



Below left: Single chainring means no chain line issues. Below right: Rohloff's Speedhub is a major investment but looks to pay long-term dividends by its immunity to cassette and derailleur-clogging mud



THORN RAVEN ENDURO £1999 27.8LBS

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The Raven Enduro marks a change in direction from Thorn's traditional output of tandems, audaxers and heavy-duty expedition bikes. Born from frame designer Andy Blance's obsession with Rohloff Speedhubs and enduro riding (long distance Mtb'ing), this incarnation of the popular Raven Tour is designed as a low maintenance, all-weather cross country machine that's good for trailer hauling too.

Like many modern Mtbs, the Enduro follows the fashion for a long top tube and seat post. However, thanks to the single chainring of the Rohloff, its chainstays are far shorter than normal – just 16in long. Shifting body weight further over the rear wheel, shorter chainstays help more assured descents while a tight rear triangle promotes direct climbing and sweet handling on singletrack.

Tough tubing

Frame wise, Reynold's top end 853 conical tubeset is TIG welded in Taiwan, with extra beefy 725 chainstays wide

enough for 2.1in mud pluggers. Tipping the scales at almost 28lbs, the Enduro's built for strength and longevity rather than litherness – the 0.9mm to 0.6mm to 0.9mm top tube is less likely to dent too if you travel with it. Fully enclosed cable housing seals out the worst of British winter grime, routed across the top tube so the bike can be shouldered, and braze-ons include mounts for a crud catcher, two water bottles and Thorn's Micro Carrier (£70), ideal for a minimal Polaris challenge. Removing the rear wheel is simple thanks to Thorn's eccentric bottom bracket and Speedhub specific vertical drop-outs.

While the Enduro is disc specific, a tour version, the Catalyst, comes with V-brake bosses and rack mounts with longer chainstays for pannier clearance. Frames are available in small, medium and large, with an extra long top tube option and three finishes to pick from: matt black, metallic silver and for the bravehearted, flo' green.

At just shy of two grand you'd

expect the Enduro to bristle with quality kit, and it does. Spec includes Mavic 717 disc rims, powerful Hope Mini hydraulic disc brakes and Fox's plush coil sprung Vanilla RL forks – with a lockout for the Tarmac.

Anti mud and crud

It's the £750 Rohloff that swallows up the largest chunk of the budget. While this startup cost may at first seem excessive, its low maintenance should save time and money in the long run. Riding the Enduro during the Merida 100k Marathon series, it proved at its best in appalling conditions, where the sealed internals of the hub could ignore the worst of Wales' derailleur clogging mud and crud, leaving a wake of frustrated riders nursing skipping gears and chain suck. On the downside, the hub concentrates weight at the rear end, and until properly bedded in can be noisy.

Handling is tight and nimble – far lighter than you'd expect – while short chainstays give a direct feel when hauling a single-wheel trailer. The disc version of the Speedhub uses a click box that's marginally heavier to shift

than the cable pull version used on the Raven Tour, but being fully sealed is more reliable in the long run.

Fourteen evenly spaced gears in 13.6% increments offer similar gear inches to a typical Mtb, albeit with a slightly smaller top end – though you can spec the size of the chainring and sprocket to suit your riding. As ever with the Rohloff system, shifting between gears 7 and 8 requires an easing off the pedal stroke as the hub changes from one set of ratios to the next. We also found downshifting from 5 to 4 on needed some care. But give it some time and the Rohloff really improves in both smoothness and noise – the more you use it, the less you'll want to go back to derailleurs. Especially when it comes to washing and lubing your bike after a day's riding.

While there are lighter, fancier and faster bikes for the money, the Enduro performs superbly at what it was built for: an all-weather, fuss-free Mtb. For those still not sold on the Rohloff concept, Thorn offer an impressive 100-day money back guarantee – ample time to decide.

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