



VITUS ESCARPE £950*

The harder you ride, the better the Vitus blasts

All the Escarpe bikes share the same frame, which is good news for the base model. The tapered headtube ensures good tracking stiffness and the back end uses double side joints onto the linkage and a 142x12mm rear axle to hold everything together. There are chainguide tabs on the bottom bracket shell and there's a hole and clips for semi-internal Stealth dropper post routing. The 67-degree head angle is spot on for extra stability when you're riding on the ragged edge and Vitus teams it with 'just right' 740mm bars and 60mm stem.

The Suntour fork uses its unique 15mm QLOC push-fit, cam-locking axle to boost stiffness and the metal rebound and compression adjusters are a nice touch for the money. Mavic rims are always a welcome sight in terms of durability and the Deore stop and go mix matches many hardtails at this price. Vitus even specs a clutch rear mech to keep the chain secure

and as silent as possible in the rough.

Continental tyres are fat without being heavy and roll well. Yet again grip is pretty sketchy – particularly in the wet – so a change to a proper front tyre at least will be well worth it in winter.

Unfortunately the Suntour Epicon shock is very notchy and clunky right from the start of its stroke and increasingly uncontrolled when faced with prolonged punishment sessions. Rebound needs to be set extremely carefully to find the knife-edge between pogo stick-style kick back and a very slow and stubborn compression character. The front fork is slightly more forthcoming with smoothness once you've got it moving, but it's still nowhere near as good as the RockShox Sektor you can find on other similar priced bikes.

What's interesting is that the harder you push the Vitus through rock fields or steps the better the bike feels. There's certainly a lot of noise

as the suspension starts to cough and splutter but the faster you ride the more the suspension limitations and clatter fade into the background and the more you appreciate the impressively well sorted handling.

The tyres are efficient enough to get it rolling without risking a cardiac arrest too, so we never really noticed the weight until we had to lug it out of a car or over a gate. Descending not climbing is definitely where this bike shines and whether you upgrade this model or choose its much more sorted £1500 VR brother (currently discounted to £1100), the Escarpe is a ton of fun.

*Discounted from £1350 at time of going to press

WHAT MOUNTAIN BIKE ★★★★★

"A properly fast race or long distance cross-country machine at a remarkably affordable price."

AT A GLANCE	
FRAME	Hydroformed 6061 T6 alloy
FORK	SR Suntour Epicon, 140mm
SHOCK	SR Suntour Epicon
WHEELS	Mavic XM319 rims, Formula disc hubs
TYRES	Continental X-King, 650bx2.4in (f), 2.2in (r)
DRIVETRAIN	FSA Gamma Drive double chainset, Deore mechs and shifters
BRAKES	Shimano BR395, 180mm rotors
WEIGHT	14.8kg (32.6lb)
SIZES	S, M (tested) L
▲ HIGHS	Sorted and upgradeable Enduro frame with a proper power assistance cockpit to match. Transmission and brakes are smooth and predictable.
▼ LOWS	£200 more gets the VR 275 with RockShox dampers and upgraded Shimano transmission. Shock is constipated on the compression stroke.
CONTACT	www.vitusbikes.com

