GENESIS CORE 20 £700

Tube technique
Hydroforming has opened up a whole new world of tube shaping possibilities. Interestingly Genesis has stayed with mechanical tube extrusion – pulling the tube through a shaped die – for better control of wall thicknesses. We certainly can't argue with the results in this case.

Top Toras
RockShox's Tora forks get some useful upgrades this year, mainly inherited from the Recon/Revelation platform. Power Bulges on the legs allow for increased bushing size and therefore greater stiffness. They're lighter and the air version is now almost as smooth as the coil versions.

Mountain Kings
The tyres on the Core 20 are different from the aftermarket versions you see in the shops with the same name: basic harder rubber versions aren't as smooth or grippy as the full-price ones, but they roll fast and last for ages.

AT A GLANCE

▲ **HIGHS** Aesthetically and technically great frame, with cracking kit including a decent fork

▼ **LOWS** A wider, lower bar would be on our upgrade list. Can't quite compete with the Voodoo on kit value.

▶ **BUY IF...** You want a really good all-round British ride with stand-out detailing.

Genesis proves that smart design and savvy spec can outflank the big boys

Genesis grew out of the popular UK-based Ridgeback brand a few years back to concentrate entirely on English bred bikes for the specific and often eclectic tastes of our soggy but trail infested island.

The facts

The five-strong Core family stretches from £599 to £1199, with the first three bikes (10, 20 and 30) sharing the same frame. It's a standard rather than inset headset head tube but open-backed molar shaped gussets on the top tube and a longer one under the throat create plenty of strength. Genesis even gives the nod for up to 130mm travel forks if you're looking to upgrade later. The round-to-oval section down tube has bolted mounts for the included Cycra Guard splash guard and welded cable guides on the throat gusset give clean open cable routing. The extended 27.2mm seat tube gets a forward-facing slot and neat QR collar.

The rear end is built from big D-section tapered stays with a pronounced curve for masses of tyre clearance. 3D drop-outs also get a replaceable hanger. The upper wishbone is formed by seam welding the two seatstays together behind the seat tube, which looks great and gives loads of mud clearance. RockShox's Tora fork gets significant upgrades for this year in the shape of Power Bulge fork legs and a webbed brace which keep it both reasonably light and usefully stiff.

A full suite of Shimano Deore gears ensures smooth shifting, with a Shadow-style rear mech to keep things quiet. The Octalink chainset and bottom bracket are impressively stiff and durable while Shimano chain and hubs ensure a long life too. The brakes feel pretty basic though and are one of the few obvious eventual upgrades.

Continental's Mountain King 2.2in tyres are a good choice for UK conditions and help keep weight reasonable considering this is a noticeably larger frame than the other bikes here. Genesis kit includes a squared shaft 80mm stem with big rear cut-out and opposed bolts plus a well shaped saddle. The 660mm bar takes some back and forth twisting to feel right, though.

The feel

The bar is the sole issue we had with the set-up; otherwise everything on the Genesis feels great from the get-go. The head angle is slacker than anything else here besides the Marin. This immediately gives a more confident, assured feel when speed and descent steepness increase or traction decreases. The 80mm stem is also short enough to catch the best lines and make mid-corner corrections without being super twitchy. Top tube lengths are generous on all sizes, which means plenty of breathing space on climbs, but not so long between the wheels that you have to heave it through tight stuff like a bus.

The rounded tyres mean the Core tips into and out of corners easily. Their low weight and the stiffness created by the thick spindle-splined crank axle and chunky chainstays also mean it kicks hard out of corners or uphill whenever you want it to. Decent ground clearance means there's no interruption of pedalling on rough/rutted ground either.

It's the overall combination of handling and smoothness that really lifts the Core into the top rank though. The Tora is precise in where it puts its tips however hard you brake or corner, and does a decent job of isolating shock. Show it a long set of steps, though, and it starts to shudder. It's certainly a fork you work with rather than around, which is a bonus at this price. Considering the stay size and muscular overall feel we're impressed by how little sting makes it up the slim seat post to the saddle, and this really comes into its own as you go further and faster.

Summary

With several bikes in this test struggling to deliver the goods for the money the Core 20 stands out as a ride that's both muscular and technically adept yet really well balanced and mileage friendly.

WHAT MOUNTAIN BIKE ★★★★

"Assured handling, smooth chassis, decent kit and attention to detail make this a superb all-rounder."