

GO's Guest Tester Todd Lyons and Free Agent's 17 Expert Galen Starlin tuck and style over a big tabletop at Twin Palms.

FREE AGENT VORTEX



The test bike: Free Agent Vortex. The scene: Twin Palms. Huge honkin' jumps everywhere — ten-foot-high tabletops, brutal doubles, near-vertical hips, etc. One of the test riders: A stocky young man dressed like a waste treatment specialist who's really into Devo. He cranks mechanically at speed toward the largest and longest tabletop jump and just as he reaches the burly lip he opts to engage in a high speed nose wheelie (no front brakes). About halfway across the flat top of the table, he senses that he overcooked it and he's going to endo and eat it hard if he doesn't do something—FAST. Leaping over the bars, grunting, and slapping soles down the backside of the jump like Larry Czonka breaking through the front line for the Dolphins, the tester savagely ditches the test bike. Both survive. Epilogue: Reserve the intricate stuntwork for the free-style tests, and stick to jumping and racing when testing full-race scoots like the Vortex.

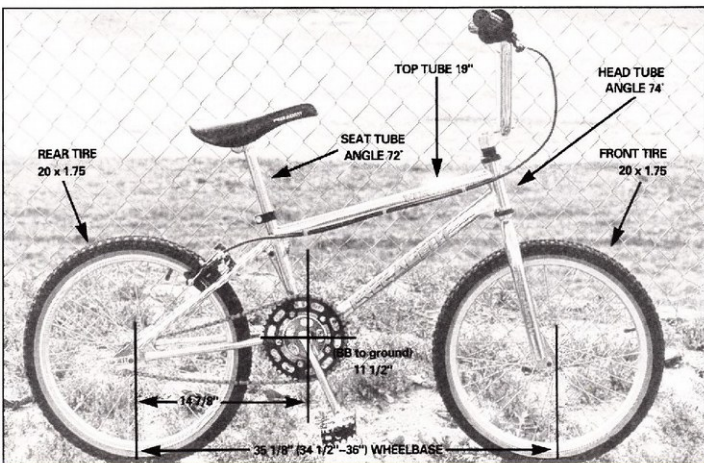
OFFICIAL
TEST

TEXT: DAILY

PHOTOS: SPIKE



FREE AGENT VORTEX



COMPONENTRY

FRAME: Free Agent Vortex, 4130 chrome-moly.
FORK: Free Agent Vortex, 4130 chrome-moly.
HANDLEBAR: Free Agent box-type, 4130 chrome-moly.
HANDLEBAR STEM: Free Agent, aluminum, chrome-moly shaft.
GRIPS: Free Agent, rubber.
HEADSET: Ten Shin, sealed.
RIMS: Sun Mistral, double wall alloy, 36-hole.
SPOKES: Stainless steel, .080 gauge.
HUBS: KK alloy sealed, super-polished.

TIRES: Cheng Shin, Comp III-type.
BRAKE: ACS Boa, rear.
BRAKE PADS: ACS, stock.
BRAKE LEVER: Star, Tech 7-type.
PEDALS: Free Agent 300, double-cage alloy.
CRANK: One-piece, chrome-moly, 175mm.
BOTTOM BRACKET SET: Steel, loose ball.
CHAINWHEEL: 44T alloy, stock.
SPIDER: Stock steel, chrome.
FREEWHEEL: 16T.
CHAIN: 3/32".
SEAT POST: Free Agent, 4130 chrome-moly.
SEAT POST CLAMP: Menor aluminum alloy.
SEAT: Free Agent 2169, plastic.
ACCESSORIES: None.



PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

PURPOSE: Entry-level racing.
AGE RANGE: Suitable for age 11 and older. Fits up to small 14-year-old with stock bars and stem.
QUALITY OF FINISH: Great.
QUALITY OF WELDING: Good.
HANDLING: Predictable. Stable. Front end comes up easy for speed jumping. Short back end really sticks when cranking hard and pow-

ering out of turns. Quick steering takes some getting used to, but once you do it goes where you want it to. Corners great in the berms. Easy to adapt to.
OFF THE RECORD: Proven full-race geometry. The Vortex is Free Agent's top-of-the-line complete race bike, and it's fully affordable. Choice components. One of the lightest medium-sized complete bikes available. Add pads and a plate and it's ready to race, right out of the box.
TEST INPUT: Todd Lyons, Ryan Vanderveen, Galen Starlin, Bill Ryan (technical measurements and dialin' in).

SPECIFICATIONS

COMPLETE BICYCLE PRICE: Approximately \$318.00 (Suggested manufacturer's retail; mail order may be cheaper).
FINISHES AVAILABLE: Chrome or black (powder coated).
COMPLETE BICYCLE WEIGHT: (without pads or plate): 23 pounds, 9 ounces.



