

Empire MX6-EVO £3,446.00

Empire strikes back with fresh trail bike

BikeRadar score ★★★★★ 4/5



Few bikes are as distinctive as the Empire MX6-EVO **Oliver Woodman/Immediate Media**

Small UK firm Empire first made its mark in the world of bikes with the unusual [AP-1 downhill bike](#), which was shortly followed by the MX6 – the company's first stab at a 150mm travel trail bike.

It was a brave introduction but one that was not without its flaws – most notably a heavy and flexible swingarm that twanged rather than tracked. The EVO, as its name suggests, is very much an evolution of that first trail bike. Designer Chris Williams has kept what worked and ditched what didn't and at the same time has tweaked the design to keep up with the constantly adapting standards in mountain bikes.

Frame: Great versatility but watch the sizing

The intricately machined swingarm of the old bike is gone and in its place is an altogether more substantial yet sleeker looking component. Versatility is in abundance thanks to clever design touches – for example the MX6 EVO can be ran with either 26in or 27.5in hoops because of an interchangeable shock mount and specially made tapered headset cup.

The cost of said parts? Just £20.40 (about US\$31 / AU\$40). Similarly, the integrated derailleur hanger can be switched for a £16 (US\$25 / AU\$31) alternative that means both 135mm and 142mm bolt-thru hubs are catered for.

The value continues with the frameset which, complete with a RockShox Monarch RT3 shock, will set you back just £1,200 (US\$1,855 / AU\$2,344). Complete builds start at £2,700 (US\$4,174 / AU\$5,274), which is great when you remember that these bikes are manufactured in Bolton, Lancashire!

Few bikes stand out as much as the MX6-EVO

In terms of geometry the original MX6 set out a solid blueprint for the EVO to follow. The 66.5 degree head angle makes for a front end that feels nimble but not so much that it lacks stability at pace; nor is it a pig to steer at slow speeds. It's fair to say that the EVO isn't at the forefront of trends in terms of geometry; sit it next to some of its current competitors and it'll look short in wheelbase and comparatively tall. But, these latest generation long wheelbase machines simply don't suit everyone – and in any case, you can always size up.



Speaking of which, there were times at which our 6ft 3in tester really wished he was on the X-Large frame instead of the Large size on test. The supplied Reverb Stealth is an original equipment item and is the shortest available; this means the frame doesn't get a nasty overhang above the shock, but the trade-off was that had to run ours at its minimum insertion where we could just about put our legs where we wanted them.

Ride: An undeniably potent descender

For a fairly scantily clad and spendy build, this is not a light bike. If you're looking for a ride that shines as well on the ups as the downs then this isn't the one for you. Thankfully you're not constantly aware of the extra heft while riding – indeed, keep in mind that this is a 35lb (15.9kg) bike and the Empire climbs pretty competently.

Sometimes you feel interaction between the transmission and suspension when charging through the roughest stuff. It's a trait rather than a flaw, and is a result of that high pivot point, the positive influence of which is the active yet drama free suspension action at the rear. Braking influence on the suspension was never significant enough to cause an issue either.

Maybe it's the well matched damping of the RockShox Monarch Plus and Pike combo, or perhaps it's more to do with the aforementioned pivot point, but something about the MX6 gives it a real ability to swallow up big hits without drama. Take off, spot your landing and the bike absorbs your energy in a composed and quiet fashion. Gone is the twangy rear end, replaced with one that follows the lead of the Pike fork exactly.

The way it changes direction is laughable, in a good way, in fact there were times when we were literally laughing while riding it. The cliché term of confidence inspiring is actually a bit of an understatement when it comes to this bike – we found it really got us pushing our luck on the downhill.

Be careful on the sizing – the supplied Reverb Stealth could only just get us high enough, even at minimum insertion



It didn't hurt that we were sitting astride the most rugged frame we've come across in a long time.

Powder coated and with thick motocross style graphics, the Empire shrugged off chain slapping, rock strikes and even over enthusiastic ratchet strapping and not once did it reveal the metal beneath.

One other small niggle worth noting is the swingarm can prove a bit of a nuisance to some riders with big feet. Our flat pedal rider with UK size 12 (48) feet found the widely spaced rear would sometimes contact with his shoes, it never caused a big problem but it isn't ideal.

Kit and equipment: All options ticked on our test bike

Our test bike arrived with an economical and well thought out transmission in the form, SRAM X9/X0 hardware paired to a Hope Retainer ring and T-Rex 40t ratio expander. This setup gives the majority of the benefits of dedicated one by groups but at a price that's easier to swallow.

We also had Hope's Tech 3 V4 brakes complete with optional floating rotors and braided lines, a pricey upgrade but performance was fantastic and the bling factor is second to none. Hope also provided its excellent Enduro wheelset for this custom build, a fit and forget favourite of ours.



International Standard mounts at the rear mean no threads to strip in that swingarm

Even though the 740mm Renthal Fatbar Lites were adequate we'd have chosen a wider bar – that's no fashion statement either, it would have further complemented this bike's downhill performance.

The verdict: A true evolution and something a bit special

"We've really enjoyed our time with the Empire, it's a truly personable bike that takes a big step on from where its predecessor left off . Suddenly those looking for a UK-made single pivot have a less predictable option"