

MERIDA CYCLO CROSS 600

The Merida Cyclo Cross 600 is somewhat of an enigma: created to hit a sweet spot in a rider's budget, yet with clearly intended race characteristics, while retaining versatility for multi-modal use across a range of riding styles.

It's been said before; almost any bike can be used for anything from cross racing, to commuting, to gravel grinding and bikepacking. Invariably any given model will end up being stronger in some areas and less so in others.

That's why the Cyclo Cross 600 (we'll simply call it the '600' from here) stands apart as a hard-to-categorise model. Sure, the name itself is a pretty big giveaway as to its intentions and the overall lines of the bike - the neutral (but capable) geometry; the purposeful 1x11 drivetrain - all speak to the 600's cross racing focus.

But, there is more below the surface than that first impression...

SET UP / INITIAL REACTION:

The first detail you'll spot when seeing the 600 from a distance is the shape of the frame. The hydro formed alloy construction allows a sweeping top tube with a flattened lower

surface - ideal for quick and painless shouldering when storming over barriers in a cross race.

The next most obvious impression from a distance is the 1 x 11 drivetrain. A well established standard at the elite end of competition in the mountain bike world and increasingly common in cross racing, the 1 x set up offers a no-nonsense, hard hitting indication of the bike's intended use. More on that when we delve into the details of the component specifications and their ride characteristics.

Getting closer, it's a superficial detail that hits the viewer next - the paint. On a bike at this price point, it's unexpected to find a paint finish worthy of commenting on, but the 600 does just that. The dark blue paint colour has a bright metallic flake-style effect working with the bold red and white graphics. The metallic sparkle shines in sunlight and drew many comments during our review rides.

Carrying the red accent colour through to the saddle and rims are some of the touches of finesse we're more used to seeing on range topping models rather than one at this end of the line up.

A welcome design detail is the use of external routing for the rear brake hydraulic hose. Sure, tucking it into internal routing would look smooth and clean, but would be a pain in the butt when doing any servicing work on the hydraulic brakes. The practical consideration from Merida's designers is appreciated in real-world use of hydraulic brake systems.

Conversely, internal routing for the rear derailleur serves to simplify the down tube clutter a little. Unfortunately the cable reverts to a standard exposed inner from the BB along the chain stay to the rear derailleur. Unfortunate, because a bike destined for cross racing use would benefit from a continuous outer casing keeping the shifting enclosed in a muddy environment.

JUST AS SUITABLE FOR EXPLORING THE WILDS AS HITTING SOME CROSS RACES.





It's not a big deal though, as it is easily rectified by the owner drilling the cable stops and running a continuous outer.

DRIVETRAIN / SHIFTING:

The SRAM Apex shifters are dedicated 1x versions - that is, the right hand lever has the secondary paddle for shifting the rear derailleur as usual, while the left hand lever has no

secondary paddle. It's a small detail, but again speaks to the tidiness of the bike's specification - instead of trying to repurpose a left hand lever with a redundant gearshift paddle.

The 40t chainring is a narrow/wide design to aid reliable chain retention and in the true style of a race bike, that is backed up with a chain keeper, just in case.

The wide ratio 11-42 cassette out back pairs with the 40t up front to provide a practical range of gears within the 1x11 format. The large 42t cog on the back does look kind of unusual at first to those of us more used to a conventional 11-28t cassette with a double chainring set-up. However, we got used to its looks pretty quickly and accept it's necessary to make a functioning 1x drivetrain.



OTHER COMPONENTS AND SPEC:

The hydroformed alloy frame is mated with a carbon fork featuring a 15mm thru axle, while the frame retains a conventional QR for the rear wheel.

Maxxis mud wrestler 33c tyres leave no doubt as to the 600's intentions as a bike to be used off the asphalt. Fast rolling tyres on the road they are not - reliably grippy tyres on gravel, dirt and mud they are.

Although there are numerous characteristics pointing to the 600's cross racing focus, they're not at the expense of other practical applications. Rack and mudguard mounting points mean the bike can easily be put to use for double duty as a commuter, gravel grinder and/or bikepacker.

Merida's house brand components in the bars/stem/saddle/post/hubs and rim areas are perfectly functional, and nicely styled with good ergonomics in particular for the sweep of the handlebars and the shape of the saddle.

RIDING:

Our time on the 600 included lengthy road sections to get to our ultimate goals of chunky gravel roads and dirt tracks. On road the aggressively treaded tyres were less ideal than slicks, but of course they shone when the surface got loose.

At the time of season we were doing our reviewing there were no cross races to be had - although we did go looking for slippery and wet conditions. Generous frame and fork spacing meant we had zero issues with the 33c tyres packing up with mud, so depending on the conditions it's perfectly reasonable to expect to run wider rubber with no major clearance issues.

The thru axle fork has a noticeable effect on the bike's handling - providing assured and responsive steering characteristics. The nature of the ride punches above its weight in its capabilities, given where the 600 sits in terms of pricing and spec. While the traditional QR at the back end isn't as aggressive as the thru axle fork in its ride tendencies it felt balanced enough to offer a sure-footed fork/axle combo.

No rattling from the internally routed rear shift cable is a relatively minor feature, but one well worth commenting on. Although all bikes should be quiet, many of them aren't, so Merida definitely got their internal routing design and execution right with the 600.

OVERALL:

Looks like a racer, rides like a racer, but at a sharp price point and with enough versatility for pulling double duty in other areas. We came away impressed

with the Merida Cyclo Cross 600's abilities. Of particular note were the high performance thru axle carbon fork, and the 1 x 11 drivetrain. Not too many years ago it would only have been the most hardcore of riders rocking a 1 x 11 set up. The 600 provides that racer-inspired performance, without sacrificing practical usability by limiting gear ratios.

MERIDA CYCLO CROSS 600	
COLOUR	Dark blue (red/white)
FRAME SIZES	47cm; 50cm; 52cm; 54cm; 56cm; 59cm
FRAME	CYCLO CROSS LITE
FORK	CC Carbon disc 15
DERAILLEUR REAR	SRAM Apex 1
SHIFTERS	SRAM Apex 1 disc
BRAKE LEVER	SRAM Apex 1
BRAKES	SRAM rotor 160
CHAINWHEEL	SRAM Apex 1
CHAIN	KMC X11-1
HUBS	Bearing Disc 15 Road Axle / Bearing Disc cassette
RIM	Merida Expert CC
FREEWHEEL	SRAM PG-1130 11-42
TIRES	Maxxis Mud Wrestler 33 folding
SPOKES	Double Butted Black stainless
HANDLEBAR STEM	Merida Expert OS -5
HANDLEBAR	Merida Road Expert Classic OS
HEADSET	Big Conoid S-bearing neck pro
SEAT POST	Merida Expert SB15 27.2
SADDLE	Merida Expert
WEIGHT	9.38 kg (w/o pedals)
DISTRIBUTOR	Bikes International
RRP	\$2,199

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:
THE METALLIC FLAKE PAINT DRAWS LOTS OF COMMENTS
THE 42T COG IS A GOOD PARTNER WITH THE 40T CHAINRING TO DEAL WITH STEEPER CLIMBS
INTERNAL ROUTING FOR REAR SHIFT CABLE, EXTERNAL ROUTING FOR REAR HYDRAULIC BRAKE HOSE
NOTICEABLE SWEEP ON THE TOP TUBE LOOKS GOOD AS WELL AS PROVIDING COMFORTABLE SHOULDERING

