

# Mountain Bikes 101

When you want to get the wheels in motion and take on the best Mother Nature can throw at you, grab a mountain bike and head for the hills.

Mountain bikes are, hands down, the most rugged bicycles on the market. They are designed and built to take anything you can throw their way; from dirt tracks and steep inclines, to pebbled surfaces and hairpin bends. Most cyclists love to use their mountain bike on narrow, unpaved trails and will rarely ride on paved roads. The resulting wear and tear has forced cycle manufacturers to come up with sturdier bikes that can keep performing under pressure.

Mountain bikes have fatter tires made of stronger rubber, to avoid tears and punctures from sharp rocks and obstacles along the trail. These bigger tires provide better traction, so the cyclist can enjoy a smoother ride as he or she rolls over obstacles and crosses uneven terrain.

The suspension is an equally important feature of mountain bikes. All good mountain bikes come with strong suspension systems. Recently, builders have begun to implement both front and rear suspension to help cyclists withstand the pitfalls of trail riding. Based on the kind of suspension they have, mountain bikes can be classified as soft tails, hard tails, fully rigid and dual suspension bikes. Soft tail bikes have rear suspension that rests on the frame and pivots. Hard tails models have a front suspension fork. Rigid types have a rigid fork, and dual or full suspension bikes have both a front suspension fork and a rear suspension. These also have a rear shock absorber as well as a linkage.

Cross-country mountain bikes are made of more resilient material, and usually weigh less. These bikes can weigh as little as twenty pounds, with the heaviest models weighing in at about forty pounds. Enduro or all-mountain bikes are generally heavier than cross country bikes, weighing from thirty to fifty pounds. These bikes have better suspensions that work well while climbing hills or maneuvering hairpin bends.

Free ride mountain bikes are built of stronger and heavier materials. These models are designed for easier pedaling than other downhill bikes. They can be easily maneuvered around dangerous obstacles and steep turns, however they are not as efficient as cross-country bikes due to their hefty forty to fifty-pound weight. Downhill mountain bikes are not as strong as free ride bikes, but are best suited for riding on downhill tracks and racecourses. These models have better traction than most mountain bikes.

Trial bikes don't have suspension and are usually reserved for short distances. This style of mountain bike lacks a proper seat or a vestigial pad and are quite light, weighing a mere fifteen to twenty pounds. Dirt jumping, urban and street styles fall somewhere between trial bikes and mountain bikes. These bicycles are very strong and have one to nine gears, with a chain guide for both front and rear gears.

Riding mountain bikes is a popular way to have fun and get fit. Visit your local cycle shop for professional advice on finding the bike to best suit your cycling needs.