

**MARIN RIFT ZONE**  
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# A RIFT ZONE IN THE VOLCANIC BIKE MARKET

*Marin's value-priced trail bike  
is shaking things up*

It's been a long time since 1986, when Marin Bikes of Marin County, California, made their first Madrone Trail. It turned industry heads and laid the groundwork for many bikes to come. Marin has survived the decades of producing bike after bike until we finally fall into modern times with the Rift Zone. This is a bike that was created with versatility in mind with a multitude of 29-, 27.5-, and even 24- and 26-inch models for the junior rippers. It's a trail bike designed to meet the demands of today's riders, but we're not testing the carbon crème de la crème of the Rift Zone lineup this time. Instead, we've chosen to go specifically with the more budget-friendly, all-new, alloy Rift Zone 29" 2 because, on paper, it seems like an incredible trail bike value.

## FRAME

At a glance, the Rift Zone's new aluminum frame doesn't look particularly unique. It has a fairly generic frame shape, loose internal cable routing and a familiar suspension design. Both triangles are made up of Marin's Series 3 6061 aluminum with features like 148mm Boost thru-axle spacing, a threaded BB and ISCG 5 tabs. Geometry-wise, Marin has done a good job of keeping up with the trends—a 65.5-degree head tube angle, 77-degree seat tube angle, and a low standover height all help make this bike competitive in its purpose. This bike doesn't fuss about size-specific chainstays, but keeps them uniform throughout the size range at a short 430mm. The reach on our size-large test bike is a roomy 485mm.

## ON THE RIDER

Lazer Jackal KinetiCore helmet (\$220)  
Contact: [www.lazersport.com](http://www.lazersport.com)

WildHorn Radke sunglasses (\$80)  
Contact: [www.wildhornoutfitters.com](http://www.wildhornoutfitters.com)

Zoic Hawkeye Jersey (\$50),  
Ether Shorts (\$75), Base Gloves (\$35),  
Session Socks (\$15)  
Contact: [www.zoic.com](http://www.zoic.com)

Leatt 6.0 Clip shoes (\$160)  
Contact: [www.leatt.com](http://www.leatt.com)









The Rift Zone 29 2 invited playfulness while riding any trail and provided the supportive suspension needed to feel comfortable sending it.

## COMPONENTS

Alloy versions of the Rift Zone range in price from \$1799 to \$3499. Our Rift Zone is the 29" 2 model—the mid-priced of the three options and, in our opinion, one of the best value builds in the line for the money. Marin's MSRP on this bike is \$2400, which gets you a handful of components that will work well enough to get you started on the trails. Our favorite highlight is the Shimano Deore 12-speed drivetrain with an FSA Comet crankset, which worked flawlessly throughout our test. Now, on their website, Marin has listed a set of components that was not included on our test bike but are similar in quality nonetheless. The web specs have Tektro HDM-535 brake levers, while ours came with Shimano MT-200s. When asked, Marin told us supply issues were still in effect, which may bring some inconsistencies to the final bike spec based on availability of parts. All parts involved are generally comparable to each other, so this is no big thing when considering your purchase.

All of that said, it was really only the brakes that were affected, so everything else will be consistent. Marin went in-house for their bars, stem, grips and saddle. Their own tubeless rims laced to Shimano hubs with Centerlock disc mounts were wrapped in Vee Tire Co.'s Flow Snap 29x2.35-inch tires with the Tackee compound. Another highlight was the TranzX YSP18JL 170mm-travel dropper post, which worked very smoothly throughout the test, providing plenty of drop for most situations, though we'd consider throwing a 200mm dropper on eventually.

## SUSPENSION

Marin uses their Multitrac suspension system for their whole full-suspension lineup. This system is their take on the Horst Link pivot design and is used to achieve 130mm of rear travel on the Rift Zone 29 2—a 5mm increase in travel over the

The Vee tires were decent in most conditions and provided plenty of traction, but their soft sidewalls and slight wobble left a little to be desired at speed.





previous model. On this bike they've tuned it to be very small-bump-compliant in the beginning of the stroke with a big ramp in support towards the end of the stroke to provide bottom-out control. The shock chosen to work with this suspension system is the RockShox Deluxe Select RT with a two-position climb switch and ample rebound adjustment. The fork a 140mm-travel (10mm more than last year's version) Marzocchi Bomber Z2 with a 44mm offset. We think this fork was an excellent spec on this bike and was one of our favorite features throughout our test.

## CLIMBING

As the Rift Zone 29 2 is an all-around trail bike, we'd expect it to climb relatively well. Our size large felt relatively light and well balanced on the trail when pointing up. No complaints were made, even on longer road climbs, and we didn't even consider the climbing switch on either fork or shock. The best compliment we can give is that we were content when climbing on the Rift Zone. The cockpit was easily set to a comfortable climbing position, and it motored up whatever we asked it to with balance and poise.

Technical climbing was little issue, too. The suspension remained just active enough to keep the rear wheel planted in loose sections where grip was questionable, and our position on the bike allowed us to shift our weight

effortlessly whenever we got into a tight spot, whether it was a tight switchback or tricky rock section. As long as we weren't in any hurry, we could climb anything on the Rift Zone.

