

Ibis MOJO SLR



Despite turning eight years old in 2013, the Ibis Mojo somehow manages to remain just as visually striking today as when it first dropped people's jaws at Interbike back in 2005. There is truly nothing else like it on the market. Its reputation is founded upon a shapely carbon monocoque frame that seems to straddle a razor thin wire between drop-dead gorgeous and positively repulsive – I still can't decide which side it falls on. Coming in at under 3kg for the original Mojo frame and featuring 140mm of rear travel via the dw-link suspension design, in one fell swoop Ibis kicked off a revolution of superlight, long travel carbon trail bikes.

The Mojo is more than just a model of bike though, as it also represents Ibis Cycles' rebirth as a modernised version of what it once was. Now located in Santa Cruz, California, Ibis is one of those names synonymous with mountain biking, much like Yeti and Gary Fisher. However, those early days of hippies welding up steel frames in a shed in Mendocino form but one chapter in the story behind the Ibis name, a chapter that was closed back in 2000 when owner Scot Nicol sold the company. For a variety of reasons, Scot admitted to being "burned out", having run the company for two decades and pouring his heart and soul into each and every bike. Without Scot at the helm however, it took just 20 months under the new ownership before Ibis was in serious financial difficulty, and went under.

Shortly after the company had gone bust in 2002, the stars realigned. Scot was phoned up by a chap called Hans Heim: an industry veteran who had notable experience working

with Specialized and Bontrager, and he also co-founded Santa Cruz Bicycles with Rob Roskopp. Hans had recently parted ways with the Santa Cruz brand, and with a head buzzing with fresh ideas, he sparked an interest in Scot in reviving the Ibis name. In some regards, the company going bust was a blessing in disguise as it allowed for a fresh start – like a phoenix rising from the ashes – but the pair had a lot of work to do when they bought back the name that year. Between them they conceived the original idea for a long-travel carbon dually, and with that they began working on the very first Mojo that would go on to form the cornerstone of the new chapter for the brand.

I've always heard great things about the Ibis Mojo, but had never had the opportunity to ride one... until now. On review here is the successor to the original, the Mojo SLR.

The Build

A sure sign of a successful recipe, the Mojo has evolved from its original design into several, discreet models: the SL, SLR and HD. The SL is the diet version of the three while the HD is the beefier long travel version. The SLR tested sits in the middle of the range and is really just the same ol' Mojo that Ibis has had updated with all the mod cons, including a tapered head tube, 142x12mm rear thru axle, BB92 press-fit bottom bracket, dropper post capability and a direct mount front derailleur. Compared to the original Mojo, the SLR has the same suspension design, the same travel and the same geometry. This is a bold move that Scot stands by, "We liked the way the original Mojo rode so much that we didn't feel it needed to be changed." And in

an industry dominated by a yearly and ever-changing product-cycle that's a refreshing thing to hear. However, with modern trail bikes trending towards 'longer and slacker' over recent years, I have to admit there was an element of doubt in my mind as to how the Ibis would stack up.

The SLR frame has a claimed weight of just 2.3kg with the Fox Float rear shock. Ibis have whittled the weight down over the years by utilising higher grades of carbon fibre, titanium pivot hardware, machined suspension linkages and a new 'sacrificial moulding' technique that if we were told about we would have to be killed. While the external moulds are still the same, Ibis introduce incremental changes in their carbon layup all the time to continue improving the strength and stiffness characteristics of the frame chassis. As far as the 'look' goes, the unconventional front triangle is less a collection of tubes, and more like a solid piece of carbon fibre that has had two ovals chiselled into it. As such, you can only fit a bottle cage to the underside of the down tube, which can be an annoyance.

In terms of components, it's worth noting that what you see here is actually a 2012 model and therefore we were more interested in testing the merits of the frame and suspension package. The 2013 version of this kit will not only include updated Fox CTD Kashima suspension front and rear, it will also utilise Shimano Deore XT brakes as well as a clutch-equipped Shadow Plus rear derailleur that would greatly cut down on the chain slap that we experienced on the model tested.

