



Photos: Chris Jorden

# BOARDMAN MTB COMP FI

Julie Rand tests an entry-level hardtail from the retired pro roadie

**C**hris Boardman's range of road, hybrid and mountain bikes now includes 'female informed' models. Compared to the men's MTB Comp, the women's version offers (the blurb says) 'women's specific frame geometry, brake lever adjustment, narrow handlebars, shorter stem and women's specific saddle'.

I normally ride a men's mountain bike – a Specialized FSR Comp – because I'm taller than average. So I was intrigued to see if the shorter reach would make any difference to

my riding style or comfort.

The medium women's frame is an inch smaller and shorter reach than medium men's but with the same height of head tube. So it's designed for a rider about two inches shorter (i.e. 5'7") who wants the handlebar a bit higher and closer; apparently most women do.

I enjoyed testing the bike in Surrey's heathland and woodland. It felt light and lively on singletrack and accelerated well. The handlebar *was* at a very comfortable height, and I didn't feel as stretched out as I do on men's bikes. The rear triangle felt stiff and the frame

responsive but not jarring.

The fork, meanwhile, is one of the best on the market at the price: a RockShox Recon SL Air. Being pneumatic, its spring can be adjusted to suit any weight of rider, especially lighter ones – a big advantage over stiff coil-sprung forks for women riders.

The lightweight aluminium frame is painted white with pink flashes, which looks smart but not overly 'girly'. Of course, that pristine whiteness won't last after a few muddy trails.

Brakes and gears worked well. The Avid Juicy 3 brakes were powerful enough, while the Sram front mech was

The RockShox Recon SL Air fork is great at this price, giving a refined and adjustable ride

slower to shift than a Shimano Deore mech. The Ritchey wheels felt tight, and are a nice touch on a bike of this price. Continental's racy tyres were grippy and rolled well on icy hardpack and slushy mud.

Long-term mountain bikers will likely want a bike that's even smoother, lighter and more enjoyable to ride – and will be happy to pay the extra hundreds of pounds to get that. But as an entry-level purchase, the Comp fi is a good basic bike and great value for money.

## NEED TO KNOW

### Boardman MTB Comp fi

**Price:** £699

**Contact:** boardmanbikes.com, sold through Halfords

**Sizes available:** S, M, L

**Weight:** 11.7kg (M)

**Frame & fork:** butted aluminium frame, 100mm RockShox Recon SL Air fork

**Gears:** 27-spd Sram X5/X7

**Brakes:** Avid Juicy 3 disc

**Wheels:** Ritchey Pro rims, alloy sealed bearing hubs, Continental Speed King tyres

**Pros:** Great fork at this price. Comfortable riding position. Braze-ons for 2 bottle cages and rear rack.

**Cons:** Saddle too narrow. Headset bearing uncovered so vulnerable to water damage. White saddle and grips get grubby quickly.

## RIVALS



**Orange Diva** £875

Despite a similar Recon air fork, the Diva is more 'trail' oriented than the racier Boardman. Gearing is Shimano Alivio/Deore/SLX. [orangebikes.co.uk](http://orangebikes.co.uk)



**Specialized Myka HT Elite** £680

Its Suntour coil fork is no RockShox Recon but it is damped and it's tuned to suit a woman rider. The frame is good too. [specialized.com](http://specialized.com)



**Marin Bear Valley WFG** £650

Like the Specialized, combines a good, upgradeable frame with a fork that long-term owners will want to upgrade. [marin.co.uk](http://marin.co.uk)