Speed jumping on the Vortex was spot-on.

FORK RAKE: 1 inch.
STEERING HEAD TUBE LENGTH: 4 inches.
HANDLEBAR RISE: 8 1/2 inches.
HANDLEBAR WIDTH END TO END: 26 3/4 inches.
TOP TUBE O.D.: 1 1/4 inches.
DOWN TUBE O.D.: 1 1/4 inches.
FORK LEG O.D.: 1 1/2 inches.
BOTTOM BRACKET TYPE: American.



Photo: Windy

FOR MORE INFO

MORE INFO: See your local Free Agent dealer.
MANUFACTURER: Free Agent
 7685 El Cerro Dr.
 Buena Park, California 90620
 Tel: (714) 994-2269

OFFICIAL TEST



You have to trust a bike to do heinous things like this on it: S-T-R-E-T-C-H-E-D nac nac by Ryan Vanderveen at Eric Carter's track. NOW do you know why he's GO's resident bike-tester?

THE BIKE

Free Agent products are designed with two things in mind: BMX racing and winning. The company was started about eight years ago when Yvonne and Brad Shoup wanted to build their son Brent a high quality custom frame and fork to race on. They did it, and it wasn't long before their special design was in demand by other racers. Free Agent grew from there, and has since gained a reputation for highly-refined racing products. Offering frame and fork sets from Minikin to Pro Limo, as well as Pro and Limo Cruiser, Free Agent has the proverbial bases covered. The company now offers four affordable complete bikes: The Ambush Jr. (16"), Ambush, Eluder, and their top-of-the-line Vortex which we tested. Free Agent claims their bikes have been "filling more gate positions in the mains than any other bike," and it's a fair claim. Free Agent bikes are very popular with the racers these days, and a quick jaunt to any local or national race will confirm this claim.

The Vision/Free Agent team roster for 1991 is: Andy Contes (13X), Chris Eudaley (15X), Percy Owens (16X), Marty Christman (16X), Galen Starlin (17X), Bryan Reust (19X), Brent Shoup (A Pro), and Kenny May (AA Pro).

The Vortex was built with the 11-13 or 14-year-old in mind. Older riders, say 15 or 16-year-olds, can custom-fit the Vortex by switching to a longer stem, bigger bars, and maybe a layback seat post. A longer frame bike is in the FA cards for next year.

Manufactured in Taiwan by KHS Cycles to Free Agent's stringent specs, the Vortex features a 100% chrome-moly frame and fork and strong/light components at a very competitive price. The quality of chroming on the frame was great except on the rear drop-outs and steering tube, which were still good. The Vortex is also available in powder-coated black. Quality of welds were good and fairly even on the main tube construction and drop-outs. Not bad.

The quick head angle—72—is a Free Agent trademark, and took some getting used to. Patterned after the American-made Pro frame and fork, the geometry of the Vortex is best-suited for powerful starts, controlled speed jumping, and dive-bombing turn tactics. The way it handles in the air suited our testers just fine, judging by how high they were lofting on it. Speaking of suiting and our testers, their one-piece wardrobes were provided by Sears. Todd Lyons noted, "It feels funny when you lift up and the pants raise up. Do a no-hander and you have floods." Once they got used to riding in them, the

suits handled great and came through a few of Todd Lyons's most spectacular diggers with nary a scuff.

How did the bike hold up? Great. The only problem we encountered was with the pedals. They were fairly well tweaked after about the third high jump. The good news is production Vortex's will be coming stock with Free Agent's new double-cage alloy pedals which shouldn't yield any problems whatsoever. The Free Agent stem held the bars like a vice—zero slippage. The seat moved once into the "ghetto mode", but that was after Todd landed on it no-footed. The seat post didn't bend at all. Neither did the cranks. Good.

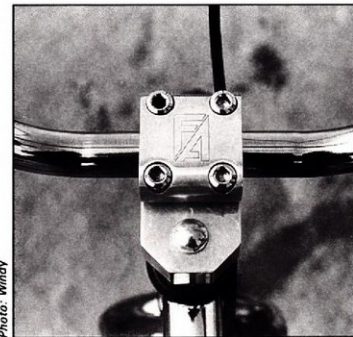


Photo: Windy

OFF-THE-CUFF BLUE COLLAR TEST TEAM COMMENTS

"I like the starts on it. I can snap really good on it."

"It's short for me. I'd probably run a layback seat post and an XXL stem."

"It's definitely designed for a smaller rider, the way it comes stock."

"The bars are kind of funny looking, actually."

"These Free Agent grips are nice and soft."

"I would add a few links to the chain and put the wheel farther back in the drop-outs."