We've listed the spec and price for the 2013 XT model but you also have the choice

of Shimano SLX and XTR or SRAM X9 and X0 build kits, ranging from \$5499 to \$8799. Most builds will feature a custom wheelset with Stans No Tubes Arch tubeless rims laced to sealed bearing Ibis-branded hubs. Ibis also take care of the stem and seatpost on the XT build, with an Easton Haven Carbon riser bar rounding out the cockpit. Our test mule had a 130-150mm Fox Talas fork fitted, though the SLR frame is capable of taking up to 160mm of travel up front and you have a number of options from Fox with each build kit including your choice of a 32 or 34 series fork.

The Ride

The first thing you notice after swinging a leg over the neon-blue Mojo and taking it for a roll is how comfortable this bike is to ride. Like the original model, the SLR features the dw-link suspension design, which connects the one-piece rear swingarm to the monocoque main frame with two co-rotating mini links that are partially hidden by the swingarm. Combined with the Kashima-coated Fox shock out back, the rear wheel is exceptionally sensitive to ripples on the trail whilst suspending the rider on what feels like a cushion made of silk. The real trickery in the linkage though is how the Mojo manages to remain efficient under power, which is thanks to a very well-tuned rear shock and the clever rear suspension design.

Further into the first ride however, the cloud of doubt in my mind around the frame geometry on our Medium (17") test bike began to grow as I struggled to grapple with the unfashionably steep 69-degree head angle and the relatively snug 580mm top tube length. Largely as a result of those two

attributes, the wheelbase length is also quite modest in length and I was finding the quick steering to be a little too responsive for my liking.

However, while I had already begun drawing preliminary conclusions within those first two hours, I know that it takes a lot of saddle time to properly determine a bike's personality and that there were a few setup adjustments to be made. Once back at Enduro HQ, the handlebar height was raised, air pressures were tweaked and along with some Slickoleum in the fork seals, I was in a better position to get comfortable with the bikes handling.

Whereas a 29er or a slack-angled trail bike requires a low cockpit or some enthusiastic forward leaning to get your weight onto the front wheel, the Mojo naturally positions the rider in a slightly more forward and upright position over the bike. We found that fitting wider bars, a shorter stem and adjusting the saddle back on the rails allows the rider to sit further back on the bike. Once we had made those changes, the handling of the SLR become much more intuitive.

The Mojo is an impressive climber, and the more technical the ascent the better it gets. For switchback climbs, dropping the fork to 130mm travel gives the rider a better position to direct the front wheel around 180-degree turns, though this was only necessary on particularly steep pinches. The low frame weight is certainly a contributor to the Mojo's climbing ability, but the impeccable rear suspension that manages to maintain grip on loose surfaces is what really impressed us. What was even more impressive is that it managed to provide that traction without sucking up energy under pedalling forces.

While you can get the rear shock to move with weight shifts and gee outs, if you crank on the pedals assertively you just don't notice any pedal-induced suspension bob at all. When we arrived at this point during the test we began to wonder if this was in large part the reason for us seeing quite a few Mojoes getting around at enduro events and marathon races. Given the efficient suspension and the fact that the total bike weight isn't far off dedicated XC rigs, it's easy to see why.

When it's time to point the SLR back downhill though, we sure didn't end up with the XC feel the bike so willingly provides on the way up. Sure, you can test your nerves on really steep chutes, and in comparison with slacker options like the Specialized Enduro or Trek Remedy, the Ibis doesn't quite have the same level of 'DH-like' stability. But whether it's the super-rigid main frame, the bottomless-feeling rear travel or the stable dw-link suspension design, the Mojo connects to the trail in such a way that exudes a level of confidence that is far greater than its on-paper numbers would suggest.