## DESCENDING

Since the Rift Zone 29 2 is a more budget-friendly bike, we were curious how it would handle the descents. The immediate weak points were discovered very quickly when the pace was pushed even a little. First of all, the Shimano MT-200 brakes chosen for this bike have two-piston calipers that lack in power relative to their high-end siblings in the Shimano line. Anything steeper than a leisurely grade became a white-knuckle affair even when the brakes were bed in properly.

Despite the weak brakes, the bike descended rather well. We took it to a wide variety of trails—from jumps to relatively steep and technical trails—and were impressed with its balance and maneuverability. When getting it up to speed, the bike felt a little unstable, but not to a point that we were worried it would skip out from under us. The Marzocchi Bomber Z2 tracked well in most situations and helped us direct the front wheel out of many treacherous ruts we encountered. The rear suspension tracked the ground well, and we never felt the back end stepping away from us for lack of traction. Heavy hits and hard landings weren't met with harsh bottom-outs or horrible clunks. It held its own quite well, and we were generally, brakes aside, happy with its overall performance, especially considering its rather reasonable price tag.

Jumping and cornering were also great to ride on the Rift Zone. Most riders had no issues with overall rigidity, but some of our more advanced and aggressive testers felt a bit of rear-end flex when pushed hard into a corner. To get to the bottom of it, we tried a Reynolds Blacklabel 327 Trail Pro wheelset on the bike—a wheelset that costs almost as much as the bike. The results were stunning. Not only did the rear end flex go away, overall performance increased across the board, highlighting the upgrade potential of this bike.



***"One thing we really like about this bike is that it provides an excellent platform to build off of when parts break or when you just want to freshen up the build a little bit."***





### WHAT DID WE LOVE?

There's a certain satisfaction in the simplicity of this bike. It's not overbuilt and has most of the features we desire on bikes with a higher price point. However, a couple of standout features were the smoothness of the Deore 12-speed drivetrain and the excellent performance of the Marzocchi Bomber Z2 fork.

One thing we really like about this bike is that it provides an excellent platform to build off of when parts break or when you just want to freshen up the build a little bit. It's exactly the same frame as the higher-end Rift Zone builds and can be made into anything you want with time.

### MARIN RIFT ZONE 29" 2

[www.marinbikes.com](http://www.marinbikes.com)

Price	\$2400
Weight	33.8 pounds (without pedals)
Sizes	S, M, L (tested), XL
Frame tested	130mm travel, aluminum frame
Shock	RockShox Deluxe Select RT
Fork	Marzocchi Bomber Z1 29"
Wheelset	Marin double-wall alloy with Shimano hubs
Tires	Vee Tire Co. Flow Snap (19x2.35") Tackee compound
Seatpost	TranzX YSP18JL, 170mm of drop
Saddle	Marin Speed Concept
Handlebar	Marin Mini-Riser, 28mm rise, 780mm wide
Stem	Marin 3D forged alloy, 35mm
Grips	Marin Grizzly lock-on
Headset	FSA No 57E, Semi-Sealed Cartridge Bearings
Brakes	Shimano MT-200
Rotors	180mm (f), 180mm (r)
Rear derailleur	Shimano Deore 12-speed
Shifters	Shimano Deore, 12-speed
Crankset	FSA Comet
Bottom bracket	External sealed cartridge bearing
Cassette	Sun Race 12-speed, 11-51T
Chain	KMC X-12
Chainrings	FSA direct mount, 32-tooth

### GEOMETRY

Head tube angle	65.5°
Effective seat tube angle	77°
Reach	485mm (19.1")
Stack	637.3mm (25.1")
Bottom bracket height	343mm (13.5")
Chainstay length	430mm (16.9")
Wheelbase	1234mm (48.6")

◀ Shimano's Deore 12spd drivetrain worked flawlessly throughout the test period.



Though the RockShox Deluxe Select RT has a lockout feature, we hardly felt the need to use it.

***"It held its own quite well, and we were generally, brakes aside, happy with its overall performance, especially considering its rather reasonable price tag."***

### WHAT DID WE HATE?

Test riders found the brakes lacking power and considered them to be the first thing they'd upgrade on this bike. The original-spec Tektro brakes might be an improvement, but we have yet to test them. Although the Vee Tire Co. Flow Snap tires hooked up well, the tire treads had a bit of a wobble in them, even when fully seated. It didn't seem to cause a problem on the trail, but it was quite distracting at speed on pavement.

### BOTTOM LINE

Our constant testing of bikes that cost three times the amount of the Rift Zone 29" 2 can result in miserable disappointment when testing anything less, but that was not the case with this bike. It helps prove you don't need a top-of-the-line bike to have a ton of fun. We enjoyed multiple rides with friends and found that it didn't hold advanced riders back as much as some may have thought.

Those ready to graduate to their first full suspension or young riders who are paying their own way into the passion of the sport should consider the Rift Zone 29" 2. To a lot of people, \$2,400 might seem like a lot of money, but for as capable a system as this is, it's really not. Like we said earlier, it's a great platform to build your dream bike with off-the-shelf components, so if you're on a budget, it makes for a perfect starting point that allows you to have fun right from the start. ☐