



£1600 TRAIL HARDTAIL

# Saracen Zen

This UK trail hardtail adopted in-between sized wheels for 2013. CTC's **Ian Warby** sees how they measure up

▶ **THE ZEN** has flown the flag for Saracen's line up of trail hardtails for years. For 2013, it was rolled out with bigger, 650B wheels. With a rim diameter of 584mm, this 'Goldilocks' size is part way between 26in (559mm) and 29in (622mm). While debates about wheel size will carry on, it seems that from an industry perspective the days are numbered for mid to high-end mountain bikes with 26in wheels.

With its 130mm X-Fusion Velvet RL fork, the Zen is billed as long-travel hardtail. This fork is the same one that's used for 26in wheels, with internal adjustments to reduce the travel. It's a reminder that 650B is closer to 26in than 29in.

The Zen did have the 'smaller wheeled' acceleration I was hoping for, yet it didn't seem to lack rolling speed when I tested it alongside a 29er – something I've felt in the past when comparing 26in and 29in bikes. On more technical trails, the 650B wheels soaked up bumps better than a 26er but felt tighter than a 29er, giving the bike a light, fast and manoeuvrable feel. It helps that the aluminium frame is very stiff and the fork is a tapered

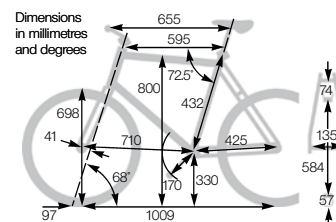
one with a screw-through axle. And the dropper seatpost is a bonus on technical descents.

The handling is great and totally confidence inspiring. There's lots of steering trail and the 720mm own-brand bars and short stem give you a riding position that feels comfortable and controlled. Components – such as the 20-speed Shimano SLX/Alivio and FSA drivetrain – are all serviceable.

## The wheel deal

I found that the improvements in balance and control the 650Bs bring on wet and muddy trails meant that I could keep the bike rolling in even the most challenging conditions. The British design means that even the 650B wheels don't reduce the mud clearance too drastically.

My first thoughts were 'not another wheel size', but I was won over. For trail bikes I think 650B wheels stand out as the right way to go, and I'm sure we'll see more and more bikes with this size wheel. The Zen, meanwhile, is great for a blast round the woods or for a day out at a trail centre. It's a hardtail that can handle pretty much anything you throw at it.



## SARACEN ZEN

**Price:** £1599.99

**Weight:** 11.79kg

**Sizes:** S, M (tested), L, XL

**Frame and fork:** 6061 aluminium frame with ISCG 05 mounts. X-Fusion Velvet RL fork, 130mm, tapered, screw-through.

**Wheels:** 57-584 Schwalbe Nobby Nic (front) and Racing Ralph (rear) tyres, Sun Inferno 27 rims, 32×3 spokes, Formula front hub, Shimano FH-M475 rear.

**Transmission:** alloy MTB pedals, FSA Comet Mega EXO 24/38T 170mm chainset, FSA BB-7000, Shimano HG-54 chain, Shimano HG62 10-speed cassette 11-36T. Shimano Alivio M591 Rapid Fire shifters, SLX M676 front derailleur, SLX M670 rear. 20-speed, 18-95 inches.

**Braking:** Shimano M505 hydraulic disc with 180/160mm rotors

**Steering & seating:** Saracen lock-on grips, 720×31.8mm riser handlebar and 60mm×6° stem. WTB Volt Comp saddle, Kind Shock DropZone seatpost (125mm)

**Contact:** saracen.co.uk



**1** 650B tyre and fork availability is improving

**2** A short stem and wide bar give lots of steering leverage

## Also consider



### 1) Whyte 905 £1599

Has a wider (750mm bar) and slacker (66.5°) front end than the Zen. The spec includes a 130mm Rockshox Revelation RL fork but no dropper post. [whytebikes.com](http://whytebikes.com)



### 2) Scott Scale 740 £1799

Not a trail bike but cross-country racer with 650B wheels, the Scale 740 has a 100mm Fox 32 Float Evolution fork and mostly Shimano SLX gearing. [scott-sports.com](http://scott-sports.com)