

NINER ROS 9 £900 (FRAME ONLY)

Curvy stays

Cowled logo embossed, 142x12mm screw-thru axle dropouts give the maximum perpendicular weld area for the curved stays.

Strong frame

The double-butted (with identical wall thickness) and gusseted top and downtube are strong enough to handle up to a 140mm fork.

Take II

The Biocentric II eccentric bottom bracket block can be used to micro adjust bottom bracket height, chainstay length and effective seat angle or tune singlespeed chain tension.



AT A GLANCE

TRAVEL 130mm

▲ **HIGHS** Genuinely floats like a butterfly but stings like a whole damn hive.

▼ **LOWS** Very expensive, heavy and not as rigidly accurate as some bikes.

► **BUY IF...** You can afford a truly sublime mix of trail melting steel alchemy and bomber belligerence.

Does Niner's left-field steel trail slayer leave the rest of the pack trailing?

A penny short of £900 for a steel frame is outrageous, but we'd open our wallets without hesitation for Niner's unbelievably smooth but full-gas, grin-fest fast, 'Ride Over Sh*t' trail terror.

Beauty

Part of the price justification comes from some truly beautiful bits of workmanship on the ROS 9. The custom double-butted main tubes are subtly curved to manipulate ride character while the seat tube curves back over the wheel from the adjustable Biocentric II eccentric bottom bracket block.

A machined chainstay yoke still means tons of tyre clearance and stealth dropper post routing, optional front mech hanger, 140mm tapered fork capability and 142x12mm axle boxes are all ticked.

Beast

What would make us buy a frame that costs as much as both the other steel frames on test together aren't features and cosmetics, it's the ride. Thanks to what we can only describe as chromoly steel alchemy the rear stays give an incredibly – in the true

sense – supple and smooth ride. In fact traction and ground connection are more like a short travel suspension frame in 'pedal' mode than a hardtail. We lost count of the number of times we checked the CrossMark tyre because we presumed it had punctured but no, it really does melt the trail and glue the tyre to the ground.

That crazy level of traction and go-with-the-flow smoothness is the same at the end of the Revelation fork too. Add a super-slack 67-degree head angle and potentially belly scraping centre of gravity and you can pile the ROS 9 into sketchy corners or straight line rocky, rooty carnage like a fully-sprung enduro bike and come out still inflated and elated.

Despite the impact shrugging insolence it still instinctively puts the front end exactly where it needs to go. As the front end grabs grip it then chops or slides the short back end through to exit way tighter and faster than you'd believe. The tight rear lets it pop the front wheel up without hesitation whether you're sending a drop or manualling a treacherous wet root spread. The only time it gets caught out is trying to sneak it down super-steep switchbacks

where the front end can be too long and not quite stiff enough to get round every time. Somehow there's no obvious softness or spongy loss of pedalling power though.

Summary

As the heaviest bike on test we're not saying it's a fire road climb dragster but it holds its own surprisingly well on more techy climbs. In fact, the fluid rear end and unholy grip saw us first-time clean and then nonchalantly multi-repeat a super-ugly stepped climb we've been trying to bag for 20 years. While the Niner bars and stem are spot on and the SRAM X01 11-speed kit is perfect for the ROS 9 it rides this well with distinctly ordinary WTB wheels, so an upgrade to a proper pair of premium hoops is likely to unleash even more superlative adulation.



"Expensive, but an intoxicating and addictive blend of Enduro attitude, steel smoothness and build quality."

"It really does melt the trail and glue the tyre to the ground"



UNWRAPPED FORM AND FUNCTION



Niner's bikes are works of art in practical and cosmetic terms. ROS 9 detailing includes an eccentric bottom bracket that clamps on the outside of the frame shell to avoid distortion, an optional custom MRP bashguard and neat separate seatstay and chainstay brake mount 'bullets'. The removable front mech clamp and internal dropper post routing come with alloy covers if they're not in use, the cable guides are removable and if you order a complete bike kit, the fork's colour-coded to match the frame.

WHAT MOUNTAIN BIKE WINNER

NINER ROS 9 £900 (F/O)

★★★★★

“The undisputed favourite of Megavalanche madmen and cyclo-cross speed freaks alike”



THE VERDICT

Cotic's Solaris is the most conventional and a solid, versatile all-rounder. Singular's Buzzard is a tough yet lively ride if you can work around the stunted front end.

If you've got proper flow skills and like scalping full suspension bikes on trail centre descents you'll love Zealous' brutal black run blasting Division. The Kinesis Sync is a superb update of classic singletrack handling balance for big-wheeled smoothness with small wheel responsiveness.

Within a few rides the Niner had made itself the undisputed favourite of Megavalanche madmen and cyclo-cross speed freaks alike. Hovercraft smooth yet Enduro DH mental it's not just one of the best steel or hardcore hardtails we've ridden it's one of the most brilliant and surprising bikes we've ridden full stop.

