

FIRST LOOK

Van Nicholas Tuareg

£1,173 (frame only), complete bike from £2,580

This head-turning hardtail from Van Nicholas will have you hankering to join the titanium tribe

Words: Matt Hampton Photos: Mike Prior

The Tuareg are a nomadic tribe of Berbers whose roots predate ancient Greece. In the earlier part of the 20th century, they were a thorn in the side of French colonists, fighting savagely against their attempts to control the Sahara.

Today, the name is associated with a middle-ranking Volkswagen 4x4 and this rather lean and hungry hardtail from Dutch titanium specialist Van Nicholas. We prefer the latter.

You can tell it's made from titanium, if not from the featherlight weight and polished finish, then because it's written in capitals along the top tube. Founder and head of design Jan-Willem Sintnicolaas passionately believes it is the superior material for mountain bikes.

"A carbon layer can de-laminate if you hit something hard, but titanium is

suitable for pretty much everything," he says — as long as it's designed properly.

The company is testing its first full-suspension bike — the 120mm Valkyr — with just a bearing issue to resolve before the back end is stiff enough for production. Elsewhere in the range is the Mamtor, a hardtail optimised for 120-140mm forks, designed specifically with the UK in mind. But it's the Tuareg that's notching up admiring glances in our Croydon HQ. It's all the excuse we need to try it somewhere befitting its name.

SPECIFICATION

Frame: Tuareg 3AL/2.5V ti

Fork: Rockshox Reba RLT 100mm

Wheels: Stan's ZTR Crest/VNT hubs

Tyres: Schwalbe Racing Ralph/Nobby Nic

Brakes: Shimano SLX

Groupset: Shimano SLX 3x10

Bar: Van Nicholas ti bar 620mm

Stem: Van Nicholas 3AL/2.5V ti stem 90mm

Seatpost: Van Nicholas ti post 31.5mm, 15mm of layback

Saddle: Fizik Tundra 2 (Kium rails)

Bike weight: (SLX build): 23.7lbs

Sizes: 14/16.5/18/19.5in and tailor-made

Contact: vannicholas.com



Frame weight
(18in): 1.56kg

Not just another logo; this die-cast bridge adds a little more compliance, also good lateral stiffness and mud clearance

Cast 3D dropouts bring the seat and chainstay out wider than standard 2D dropouts, providing better lateral stiffness

Every part of the frame is Ti, with matching bar, stem, seatpost and collar. Tubes are hydroformed for stiffness and weight saving, and there's a lifetime warranty against material failure or any manufacturing defects

XC-oriented geometry optimised for 80-100mm travel fork. Long-travel sibling the Mamtor packs up to 140mm travel up front

Tapered head tube for front-end stiffness with laser-etched logo; there's no mistaking the provenance of this frame

Variety of builds available, from Shimano SLX groupset and RockShox Reba RLT fork up to XTR and Fox 32 F100 Terrallogic

Custom frame building is from £415 extra, allowing adjustment in tube diameter and thickness as well as length



Tapered head tube with Chris King headset



Stylish seatstay bridge offers good mud clearance



3D dropouts boost lateral stiffness

ANGLE FINDER

Size tested: 18in
Head angle: 71°
Seat angle: 73°
BB height: 360mm
Chainstay: 450mm
Front centre: 650mm
Wheelbase: 1,073mm