

**MANITOU MACHETE 27+** PRICE: \$766 • DISTRIBUTED BY: SHOCKCRAFT

Looking around your local bike shop you might be led to believe that suspension for mountain bikes is a two company affair with Fox and RockShox dominating the original equipment that is seen spec'ed on many bikes these days. However Manitou suspension have also been in the game for over 20 years. Manitou are perhaps most recognised for their iconic upside-down Dorado downhill fork but in recent years have been also been making their presence felt in the mid-travel market with their much lauded Mattoc fork. We had the chance to test their budget friendly Machete, a fork designed to keep up with current evolving 27+ standards.

The Machete we tested was designed to accommodate 27+ & 29" tires, ( up to 27 x 3.4" & 29 x 2.3") and there is also a version designed for 29+ if that's what you're into. It's designed around the new 110mm Boost spacing and engineered to be stiff and strong enough to use for fully laden bike packing or on cargo bikes. The Machete is air sprung and travel adjustable from 120mm-140mm and also has a two position lockout. The axle is secured via their HexLock SL system and requires a 6mm Allen key to secure. Most importantly it comes in a wallet friendly RRP of just \$766

Out on the trail we dialled the pressure in, rode a few laps and adjusted as we went till we settled at about 90psi (rider weight about 75kg). The rebound dial moves through its full range in about ¾ of a full turn, and the 'full slow' end of the range is not nearly as sluggish as other manufacturers are. This might instinctively feel like there isn't as much rebound adjustment, but we've never found much use for the 'full slow' rebound of some forks, and on the plus side on the Machete you can visually see where the dial is pointing – unlike other adjustment knobs which spin round 360 degrees multiple times and require you to mentally remember how many 'clicks' from either end you should be. For us we left it about a quarter back from the slowest setting and that seemed about right.

For a lower priced fork the Machete also offers a remarkable level of tuneability to help you get the most out of your fork. You can upgrade to Manitou's ABS damper and here you have an array of shim stack options on offer. (If you are at either end of the body weight spectrum this will be of particular interest to you.) There is also a handlebar remote lockout available as an option. We never tested the fork in 140mm travel mode but can only imagine that this would make things even more rowdy. If you've got a bit of mechanical aptitude Shockcraft (the NZ distributor) reckon you can easily switch the spacer out in under an hour.



Our fork was set up in 120mm mode and attached to the 27+ 'all mountain' hard-tail Marin Pine Mountain, an ideal bike for testing this fork. The Machete was replacing the RockShox Recon that came stock. We spent a good amount of time riding the Recon as part of our review for the Pine Mountain (see next issue of NZMTBR) so that we could appreciate any difference. While the Recon is a good fork relative to the overall price of that bike, our main gripe with the Recon was the way that it tends to dive through the mid stroke. It might not sound like much, until you've compared it with a fork that has a much more progressive feel to it. Enter the Machete.

Once we felt we had everything set where we wanted it, it was time give it some stick and er – see if the Machete could cut it. The thing about plus-sized bikes is that they give you so much tyre with which to ride as aggressively as you can muster - cornering

grip, braking traction - they are begging you throw everything at them, so if your fork isn't up to it, you are going to notice it. The Machete was a notable improvement in this area over the stock Recon. Increased lateral stiffness meant that we felt confident pushing hard through the corners and hitting off-angle drops, and a significantly more progressive stroke meant that we never felt like we were blowing through the travel en-route to a nasty bottom-out. The harder we rode it the more we liked it. The TPC damper that has been at the heart of Manitou forks over the years doing a superb job. Outside of a lab, fork testing is relatively subjective but overall we were impressed with how much difference the Machete made over the stock fork. If you've purchased a 27+ bike recently and your current fork simply isn't hacking it then the Machete will definitely sharpen up your ride.

**Lance Pilbrow**