The wide bars help to maximise your stance over the front of the bike and, combined with the sharp head angle, you can make last minute steering corrections around tree roots in a way that 29ers can only dream about. Ducking and weaving around branches and dropping the bars side-to-side through alternating corners is where the Mojo is most comfortable and for me, is where it all falls into place. The short wheelbase means the front wheel is easy to lift up for manuals, which is made all the more useful on the trail thanks to the supple rear suspension that

means you can hold them for longer without getting bucked off line. It also takes to the air more ably than other raked-out trail bikes, which makes you search for natural lips to boost off of. Given that Brian Lopes has had significant input in the R&D process with Ibis, the playfulness of the Mojo makes complete sense.

Part of the bike's agility also comes from the low bottom bracket height on the SLR, which helps drop the rider's centre of gravity. A low bottom bracket can often mean constant pedal strikes, but the Ibis gets away with it because the dw-link suspension doesn't wallow in its travel. Our experience matched the theory, with very few pedal strikes during testing.

Unfortunately, our test bike was fitted up with 'converted' non-tubeless tyres with relatively thin sidewalls. At the low pressures we wanted to run for parts of the testing, there was just too much squirm and deflection through the casing. This meant all of that frame technology Ibis has poured into the Mojo was compromised.

Running a regular tubed setup, or switching to a thicker-casing tyre or better yet a proper UST tubeless tyre, will help you get the most out of the Mojo on technical trails. Focusing more on the frame, we have to say that we didn't find the rear triangle to be as stiff as we'd anticipated given the 142x12mm Maxle setup. Further, the 32mm stanchions on the Fox fork up front were definitely reaching their limits before the frame even so much as shuddered, so bigger riders or those who are hitting up black diamond trails may want to elect for a 34 series fork for steering duties.

Verdict

In our opinion, the Mojo SLR is the definition of a true 'do-it-all' mountain bike, with an incredibly lightweight frame, excellent pedalling efficiency, plush suspension and an ability to cover rolling terrain with admirable speed. It's a comfortable bike to ride, and we wouldn't hesitate throwing on a big trailpack for a day of covering stacks of kilometres exploring new trails.

Its nimbleness could easily be mistaken for nervousness, but with the correct setup that is simply not the case. Whilst there are

options on the market with similar travel to the Mojo that are more capable on really steep descents, none of those bikes will pilot you as quickly through twisty singletrack or allow you to scale techy switchback climbs like the Ibis. The adjustable fork travel helps in this regard, but it's not essential and personally we would prefer the smoother action of a fixed-travel option to match the supple rear shock.

