

PROFLEX BEAST

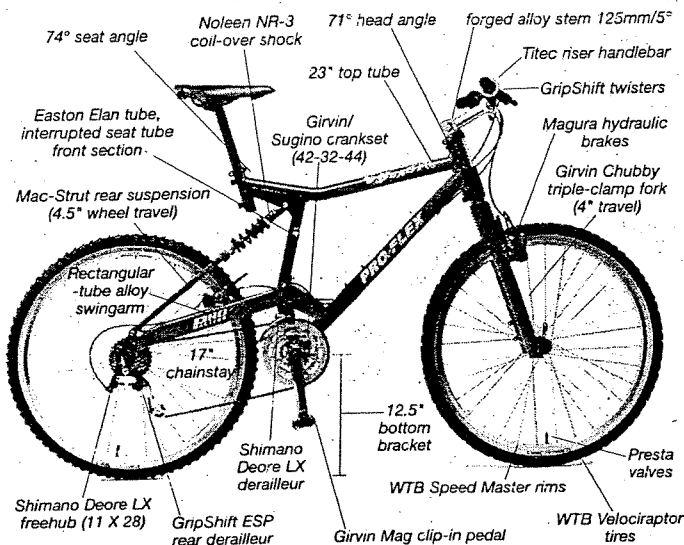
Mega Mac-Strut

ProFlex never intended to make a downhill bike. So when the company produced the Beast, its marketing department had no clear idea where to place the radical-looking bike in its lineup. They weren't really thinking about ski areas when they were drafting the Beast, but as soon as the production model hit dirt, its natural habitat became evident.

Contrary to its name, the Beast is actually quite refined. For about \$1600, it has everything a ski-area biker could dream of. The list is extensive: Easton-tube, Mac-Strut frame; Girvin's four-inch-travel "Chubby" triple-clamp fork; 44-tooth chainring; beefy, box-section aluminum swingarm (that provides a longer, 17-inch chainstay length); riser handlebars; Magura hydraulic brakes; rebound-adjustable Noleen NR-2 coil-over shock; and WTB Velociraptor tires. If you desire to upgrade to more powerful stoppers, the Chubby's left fork slider has disc brake mounts.

PROFLEX FRAME FACTS

The skeleton of the beast is the 9-Series, interrupted-seat-tube, ProFlex front section. Its heavily butted Easton 7000 alloy tubeset was specifically developed for the 9-Series frame. A stout, rectangular-tube swingarm drives a two-inch-stroke Noleen hydraulic damper through a small, alloy compression strut. The huge swingarm and Easton frame deliver lateral rigidity that has yet to be seen on a ProFlex. The 9-Series frame has a generous amount of seat tube available to make room for huge chainrings or aftermarket chainguides should its



owner decide to try downhill racing later on. To keep the Beast running, grease ports were installed at all pivot locales. No head tube gusseting was used, but we would guess that Easton's butting process included mega-thick sections at the Beast's head-tube junction.

PROFLEX FANTASY FORK

Girvin's Chubby fork has a foot-long stack of MCU elastomers with a steel spring to assist its low-amplitude performance. The only damping is a non-adjustable air bleed that is surprisingly effective. The 1.125-inch-diameter fork stanchion tubes are hard-anodized aluminum and the lower legs are cast alloy units. In keeping with the latest trend at ProFlex, both triple clamps are cold-forged aluminum. Because a triple-clamp fork doesn't put a bending load on the steerer, it can be made fairly light. An alloy steerer tube can handle anything a downhiller can dish out. The only adjustments on the Chubby are pre-

load clickers on top of each stanchion tube.

GRABBING THE BEAST BY THE HORNS

Taking the ProFlex onto the trail was a joy for all but one of MBA's test pilots. That unlucky member of the wrecking crew missed a double jump—but he did prove that the Beast could take one heck of a beating without suffering much more than a scratch. The Beast's wheelbase was long enough to keep it stable at speed, and its roomy cockpit and 130mm stem kept the test riders from feeling too cramped on long ascents. Both its front and rear suspension felt too stiff at first, but the culprit was found to be tight bushings in both the fork and its swingarm. After a couple of rides, the Beast loosened up and delivered a much improved ride over the bumps. With four inches of wheel travel up front, and 4.5 in the rear, the Beast could erase a lot of ugliness from the trail. It is the first ProFlex that MBA's test riders have ever dubbed

"downhill-worthy."

Overall, the Beast was a good mix of handling traits. Its front end steered quickly enough to make it a blast on singletrack without hampering its descending prowess. At 28.5 pounds, the Beast was not light, but by velo-skiing standards it's a fairy princess. If the need arose, the Beast could be delightful on longish cross-country rides (flat ones). At speed, it was easy to push the front tire through the corners. The steering geometry of the Beast was not well suited to the WTB front tire's triangular tread profile. Through twisty trail sections, however, the Velociraptor stuck like glue. The Beast's extended swingarm was one of the reasons for its balanced handling—adding stability without compromising its nimble, cross-country steering geometry.

WAS THE BEAST A BEAUTY?

Yes, it would be tough to find a better definition of a production velo-schussing bike than the Beast. It's outfitted with everything a wheel skier needs right out of the crate, and at \$1600 it's affordable enough to suit the not-so-serious weekend warrior (it even comes with SPD-compatible click-in pedals).

It stops, corners, climbs and descends as well as some pretty heady one-offs, and it doesn't require a brain surgeon to keep it running. MBA would recommend switching the front tire to a Specialized Team Control or an IRC Missile and switching the shock spring to lower its rate by 50 pounds. If it also came with a season pass at a local resort, it would rule. □