



JAMIS DAKAR XCR COMP

Tester: Karen Brooks
Age: 34
Height: 5' 8"
Weight: 120lbs.
Inseam: 33"

Jamis has been producing mountain bikes with the Dakar model name since 1985, and has been making them with squish capabilities since '95. In this long history (by mountain biking standards, anyway), Jamis has made a slow and steady progression of the Dakar's technology, embracing concepts such as lightweight linkage full suspension early and making improvements year by year, rather than erratically jumping on the latest trends. Thus the '07 Dakar XCR Comp doesn't look all that different from its predecessors, but is a good example of a proven design enhanced with modern materials and components.

The three bikes in the Dakar XCR lineup—the Comp, Expert, and Pro—are all based on the same frame built from Kinesis' Kinesis brand of enhanced 6000 series aluminum, and all feature the third generation of "multi-pivot" linkage suspension to grace the Dakar models, called MP3. This suspension behaves essentially as a single pivot would, with the wheel rotating around a single point, but with a linkage to tweak the travel rate and improve rear-end stiffness. The new MP3 version puts the linkage and shock lower on the frame than in previous iterations, with the front of the shock attached to the down tube rather than the top tube; this allows for a smaller, lighter, and stiffer rear triangle. Other tweaks, such as a

VITAL STATS

Country of Origin: Taiwan
Price: \$1785
Weight: 28.8lbs.
Sizes available: 13", 15", 17" (tested), 19", 21"
Contact: www.jamisbikes.com

smaller linkage and hollowed seatstay ends, allowed Jamis to keep the weight of a 17" frame down to 5.5lbs. In the recent past I've spent time on single-pivot linkage designs with the shock attached to the top tube, and while this model was a few pounds heavier as spec'ed, the weight felt easy to control, perhaps because of a lower center of gravity. In this configuration the rear end has 100mm of travel at a slightly rising spring rate, using a Fox Float R with factory-set ProPedal low-speed compression damping. Pedal bob was minimal, even without the benefit of a shock lockout, and I did not detect any rear-end flex.

The Manitou R7 Super fork was a good match with the rear, providing a smooth and uneventful 100mm of travel. The TPC (Twin Piston Chamber) compression damping, activated with an indexed switch atop the right fork leg, can be gradually increased until it locks out at the last quarter-turn. (A remote handlebar switch is available separately.) I used the lockout quite a bit when climbing, and really appreciated it; the only problem was that I often didn't take note of how many clicks in I had started from, so I just returned the switch to its all-the-way-open setting when turning off the lockout, which seemed to work just fine for me. The rebound damping is also externally adjustable, and I kept this all the way open as well. As



Avid Juicy 3 brakes and Shimano LX shifters.



FSA Orbit Z integrated headset.

with most forks, I still don't understand why there's no provision to hold the front hydraulic line in place other than a plastic zip-tie contraption that didn't work as well as a plain old zip tie.

The Dakar's parts spec is a no-nonsense mix that proved sturdy and mostly trouble-free. The Avid Juicy 3 hydraulic disc brakes felt a little stiff in actuation, and I seemed to have a hard time adjusting the levers to feel right, perhaps because I'm not used to Avid's blade design; but I really can't complain about having powerful, low-maintenance brakes on a full-sus bike at this price. (I'm pretty picky about brakes since I use them a lot.) The Shimano LX shifters have a "two-way release" upper lever on the right shifter, which can be either pushed or pulled to downshift—a small but significant bonus, especially when coupled with the high-normal return spring XT rear derailleur. This spring style is the infamous one formerly known as Rapid Rise, and while most folks seemed to hate it, I have always liked using it. Mavic XM117 rims with 32-hole Shimano M475 hubs made for a wheelset that while not light, stayed true and rolled smooth. The 2.1" Maxxis Ignitor tires at first seemed rather low-volume for the size of the bike, but they proved to be capable in a wide variety of conditions. Not as true for the basic Shimano M505 clipless pedals, which were not great for mud clearance. Although the total package was a little on the heavy side for my taste at 29.8lbs. (with pedals), climbing wasn't too laborious, due in part to the aforementioned suspension perks, but nor was it too fast: the SRAM Powerglide rear cassette's low gear is 34t, and I found myself in the granny ring more than I'm used to. But hey, more time to admire the spring flowers along the trail, right? Pointing the bike downhill, I enjoyed the Dakar's truck-like stability, which allowed me to make friends with the extra momentum and use it to plow through rock gardens and over knobby roots. The bike still gave me enough maneuverability to unweight for obstacles and avoid the grabby hanging vines of my home trails.

With an effective top tube length of 22.79" for my 17" bike plus a 105mm stem, the cockpit is a tad longer than what I'm used to, but the handling seemed to benefit, staying smooth and predictable and not too fast. With my usual 90mm stem things got a bit harder to control in tight corners. The wheelbase is a bit long as well at 42.2", and the bottom bracket is 12.2" from the ground, which contributed to the overall stability of the ride. The WTB Rocket V Comp saddle was as comfortable as I've come to expect from this brand, going unnoticed most of the time.

I'm continually amazed by what you can get for your bike money these days, particularly in the area of mid-priced, cross-country full suspension. That term used to be somewhat of an oxymoron; when I first started working in a shop, I would never have recommended a full suspension bike in this price range for someone of my build and riding style, since it would have weighed at least 35 pounds (if

not ten) and the suspension would have been nearly impossible to adjust correctly for my weight. We shop rats used to refer to such bikes as "tanks." The \$1785 Dakar XCR Comp, on the other hand, is a platform that a sport-level racer could be happy with for years, upgrading as parts wear out. Not a bad deal at all.

Photos by Maurice Tierney



The MP3 multi-link suspension.