

HARO SONIX VL120

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK LAMBERT

The Haro Sonix throws a new spin on the old unified rear triangle (URT) suspension designs of the past with their Virtual-Link suspension.

While the bottom bracket is housed in the pivot-less rear triangle the swingarm is attached to the front triangle via a pair of short links that pivot around the outside of the bottom bracket shell. The idea being that with the 'virtual pivot' moving in a half orbit around the bottom bracket the first half of the travel has a firm pedalling platform while the second half reacts to absorb bigger hits in a smooth manner. As the pivot-less rear triangle has the bottom bracket and front derailleur mounted to it the drivetrain is free to operate without flex and the effects of chain growth.

The Sonix VL120 is the entry model in a trio of Sonix models. All share the same frame with 120mm of rear travel and are mated to 100mm forks. The VL120 has a Manitou Black Comp coil fork matched to a Manitou Radium R shock in the rear. All other components are a solid mix for a bike at this price point.

Our test bike was an 18 inch frame and we'll warn you now, it sizes big. Coupled with the fairly slack 72.5 degree seat tube angle, a long top tube and a 110mm stem riders around 180cm (6 foot) were stretched. Several rides were done with a 90mm stem fitted which helped but a zero-offset seat post would likely be the next recommended change. The Sonix also comes in 14, 16 and 20 inch sizes.

Haro recommend setting the shock sag at 10mm (20%) to achieve optimal suspension action. This was easy enough to do with the Radium shock and equated to 120psi for an 88kg rider. Up front the fork is only preload adjustable so we were pleased to find the correct sag was achieved with minimal preload and the non-adjustable rebound felt about right.

Despite the weight of the Sonix being on the wrong side of 30 pounds it moves along like a bike that weighs less. Effort at the pedals is not lost through unwanted suspension action but instead translated to forward speed. Getting out of the saddle to power up rises in the trail is rewarded with a firm pedalling action rather than being an energy sapping exercise. Yet the suspension will open up and react to the terrain when asked to such as crossing an erosion rut on a climb. This meant traction could be maintained on some quite technical uphill trail. On steep trail we found ourselves sitting too far forward on the saddle and likewise its position hindered our efforts to get behind the saddle on steep downhill – hence the recommended change in seat post.

Downhill was somewhat of a revelation on the Sonix. For what is supposed to be a cross country orientated chassis it absorbed bigger hits well and proved relatively stable at speed despite the 71 degree head angle. In fact we never felt the suspension complain on big hits even though we managed to get 106mm of travel out of the 100mm fork!



> The Sonix VL120 houses the bottom bracket in the rear triangle attached to the front triangle via a pair of short links.



> Adding a 110mm stem to a 23.9 inch effective top tube results in a good stretch for most riders unless you have gorilla length arms.



> The Sonix impressed with its ability to absorb the trail at speed.



The fork was a little noisy as it topped out while climbing but overall the smooth action and performance impressed us. Initially the rear end is chattery over small bumps but as soon as the ground starts getting rougher it comes into its own. This is somewhat the opposite of bikes at this level where smooth supple action at low speed becomes a wild ride at higher speeds in the rough. Having such a long top tube coupled with the laid back seat post and long stem did affect the rider's ability to shift their weight around on the bike and consequently this transition impacted on confidence in corners and rough trails. But the Sonix felt more than capable of charging with the best of them.

A few rides into our test period we noticed a disconcerting amount of flex coming from the rear end which was eventually traced to a loose bolt at the bottom of the upper link and a very loose bolt that holds the link plates together. It would pay to keep an eye on these and splash a dab of loctite their way.

In terms of the bikes other components coming off X-9 shifters the X-7's are a little vague but the Sonix never missed a shift in our time with it. Likewise we appreciated the WTB Exiwolf tyres. The large volume provides confidence in dry conditions (from past experience we know there are better wet weather tyres). The Avid BB5 cable brakes proved to have good stopping power but when the speeds got higher usual one-finger operation became two-finger.

The Sonix VL120 looks like a trail bike, has the suspension travel (at least in the rear) and weight of a trail bike, yet the angles and riding position say cross country. It's too heavy to be a serious cross country bike but is definitely worthy for enduro type events and general trail riding. It pedals solidly yet handles rough trail and descents like a bike worth more. Good job Haro.

SPECIFICATIONS – Haro Sonix VL120	
FRAME	7005 Aluminium double butted
REAR SHOCK	Manitou Radium R
FORK	Manitou Black Comp
STEM	Ritchey Comp V2 110mm
HANDLEBAR	Ritchey Comp riser
GRIPS	WTB Moto
HEADSET	FSA Orbit MX
SHIFTERS	SRAM X-7
FRONT DERAILLEUR	Shimano Deore
REAR DERAILLEUR	SRAM X-7
CRANKSET	Truvativ Firex
RIMS	Alex DP17
HUBS	Pivit SL 32H
CASSETTE	SRAM PG-950 11-34
CHAIN	SRAM PC-971
BRAKES	Avid BB5 Cable w/FR5 levers
SEAT POST	Ritchey 2 bolt
SADDLE	WTB Rocket V Race
PEDALS	Shimano M520
TYRES	WTB Exiwolf Comp 2.1
COLOUR	Pewter
WEIGHT AS TESTED	14.4kg (31.7lb)
SIZE TESTED	18 inch
REAR TRAVEL	4.8 inches (120mm)
FRONT TRAVEL	4 inches (100mm)
RRP	\$2699
BIKE SUPPLIED BY	Recco Sport NZ 0800 504 503

