

ICONS

PRODUCTS THAT
BROKE THE MOULD

The Specialized Enduro

The Enduro has been a linchpin of the Specialized mountain bike range for the past 12 years. In the first of an occasional new series, we chart the evolution of this iconic model and get dirty aboard its ultimate incarnation

Words: Danny Milner Photos: Mike Prior, Ryan Cleek, Danny Milner





Boasting a timeline that spans more than a decade, and showing no signs of retiring, the Enduro has more than lived up to its name. Like the best of us, its weight has yo-yoed over the years and it has followed the fickle finger of fashion with overzealous enthusiasm — but it has always stayed true to its brief: “adventure orientated off-road bikes built for truly epic rides”.

The Enduro lexicon slipped quietly into the Specialized vocabulary. It was the late-Nineties Ground Control FSR that first carried the Enduro tag, tacked on with what now almost looks like embarrassment; the corporate equivalent of giving your kid a quirky middle name.

It wasn't until 2000 that Specialized embraced Enduro as a range in its own right, but the bike was a head turner, with moto-inspired mudguards, cool graphics and a clever linkage chip that allowed riders to tune the rear travel and geometry. At a time when Shaun Palmer was flying the Specialized flag and everyone wanted their mtb to look like a motocross bike, it had all the ingredients to be an instant hit, but somehow the recipe was missing something.

A tweaked version arrived in 2001, but it would be the second generation Enduro, unveiled for 2002, that would really shake up the trail bike market. With 132mm of travel, an Itch Switch (Integrated Travel Switch), adjustable geometry and a stunning monocoque front triangle, the new bike oozed desirability. And Specialized didn't stop there; it sweated the details and lured the magpies by sprinkling little nuggets of gold anodising — such as the bars and link — throughout the spec. It was an intense at high-street prices.

We were instantly smitten, proclaiming in the March 2002 issue that “the Enduro Expert is going to be one of this year's most sought-after bikes” and awarding it 5/5. Although we did complain that the bar was too wide; how things change, eh?

Despite the plaudits, the first models suffered teething problems, so for 2003 the Enduro returned with extra material around the front shock mount and the seatstays. Specialized also released what is still probably our favourite colour scheme of any Enduro past or present: the black and gold, JPS-style, Enduro Comp. Even now, eight years on, a good example would have us reaching for our wallets. Once again it had us running out of superlatives: “This bike is an inspiration to ride and makes everything seem possible,” we said.

2003 had further significance as it marked the introduction of the Enduro SX — a model that launched a successful hardcore spin-off range. This 100mm travel frameset option was stronger and stiffer thanks to thicker-gauge aluminium, while the geometry was made slacker and lower to improve stability. It was intended for the World Cup 4X circuit, but it also became something of a cult bike among hardcore trail riders. At the time, the Enduro SX filled a hairline crack in the market, but it was to provide the DNA for the hugely popular Enduro SX Trail and, to some extent, the current Evo bikes. **121**

With a stunning monocoque front triangle, the bike oozed desirability