict

In our opinion, the Nail Trail is one of the best mountain bikes going for the money. It is spec'd well, rides confidently and you get a whole lot of technology for the money.

Parts aside, it's the refined handling package that we were most impressed with. In a nutshell, Marin has successfully weaved trail bike geometry into an XC hardtail, and for us that was a bit of a revelation. Why should XC hardtails, and particularly mid-level hardtails, be stuck with twitchy race geometry?

The Nail Trail is simply a rock solid mountain bike delivers confidence in spades, and is ready and willing to develop and grow as your skills develop.

And as for the new company direction? Well if Marin are willing to focus this much attention to detail on ride quality with a \$2,100 hardtail, we can't wait to see what else is in store from the San Franciscan brand. - ENDUromag

Frame	6061 alloy w/triple butted & hydroformed main tubes, double butted seat/chain stays & tapered Zero Stack head tube.
Fork	RockShox Reba RL fork w/100mm travel, QR15 Maxle Lite, tapered steerer tube, Motion Control damping and adjustable air spring.
Wheelset	Alex XD Comp 27.5 disc specific rims, DT Swiss Champion spokes & Marin sealed bearing Centrelock hubs. Schwalbe Racing Ralph Performance Series 2.25" tyres w/folding Kevlar bead.
Drivetrain	Shimano SLX 2x10 shifters & front derailer, Deore XT Shadow Plus rear derailer, Deore 38/24t crankset & 11-36t cassette.
Brakes	Shimano M615 hydraulic disc brakes w/180mm front & 160mm rear Centrelock rotors
Cockpit	Marin alloy low-rise bar w/710mm width, forged alloy stem, twin-bolt alloy seatpost & Selle Royal Seta saddle.
RRP	\$2,099.00
Contact	Oceania Bicycles www.ocbicycles.com.au Marin Bikes www.marinbikes.com