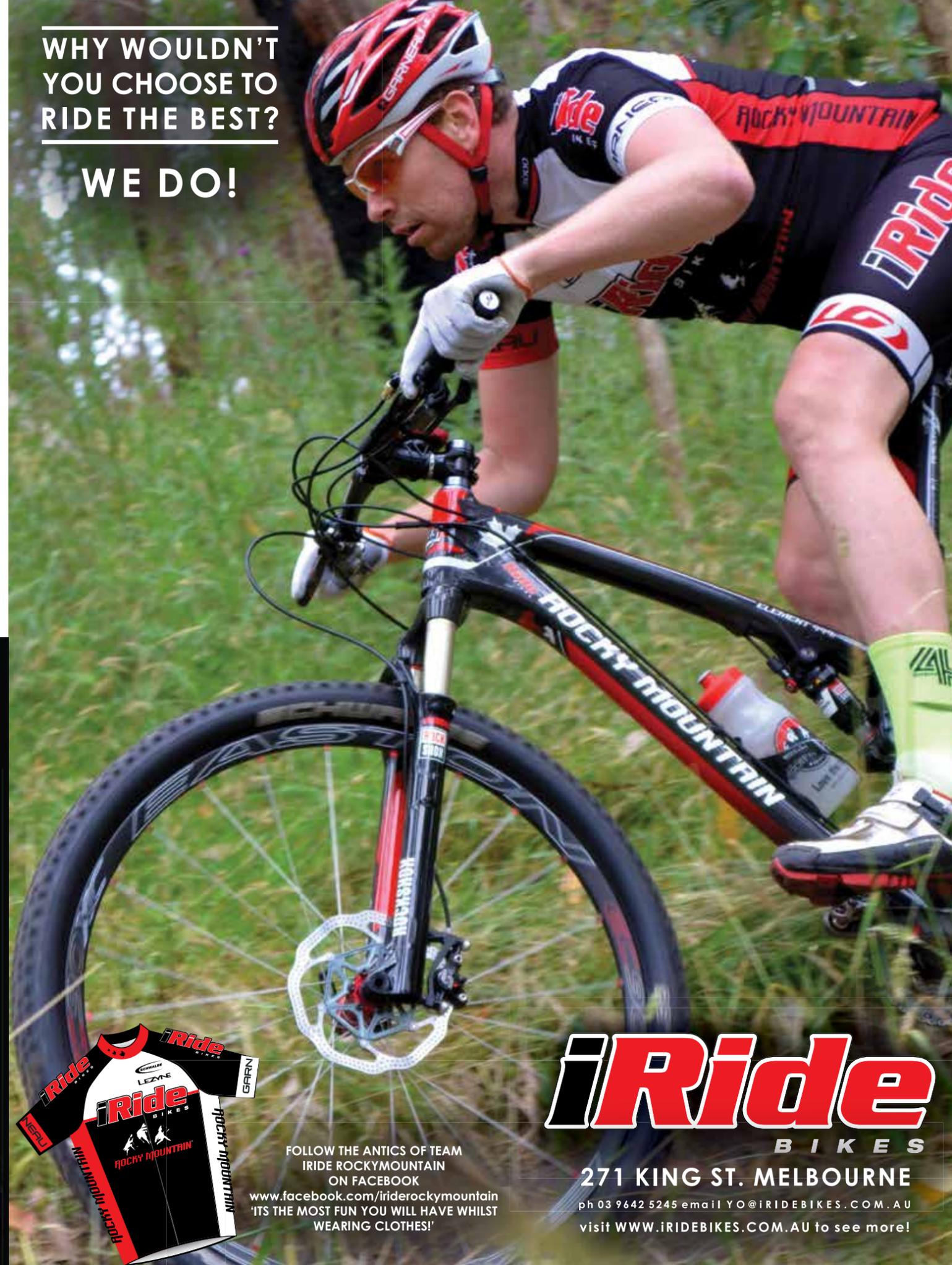
If you need something slacker for dedicated alpine riding, get the Mojo HD. If you must have the lighter SLR frame and still want it slacker, you can always fit an aftermarket Cane Creek Angleseat. Otherwise if you can get over the 'unfashionable' geometry, the Mojo SLR will reward your trust with outstanding versatility. The Mojo SLR is not cheap, but it is very well designed with a high level of construction and quality suspension. In the truest sense of the word, this bike is pure fun.

Frame	Carbon Fibre Monocoque Frame & Swingarm w/140mm Travel, dw-link Suspension Design, Tapered Head Tube, PressFit BB92, 142x12mm Maxle
Suspension	Fox Float CTD Kashima Rear Shock. Fox 32 Float Fork w/140mm Travel
Wheelset	Stans Arch 32h Rims w/Ibis Disc Hubs. Specialized Ground Control / Fast Trak 2Bliss Ready Tyres
Drivetrain	Shimano Deore XT 3x10 Shifters, Derailleurs & 42/32/24t Crankset. Deore XT 11-36t Cassette.
Brakes	Shimano Deore XT w/180mm Front & 160mm Rear Rotors
Cockpit	Ibis Stem & Seatpost, Easton Haven Carbon 711mm Handlebar & WTB Rocket V Saddle.
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