"It speed jumps really good. It's easy to stay low to the ground, maybe because of the relatively low bottom bracket."

"The steering might be a hair quick, but it's good for people who like quicker steering."

"It's small so you can get in and out of turns fast. It's really good in the turns."

"A couple times the front end washed out just a little bit, maybe because it's got such quick steering."

"The tires grab really good for Comp III imitations."

"With the quick back end you can really throw it around."

"It feels real stable in the air."

"I feel like I should change the oil or something wearing this suit."

"The seat post held up and the seat is comfortable."

"I'd put on a 46T, but the 44T is good for here—at a stop and go track where you need quick bursts of speed."



GALEN STARLIN

AGE: 17

HOME TOWN: Glendale, Arizona

SPONSOR: Vision/Free Agent

CO-SPONSORS: Vision, Aero, Ecko, Zeronine, A'ME, PJ1

PERSONAL GEAR:

Ecko open face helmet

Zeronine visor

Haro mouthguard (sometimes)

Aero jersey

Aero pants

No gloves ("I can't stand 'em.")

Low-cut Vision shoes ("Always black.")

PERSONAL VEHICLE:

Free Agent Pro frame

Free Agent Pro forks

Free Agent Pro bars

DK XL stem

Jive Handles

Tioga Headset

Kastan headset seal, neoprene

Sun rims, aluminum

.080 stainless steel spokes

DK sealed hubs

Comp III tires, 1.75 front and rear

Odyssey Pit Bull brake

Dia Compe Tech 7 lever

Skyway Tuff Pads, black

SR pedals, Crupi Cages

Redline Flight Cranks, 185mm

Redline bottom bracket

Flight gear, 41T (40T for indoor nationals)

Shimano freewheel, 14T

Sedis Sport chain

Turbo seat

Free Agent seat post, 18"

DK seat clamp

Zeronine plate

Free Agent pads

Since superfast 17-year-old Galen Starlin races the Pro-size Free Agent frame and fork, which the geometry of the Vortex is modeled after, Vision/Free Agent kindly flew him out for our test to do some flying of his own... and that he did (see cover). He's almost ready for the next frame size up, but not quite yet: "I run my back wheel all the way to the very back of the drop-outs. I'm almost ready for a Limo, but I'm not tall enough yet. They're too big for me."

Galen's dad, "Cowboy" Bill Starlin, is back as Vision/Free Agent's Team Manager and is expected to take the team to #1 this year

(Vision/Free Agent was the Number One Factory Team in the ABA for three years in a row—'87, '88, and '89). Recently Galen got the cover of the American BMX'er newspaper, so the following mini-interview thing is kind of like the Uncovered he never got—just like the #1 Amateur plate that's eluded him the past few years by mere points. Points...

DOES VISION/FREE AGENT HAVE A GOOD CHANCE AT NUMBER ONE THIS YEAR?

"Oh yeah. At the beginning of the year we started off good. We're rebuilt this year. We cut some riders and picked up Andy Contes. He's from Arizona too. He's pretty fast."

IS IT COOL HAVING YOUR DAD BACK AS TEAM MANAGER AGAIN?

"Yeah, really cool. It seems like I just do better. I just want to win for him more and more. He supports me 100%. He says whatever I want to do he'll support me. I quit last year, too. I played football. I didn't ride a bike from about the Lemoore National until December. I just took a break. It's fun again, not boring."



DID YOU GET STRONGER FROM PLAYING FOOTBALL?

"Lots stronger. I didn't even ride that whole time. I hopped on my bike and felt about like where I was. At the Reno National I was about 90% and I got two thirds. In Austin, Texas about two weeks later I won both days—17X. I feel a lot faster than I did last year."

WHO'S YOUR TOUGHEST COMPETITION?

"In 17 Expert it's Robert Zahnow, John Gonzales, and Todd Steen. In 18 Expert there's Dave Milham and J.D. Finney. I don't like the new classes. Last year I only got to race 17 & Over Expert once, and I quit after that. I kinda liked it the old way. It was a lot harder and tougher to get into the mains. Now it's just like the same old stuff, like when I was 14 and 15... the same people. Takes the fun out of it really. I just don't like it."

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS? DO YOU PLAN ON TURNING PRO SOON?

"My 18th birthday is Saturday at Lemoore. I want to turn Pro when this year's over with. If I don't turn Pro I'll probably get bored again. There isn't any incentive hardly for me. Money makes you go faster."

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CONCLUSION

Draw your own conclusions. Check out the specs and photos. Read our test team's comments. Test ride one at your local track or bike shop that carries the Vortex. This was GO's first official bike test, and we give it the Rider's Manual Stamp of Approval.