

Marin Rift Zone 2

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If you've been around biking long enough, you'll no doubt be in sheer disbelief over the price escalation that has been part of the sport. I'm not sure who is buying the \$20,000 bikes on offer, but clearly someone is. In many ways, though, at the other end of the spectrum, the quality of 'entry level' bikes we are getting is incredible too. The Marin Rift Zone 2 (RZ2) is probably in this category, although we're aware that calling a \$3,499 bike 'entry level' clearly shows we've been drinking the MTB industry Kool-Aid by the gallon!

Marin Bikes have been around for, literally, ever — arguably among the 'first' of a group of mountain bike companies hailing from Marin County California. In recent years,

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they have been absolutely hitting it out of the park with quality bikes that look the biz — and at great price points too.

The Rift Zone 2 is a perfect example of this; it hits so many of the right notes and, if you're just here for the summary, it's this: the Rift Zone 2 is all killer, no filler. A great choice to take your trail riding game to the next level, and feel really quite smug at your clever purchasing.

We tested the alloy framed RZ2, priced at \$3499. There is also a slightly lower spec RZ1 at around \$2899, and a flashier, more aggressive spec'd XR version, plus two carbon options above that as well. But it's this mid-range option that will hit the sweet spot for lots of riders (or parents of riders). Spec wise, the Rift Zone 2 has a 140mm Marzocchi Bomber Z2. It may not be as flashy as its Fox or Rock Shox brethren, but this fork is a true workhorse and is capable of handling a wide range of

terrain, from flowy singletrack to technical descents and everything in between. If you're old enough to remember the original bright orange Bombers it's got a certain nostalgia to it too. Handling the rear is the Rock Shox Deluxe Select RT Debonair, delivering 130mm travel. Despite being quite a mouthful of a name, the shock is pretty straightforward and proved to be highly responsive and supple. The Debonair technology provides excellent small bump sensitivity and a highly progressive ramp-up as you charge bigger hits and drops. This allows the shock to provide good levels of control and stability in most riding conditions.

Shifting is handled by the Deore 12-speed system. Well, at least the shifter and the derailleur are Deore; the derailleur features Shimano's Shadow technology, which provides good chain stability and reduces chain slap, ensuring that you get a quiet and smooth



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ride. We reviewed the Deore drivetrain a few issues back and were impressed by it - so long as it is kept clean as it does seem more ‘temperamental’ when it gets bogged down in grit and gunk. Sadly, you’ve got a Sunrace cassette, but that is something you will naturally update down the track. The cassette features a 11-51T gear range, which provides a 510% gear range, making it highly versatile and capable of handling a wide range of terrain.

A Tranz-X dropper provides a simple but totally functional dropper seat, and it’s great to see it offered at a 170mm drop on all sizes apart from the small, which gets a 150mm version. The only other notable spec was the 2-piston Shimano brakes which felt like a swing and a miss. Even the low-cost M520 4-piston Shimano brakes would be a welcome addition, even if this raised the price fractionally.

Both carbon and alloy frames sport full internal cable routing in the front triangle with Marin’s all-new internal cable routing grommets providing a clean and rattle free cable set up.

Colours are subjective, but most of our riders were impressed with the simple grey/white fade and striking red graphics.

Geometry wise, our size large had a fairly lengthy 485mm reach and fairly slack 65.5 head angle. Remember, this is only a 130mm travel bike, but it is clearly pitching itself at the aggressive end of the ‘trail bike’ spectrum.

On the trail we were immediately impressed with the Rift Zone. The phrase that kept coming up was ‘bang for buck’. It doesn’t have any particular bling, but that doesn’t hold it back from doing everything it needs to do. Marin’s MultiTrac suspension system delivered a balanced ride capable of absorbing big hits with an ‘efficient enough’ pedalling platform. We were really impressed with just how much of a lively combo the slack head angle and moderate amount of travel made. Longer travel bikes can feel like they take excessive rider energy and



input to 'get up and going', but the Marin feels spritely; the short chainstays and low bottom bracket height make for nimble and agile handling on tight turns and technical terrain. Despite being on the lower end of travel, the slack head angle gives the rider plenty of confidence to have fun and attack whenever the trail presents an opportunity. This is a winning combination for many of us, who need one bike to do most things well.

The Vee Snap tires specced also performed well. Being a new tyre for our testers, it has an aggressive pattern and seemed to pump up wider than its 2.35" label. They gave good grip and cornering ability on a range of terrain types, from loose dirt to rocky surfaces. Other parts handled suitably well too. The Bomber fork was surprisingly capable, and even outshone the RockShox rear shock which we never quite managed to get dialled, but maybe reflects its price point. The only thing we kept coming back to, were the brakes. The bike wants to be ridden hard, but 2-piston brakes have their limit and longer, steeper descents reminded us why 4-piston brakes would be a better option. It's not a deal breaker, but something that could have made the RZ2 an absolute home-run.

Talking to a local bike shop mechanic about the Rift Zone, he pointed out that, from a shop perspective, they have been really impressed with the Rift Zone and have seen very few issues come up, which should give buyers confidence too. They've sold a lot of them to teenagers, where parents are looking for a bike that is going to let their child really expand their capabilities without breaking the bank (too much). I can see that being a great fit.

Ultimately what really stands out about the Rift Zone 2, is its versatility. This bike is designed to handle a wide range of terrain, from flowy singletrack to technical descents and everything in between, and it's not afraid to jump — something a teenager, in particular, will really like. The bike's geometry and suspension system make it highly capable and able to tackle any trail. It all comes together in a package that really feels like value for money, and greater than the sum of its parts.

