

MERIDA BIG TRAIL 800

£1,750 / 27.5 Plus / merida-bikes.com

NEED TO KNOW

- Modern 27.5 Plus trail hardtail
- Designed with a focus on descending, with 130mm travel up front
- 1x gearing specific, with an upper chain guide mounted to the ISCG tabs
- Three-strong range, with prices starting at £1,300 for the Big Trail 600

Merida's hardtail marries modern design and Plus wheels

Merida's roots give it a solid footing in XC racing and lightweight marathon bikes, but some of its recent releases see it branching out in new directions and flourishing as a result. Take Merida's One-Sixty range of enduro bikes for example, or the e-bike version tested on page 98.

Merida isn't all about racing though, and the new Big Trail range of Plus hardtails feature modern trail geometry, with longer-travel forks, and are more focused on smiles per mile than lap times.

There are three different builds in the line-up, and we took the mid-range Big Trail 800 for a shakedown in the Welsh valleys.

The Big Trail is based around the 27.5 Plus tyre size, and boasts a bold new frame design. The geometry is modern, but not cutting edge, where the 19in frame features a 445mm reach measurement, a 67.5° head angle and super-short 425mm chainstays.

The short back end makes for a whippy, responsive ride, where the necessary tyre clearance has been achieved by flattening the driveside chainstay where it meets the BB. This, combined with the curved seat tube, allows the rear wheel to be tucked tighter into the frame. It also gets a low-slung top tube that offers the rider ample space to move around when the trail gets technical.

The frame's neatly welded hydroformed tubing is easy on the eye, and has one or two nifty features too, like the Smart Entry cable system that clamps the cable at the entrance and exit holes of the internal routing to eliminate rattle.

The Big Trail stays true to the hardcore hardtail philosophy. With its super-comfortable riding position — helped by a tiny 35mm stem and 760mm handlebar — you instantly feel at home, quite happily hitting a trail in the same way you would on a full-susser. The ride is surprisingly balanced, and the big-volume 2.8in tyres allow you hammer into sections of trail knowing that you'll have grip and control when it's needed most.

The softer 3C compound Maxxis Rekon tyres are the perfect accompaniment to the Big Trail's attitude. And even as you move down the range, Merida hasn't scrimped on the rubber, as the entry-level Big Trail 600 has the exact same tyres, so it will share a similar ride quality. Bonus.

Charlie Collins

SPECIFICATION

Frame Prolite 66 triple-butted 6066 aluminium

Fork RockShox Yari RC, 130mm travel

Wheels Merida hubs, Merida Expert TP rims, Maxxis Rekon 3C 27.5x2.8in tyres

Drivetrain Shimano SLX chainset and r-mech, Shimano XT 1x11 shifter

Brakes Shimano M506, 180mm

Components Merida Expert 760mm bar, Expert 35mm stem, Expert 120mm dropper post, Sport saddle

Weight 13.58kg (29.94lb)

Sizes 15, 17, 19, 21in

GEOMETRY

Size ridden 19in

Head angle 67.5°

Seat angle 73.5°

BB height 295mm

Chainstay 425mm

Front centre 1750mm

Wheelbase 1,175mm

Top tube 631mm

Reach 445mm

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION

✓ HIGHS

Great build for the price with all mod-cons catered for. Short stem and wide handlebar. Rides every bit as good as it looks.

✗ LOWS

Chain taps on high chainstay, although isn't noisy. Dropper post needs more than the 115mm drop we measured.

