

GROUPTEST

CYCLING JOURNALIST **STEVE WORLAND** REVIEWS MTB FORKS

Rigid MTB forks

For transport, touring, and less rocky off-road trails, a rigid mountain bike fork can trump a suspension fork. Cycling journalist **Steve Worland** tests four

ALMOST ALL mountain bikes come with suspension forks these days. This is a pity, because not every rider or ride requires suspension. On rough trails, a well-controlled suspension fork boosts comfort and control; elsewhere, it's simply extra weight.

The cheapest suspension forks add hardly anything *except* weight. There's little or no scope to adjust the compression or rebound, so the fork may scarcely move, sag too far, or spring back like a pogo-stick. This is worse than no suspension at all.

Switching to a rigid fork should make your mountain bike lighter and make the handling livelier. Riding rigid off-road is fine as long as you avoid rockier trails, although you can improve comfort with generously-sized tyres and thoughtful line choice. On road, whether you're using a mountain bike for transport or touring, a rigid fork is an asset.

2 Steerers

Make sure the new fork steerer is compatible with your frame, stem and headset in height and diameter. MTBs over a decade old may have a 1in diameter threaded steerer. More modern MTBs will be 1.125in and Aheadset (no thread). A bang-up-to-date bike may have a tapered steerer.

3 Brake mounts

Some forks are designed for rim brakes only, some for discs, and some are compatible with either. Discs usually have a 160mm or 180mm rotor. Make sure the fork you buy is compatible. There are two different disc calliper boss types – post mount and ISO – but you can buy adaptors to convert from one to the other.

1 Material

The cheapest rigid forks will be made from basic steel, and they won't be light, although there are some relatively light chromoly steel offerings around. Mid-range forks usually use carbon legs with aluminium crowns, dropouts and steerers. Top-end forks use more carbon.

5 Height and geometry

Your new fork should roughly match the length and rake of the sagged suspension fork it's replacing. If it's too long or too short, or if the rake is totally different, the steering and handling of the bike is likely to be compromised. If you're at all unsure about this, take the advice of a good shop mechanic. The sales information for a quality rigid fork will usually explain that it's designed to replace a suspension fork of a certain length.

4 Dropouts

Most fork dropouts on rigid forks will be for quick release wheels, but many suspension forks on modern MTBs use a through axle. You can buy through-axle rigid forks but they're usually of the costly carbon variety.



ON
'GUARDS

If you're planning to use your rigid-forked mountain bike for transport or touring, look for mudguard compatibility. Relatively few mountain bike forks come with eyelets at the dropouts or a drilled crown. There are work-arounds, however. P-clips on the fork legs are fine for attaching mudguard stays. To attach the mudguard to the fork crown, bore two pairs of holes in the chromoplastic 'guard, just in front of and behind the fork crown. A zip-tie each side will secure the 'guard to the fork crown.

**ON-ONE CROMO £59.99**

Mail order brand On-One offer lots of different fixed-blade forks for MTBs, from the remarkably well-priced carbon monocoque model at £149.99 to this basic chromoly steel fork. You could opt for a disc-brake-only version or one with cantilever as well as disc mounts (pictured). At this price you don't get much finishing finesse but you do get a fork that has a good reputation for durability in harsh riding conditions. The chromoly build is slightly less harsh on rough terrain than the hi-tensile steel forks you'll find in many shops for about £30, and it's about the right length to replace average short-travel suspension forks. There are no mudguard eyes but it's worth taking a look on On-One's web site to see what else is available. They offer a variety of axle-to-crown lengths and a variety of lighter carbon forks. Weight: 1270g. Axle-to-crown length: 440mm. on-one.co.uk

A basic but tough fork that comes in versions to fit any MTB

**SALSA CROMOTO £99.99**

Salsa and sister brand Surly produce a wide range of steel forks, covering almost every possibility of length, steerer size, brake fitting and tyre size. You can buy the chromoly steel Cromoto as a disc brake fork, as shown here, or with both disc and cantilever brake bosses; you can remove the canti posts if you don't need them. The 425mm length is intended as a replacement for a short travel suspension fork on a 26in wheel bike, but 445mm or 465mm versions are available too. All are black and there are versions with rack mounts too. We've used several of these forks on different bikes over the last few years. The ride is surprisingly compliant for a straight blade fork and we like the aesthetics, especially the sturdy and slightly cowed aluminium 'Ride and Smile' embossed dropouts, which have threaded mudguard eyelets.

Weight: 1133g. Axle to crown: 425mm. ison-distribution.com

A very nicely finished steel fork with aluminium dropouts

**CARBON CYCLES EXOTIC DISC £179.99
(CURRENTLY £98.99)**

Carbon Cycles sell lightweight parts for road and mountain bikes online. Most of the products are branded Exotic. RRP's are listed but everything is substantially discounted. But the main draw is that there are so many forks available, variously constructed and in all lengths and steerer sizes. It's a great place to look if you need a short fork for an older bike (e.g. with rim brakes and a 1in steerer), and there's an excellent choice of super-light models with carbon steerers too. The one tested here was a UD (unidirectional) carbon legged model with an aluminium crown, steerer and dropouts. Construction standards are superb and the price tag at the time of testing was discounted by 45%. The carbon legs are noticeably better at absorbing vibration than a steel fork. Weight: 815g. Axle-to-crown: 425mm carboncycles.cc

One of the cheapest carbon forks, and with no obvious quality cuts

**RITCHEY CARBON DISC 29ER £380**

Ritchey have established an excellent reputation for their carbon forks, supplying rigid alternatives to World Cup mountain bike racers for as long as there have been World Cup mountain bike races. The World Championship Series model is even more costly than this (£485) but also weighs 130g less. This one is already one of the best on the market for riders who don't mind paying extra for a reputation. On the trail, however, there's almost no feel or performance difference between this and the Carbon Cycles fork. The fact that dropouts are carbon as well as the legs trims more weight. There are 26in and 650b options too, with rakes to suit, including a 26in-wheel fork with cantilever bosses. This is one of the nicest forks out there but the cost is obviously a deterrent unless you're equipping a very classy MTB. Weight: 755g. Axle-to-crown: 480mm. paligap.cc

Superb build and ride quality and very light but very costly too