



THE SPEC
 Model Orange R9 RS
 Groupset Shimano Ultegra
 8070 Di2 Deviations: None
 Wheels Hope RD40 Carbon
 Finishing kit Easton EC70
 handlebar, Easton EC70
 stem, Easton EC70 seatpost,
 Prologo Kappa RS saddle,
 Schwabe Pro One 28mm
 tubeless tyres Weight
 7.77kg (large) Price £1,900
 frameset, £5,225 as tested
 Contact orangebikes.co.uk



Orange R9 RS

A company that achieved fame with its mountain bikes has hit the road

Words **STU BOWERS**



Orange is a brand that, for me, brings back happy childhood memories. For anyone who might not have heard of it, the company set up shop in Halifax, West Yorkshire, in 1988 and went on to achieve a level of success in mountain biking that it could never have anticipated at the time.

In its early days, Orange imported its now iconic steel hardtail mountain bike frames from Taiwan, and they were the stuff of dreams for teenage mountain biking nuts such as myself. However, it was when the company turned its hand to building its own aluminium, full-suspension frames that the name Orange found true renown, aided in part by a timely association with a certain other Yorkshire native: Steve Peat.

Anyone who had even the slightest interest in mountain biking through the 1990s and early 2000s era will know his name. A skinny, scruffy northern lad turned world-beating pro, Peat (or Peaty, as he was usually known) carved out an unprecedentedly successful career in downhill mountain biking, cementing his legacy forever as a legend of the sport. And for a reasonable chunk of his prime it was an Orange bike between his legs, with its unmistakably boxy and industrial-looking aluminium construction. Peaty was far from being the only reason Orange flourished

HEAD TUBE
 Orange has opted for fairly routine geometry, with a 73.5° head angle and 73.3° seat tube angle. The 170mm head tube makes for a relaxed position – you can always slam the stem if you want a livelier ride



◀ as a brand, but his association with it certainly did nothing to harm its credibility.

Third time lucky

Nostalgia aside, being a stalwart of the mountain bike scene is no guarantee that Orange is any good at making a decent road bike. In fact, it has already proved as much.

After dipping its toe in the water with an aluminium road offering, its first stab at entering the carbon road market misfired a little when the Carb-O, launched in 2011, encountered delays with production and a few teething troubles that stalled the project and ultimately led to it fizzling out. Seven years down the line, Orange has launched the R9. So what has changed?

'We just felt the industry had finally reached a point where we were really happy to get back into road,' says Orange's John Chennells. 'Once things had settled down with disc brakes, thru-axle standards, flat-mount callipers and wider tyres, we felt like that these were the sort of road bikes we wanted to ride, so it was the right time to pull the trigger on our reintroduction to road.'

'It's made in Taiwan, but it's not like we went to some Chinese catalogue and sent them some stickers. It's made with a partner factory that we've used for many years for our hardtail mountain bikes, so we get to oversee all the details.'



SEATSTAYS

Whether the curved seatstays help as much as the supple 28mm tubeless tyres is debatable, and I'd certainly vouch for the latter, but either way the R9 RS was surprisingly comfortable on the road.



On the road the R9 RS surprised me by being just a little bit better than I expected in almost every way

The R9 RS, as tested here, costs £5,225 (that includes an additional £625 wheel upgrade to Hope RS40 carbon wheels) and is the middle option in a range of three. Below the RS sits the Pro model at £3,200, while above it is the Factory model at a considerably steeper £7,800. That comes with Sram Red eTap and a full complement of Zipp components, including 303 Firecrest wheels.

The brand name was derived from the company's commitment to produce an 'all-round range' ('O' is all round, added to 'range' – geddit?). It's fair to say it has delivered on that front, but what about performance?

No messing

At first glance it became clear to me that Orange hasn't tried to do anything too clever with the R9. The designers have stuck to a tried and tested geometry, so I expected predictable handling on the road, and the generous 170mm head tube (size large) hinted at a relaxed riding position, yet ▶

▷ not so tall that slamming the stem wouldn't still make it an aggressive fit.

When I got it out on the road, the R9 RS surprised me by being just a little bit better than I expected in almost every way. There were no foibles in the way it handled, no worrying wobbles at speed and therefore nothing to stop a large grin from forming across my face every time I swung it into a high-speed turn. Its best attributes seemed to be its ability to feel solid during hard pedalling efforts and on steep gradients yet at the same time gentle over rutted rural lanes.

That's not an easy balance to strike, but it's a conundrum that became somewhat easier for manufacturers to solve when 28mm tubeless tyres rolled into town. Orange supplies the R9 with tubeless tyres already filled with sealant and ready to ride. In my opinion, a tubeless 28mm tyre at 70psi has the power to make any bike feel comfortable, and I couldn't help noticing there was still a good amount of clearance to spare, so going wider still – perhaps up to 32mm – is a realistic possibility.



CABLE PORTS

Most of the details are well considered, but the exception may be cable ports that seem a little too large. Gaping holes mean it won't just be cables entering the frame, but water and dirt too.



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One detail of the R9 I really rather liked was the thru-axles, which have a nifty feature enabling the levers to pivot on themselves to be stowed back inside the axle, making for a clean look without the need to use an allen key. I initially had my reservations that this design might cause an annoying rattle, but that was never the case.

Less appealing are the cavernous cable entry points on the down tube. The capacious openings Orange has provided could potentially house anchor chains, and look somewhat unsightly surrounding the delicate Di2 wiring. They're also an open invitation for dirt and water to sneak into the frame, with no obvious point of escape. That may sound like an insignificant gripe, but these details make a difference when you start looking at the competition this bike is up against. For instance, the Cannondale SuperSix Hi-Mod Dura-Ace Disc and the Trek Émonda SLR 8 Dura-Ace Disc are both bikes I would put in my top five all-time greats, and are both cheaper than this version of the R9.

That's not a minor issue when it comes to deciding which way your cash eventually goes. But if, like me, you've got a particular wistfulness for that 90s golden era of mountain biking, then perhaps the Orange will be the apple of your eye. 🍏