

Nukeproof launch 2014 – Two days in a Basque (country)...

It's two in the afternoon, and I've been travelling since two in the morning.

I stare at the black coffee in front of me and try to focus. I'm here, in Bilbao's surprisingly small airport, waiting for a lift to take me to BasqueMTB's hotel-headquarters at Hondarribia, some hour and a half away. My ride is here, driven by the chirpy Scotsman Doug, but one of the other journalists from France has missed his flight. So. More coffee, more coffee, more coffee. Try to stay awake.

My flight's taken so long because I'd had to fly from Manchester, and change at Frankfurt. If I'd driven to Stansted Airport instead, I could've just flown direct, and started at a much more civilised hour. But what's done is done; get on the minibus, find an appropriate headrest; sleep.

grindgrindgrind



BasqueMTB has been offering holidays and guiding in the Hondarribia region for the past six years or so, and Doug – head honcho, driver and guide – is justifiably proud of the trails (and the food) that the Basque region has to offer. He drives us to our accommodation, a small family-run hotel/B&B called Bista Eder, where we are treated to a presentation of the new and the updated in the 2015 Nukeproof range (for more details see my earlier missive [here](#)) before we are treated to a slap-up barbeque feed courtesy of Hotlines Sales Manager – and former chef – Declan. This is promising to be a good trip.

The next morning, we are split into two groups. Half of us are destined to ride Nukeproof MegaTR bikes on a cross country route to San Sebastian, the nearest city, and the rest of us are on uplift duty aboard Nukeproof Mega AMs. I am destined for the latter; we'll swop the next day.

 **exclusive Premier content**

Day 1: Uplift

It takes some fettling to set my bike up the way I want it. Tyre pressures, shock pressures, fork pressures:

It's time for the wheel size question again!

- My main bike has 26in wheels
- My main bike has 27.5in wheels
- My main bike has 29in wheels

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one of the difficulties of trips like this is the unknown nature of the terrain on the first day. Many searching (and probably inane) questions are asked of our hosts about terrain, altitude and steepness, and much weather-based chin-scratching is performed before we eventually settle on... well, pretty much what we'd have probably gone for in any event. But, like making coffee on a Sunday morning, the ritual is important.

Sitting in a minibus, the bikes parked in a trailer behind, we climb and climb into the mountains, past switchback after switchback, past the occasional tired-looking roadie, and eventually, when the trees break, we disembark, get on our bikes and, er, climb a bit more.

Martin from Hotlines does something probably involving the word 'schralp'.



Not for long, though – we ride up to the crest, a matter of a hundred metres or two, and then we drop down the other side of the hill through a spectacularly British looking piece of freshly cut, rootsy singletrack. It is a slightly moist day, and the roots are even more so. After a remarkably hot few weeks back in the UK, it's a trial-by-fire to remember how to ride very, very slippery things, exclusively arranged in such a way as to spit you off the side of the trail as much as possible.

This section of trail doesn't last long – a few hundred metres. And then we're off down magnificently steep, drift-the-back-wheel-round switchbacks; foresty, rooty step-downs, sandstone sinuous trails... and so it goes on. We finish one trail only to be picked up by the van and carted off to another, with more singletrack, more stepdowns, more rocks, more roots.

The riding is unquestionably fantastic, and it carries on all day.

Lunch is provided in a small restaurant literally at the bottom of one of these trails; an excellent repast of bean soup with sausage, steak with frites and a sort of sheep's yoghurt and honey thing. Yum. And then? Back on the gnarl.

One of the extraordinary things about riding in this region is how like the UK it feels; albeit a region of

the UK where the trails go on for a **long** time, and where there are no access issues, and the food is much, much, *much* better.

Lesser-spotted photographer, mid-ravine



It is during our postprandial run that (mild) calamity strikes. Doug had warned of a section of trail which suddenly dropped into much steepness, but his warnings were for naught. Paul Lazenby and I are vying for last place once again – well, if I'm honest we'd worked a compromise where I am last, and I try very hard to keep up – but I am making a semi-decent fist of bothering his rear wheel, when Paul suddenly disappears in a flurry of whoops and dust. My feeble attempts to follow are marred by the sudden appearance of a large tree, which separates me from my bike before I ricochet off a fallen log and slide down a large dirt chute. I'm not the only one, though – I join one of my German colleagues at the bottom, and although I've hit my head pretty hard (thanks, IXS, for saving my swede) I feel OK to continue the run. The 'ravine' jump that comes afterwards it's prudent to skip, though. At least, the crash is my excuse...

The MegaAM

All Mountain. And VERY GREEN...



