



ANDI

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This year has been different, difficult and demanding, but overall for riding it has been very rewarding. I've managed to ride more than I would if I had to drive an hour to the office each day. I've discovered some simply amazing trails accessible from my doorstep, and made a bunch of great new riding mates. Sure I've missed the travel and the racing, but I've more than made up for it in other ways.

YT IZZO

Just ahead of lockdown I was sent a bike that would entirely change my mind about short travel lightweight bikes. After a year of riding the 170mm travel Commencal META, and a winter of patrolling the Peaks on my... Patrol E-Six e-MTB, the last thing on my mind was a full carbon lightweight trail bike with just 130mm of travel, but when the YT IZZO arrived I was smitten.

At first I was shocked by how light it was. With a full carbon frame, carbon bar, and DT Swiss carbon wheels shod in lightweight cross-country tyres, it felt like a pure featherweight compared to my eMTB with Fox 38 and downhill tyres.

It was hardly surprising that I found the YT to be a fast climber, but it did open my eyes when I realised that it felt just like climbing on my e-bike and that I would cover ground at a similar pace. Better than an e-bike though, the IZZO will get you to the top of as many climbs as you like without the dreaded 'range anxiety'.

What did surprise me was how capable this 130mm travel bike was in the technical stuff. No, it isn't as fast as an enduro bike, but it's really engaging and fun. You can ride extremely challenging terrain and feel the rush that you and your skill cleared it, and then you can ride a tame trail centre and never feel over-biked.

The spritely YT IZZO made such a mark on me that I purchased my very own. I went up to a large size, swapped out a few parts and completed 67km on my first ride.

SR Suntour TriAir 3CR

When we consider upgrades for our bikes we tend to think of new brakes, better tyres, lighter wheels, drivetrain upgrades or a new fork. Weirdly though, the rear shocks on our bikes tend to get overlooked, yet they play a huge role in how our bikes ride. A good rear shock can reduce fatigue and improve pedalling performance, a great shock will add speed, sensitivity and tuning, a truly amazing shock will do all of this while costing a small fortune, or will it?

Earlier this year I was given the opportunity to test the SR Suntour TriAir 3CR rear shock, and to say I was impressed would be an understatement. As the name suggests the TriAir is an air shock with a positive and negative air chamber along with an IFP which can also be adjusted via an air shock.

In addition to these tuning options, riders can install volume spacers to either side of the air shock, fine-tune rebound via the external rebound knob and set 3 levels of compression using a simple lever. During my time with the TriAir I was impressed by its coil-like performance, small bump sensitivity and amazing platform. Best of all though is the price, with an RRP of around £333 (hunt around and you will get it for less) the TriAir is a top-notch shock for a fraction of other rear shock upgrades.

Bontrager DropLock

My IZZO was shipped with a SRAM TwistLoc remote to control the lockout of the rear shock and, while I hadn't had any issues with the system on our test bike, the control on my personal bike refused to remain in place. With the correct torque and carbon paste applied, the SRAM TwistLoc would still move. I did what any sane person would do and added slightly more torque which rounded the head of the extremely tiny bolt. Thankfully I had a similar sized bolt and replaced it, but nothing I could do would stop the TwistLoc moving.

With the option of either ordering another TwistLoc and perhaps suffering the same problems or finding an alternative, I chose the latter. A quick search brought up the Bontrager DropLock, a dual lever control that activates the lockout of a rear shock, with a second lever for controlling the dropper. Best of all, the Trek store in Manchester's Piccadilly had them in stock so it meant just a quick trip to the city to sort it out.

The DropLock isn't a cheap item – it cost £100, and I don't suggest for one moment that it should be so expensive, but it is made entirely of metal, has real-sized bolts with real-sized heads, and it was a doddle to fit and it doesn't move. A replacement SRAM unit would have been roughly the same cost, is made of plastic and has very tiny bolts. An expensive component, but I'm very happy with the direction I went – plus I can now use any brand of grip that I want as I don't need a special TwistLoc compatible model.

Troy Lee Resist Trousers

It's raining, it's pouring and the trails are far from boring. With our dusty summer tracks now turning to slick, rooty steeps, it's time to keep dry with quality waterproof kit, and I'm so far very happy with the new Troy Lee Designs Resist weatherproof trouser.

Like most of Troy Lee's kit, the Resist Pants are a great looking pair of trousers, but more importantly, they're perfect for riding in the rain and slimy conditions. The material is a Bluesign® 10k waterproof stretch material which somehow, magically, prevents water from leaking in, but has enough stretch to keep them comfortable on the move. The material comes with a Teflon EcoElite™ finish that helps water to bead up and roll off, but also stops mud and grit sticking firmly to them.

Like all good waterproofs, the Resists have fully taped seams and Troy Lee has incorporated a couple of zipped vents for cooling, pockets for your keys and phone and a ratchet waist adjustment to dial them in. Riding pants are no longer the confines of the downhill only moto crowd, and waterproof pants aren't just for commuters. Comfortable, practical, and flattering, I'm looking forward to a winter of riding that doesn't fill the washing machine with layers of muddy clothes after every ride.