The Nukeproof AM is a beast of a bike – 160mm front and rear courtesy of a RockShox Monarch plus shock with a Pike fork, a 1x11 SRAM XO groupset and Avid Guide brakes means that it could quite happily get me into – and out of – a whole heap of trouble, provided I have the confidence and chops to let it. It seems I

have enough confidence for the former, but slightly less for the latter...

One day of uplifts is hardly enough to give a decent impression of what a bike is like, but I'm impressed. What little climbing we do is dispatched with the minimum of fuss, but the proof of this All Mountain pudding is in the descending. My MegaAM is a little small for me on paper, but this is no problem when the trail becomes steep. The back end is light enough to pick up and plant, and the whole bike feels nimble, as long as the trail points down. The suspension feels tight and stiff and surprisingly un-wallowy, an attribute Nukeproof ascribe to their Erosion Link, which apparently gives a "smooth progressive action with a well-controlled mid-stroke to avoid wallowing under pedalling loads". I can't really comment on any pedalling loads, as the trails weren't terribly pedally, but the suspension certainly has a nicely bottomless feel without feeling like it's sitting deep into the travel.



Safely packed into the van, we are carted back to the hotel, and I'm patched up before we wander around San Sebastián, drinking and eating at a variety of pintxos bars (a pintxos is essentially a small regional snack characterised by its impalement on a cocktail stick) of uniform excellence before any further hunger pangs are assuaged by exposure to another culinary treat of the region – a huge potato omlette served in a french stick: we can barely move.

Day 2: Cross Country

Day 2 dawns somewhat more soggy; heavy rains overnight and intermittent heavy showers make us glad that we'd dispatched the super-steep uplift riding the previous day. And so, after breakfast, bikes swapped to Mega TRs, we ride from Hondarribia along the coast, enjoying the view awhile and taking some pics of the stunning scenery. Soon, however, the trail turns sharply upwards, and our grinding-grinding misery is compounded by a sudden, and extremely violent downpour. At least the bikes are more suited to long, arduous uphills. Earlier, Carston from SRAM did me a massive favour by swapping my Reverb to a 150mm model, which gives me an essential extra inch or so of climbing comfort (thanks, Carston). Several hundred vertical metres later, and rather more moist than we were at sea-level, we crest the rise under a large antenna tower, and start our descent, which proves to be essentially very, very similar to the local riding at Singletrack Towers, all sandstone and scrub and grip, but pitched at more of an angle – and with rather more impressive scenery.



Lunch is half way down the extremely long descent, and is very welcome. From the open sandstone descents before lunch, the terrain changes. We charge down through wooded valley floor trails of surprising steepness; more roots, gullies and dropoffs. All are rideable if you are on your game, and all leave us buzzing.

Mega TR

The Mega TR is, perhaps, the do-it-all bike in the Nukeproof range. My test bike comes equipped with a RockShox Revelation fork with 150mm travel, complemented by 130mm of RockShox Monarch-driven bounce at the back. It's lighter than the Mega AM, the geometry is a little more upright – but in my initial assessment, this is a very competent bike indeed. Climbing is, perhaps, more of a chore than on a lighter bike, but this is more than made up for by the bike's capability on descents. I would be more than happy taking the MegaTR on the trails we rode the previous day on the AM. The fork feels a little twisty in comparison to the similarly-travelled Pikes on the MegaAM, but the shorter rear travel isn't really noticeable here. The descents on this ride have more pedally

sections, and there is commendably little wallowing; I'm using all the travel, and the bike has noticeable 'pop' when accelerating hard out of corners.

In fact, these descents pretty much match those from yesterday, and in variety possibly exceed them – there are long, flowy high speed flights; short, sharp steep bum-clenchers; rooty sideways twisters, and (spectacularly) one which seems to run through a thicket of bamboo. Once we finally drop into San Sebastián and, via an impromptu rock concert, into a bar, we are suitably elated, and extremely knackered of leg.

End Premier Content

Actually steeper than it looks, honest. The MegaTR in action



The meal that follows a brisk clean-up is fantastic – we're treated to food in a private gastronomic club in Hondarribia, and the revelry continues into a bar, where inadvisable quantities of booze were consumed: the

subsequent 5 minute walk back to our hotel took more than an hour and a half.

And thus I find myself at the airport once more, waiting on a long flight back to the UK. My initial suspicion that I've escaped the inevitable hangover is, sadly, unfounded. And so it is with banging head that I board my flight, already missing the trails, and the food. Not so much the booze though (until perhaps later).

Thanks to:

www.nukeproof.com

www.basquemtb.com



Pics by Andy Lloyd and Barney

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