

# THE ROAD TO ROVANIEMI

With less than a month until our intrepid duo hit the frozen trails of Finnish Lapland, they explain how their race preparations are coming along

Words Matt Orton Pics Various

At the time of writing this, there's exactly one month to go until Tom and I line up on the start line for the Rovaniemi 150, a 150km race through Finland's subarctic wilderness by foot or bike. And by bike, we mean fatbike – snow is the natural habitat for big rubber. While Finland boasts perfect fatbike riding conditions, the same can hardly be said of the UK, occasional cold snap excluded. So how can you train for an extreme race in average conditions? We've opted for putting plenty of miles in, a bit of friendly competition, oh, and riding to work on probably the least efficient commuting bike ever... »

## THE LOWDOWN

ROVANIEMI 150



This unique winter race through Northern Finland's subarctic landscape starts and finishes at Lapland's main city, Rovaniemi

**LOCATION** ROVANIEMI, FINLAND  
**DISTANCE** 150KM  
**TIME** WITHIN 42 HOURS  
**DATE** 20-22 FEBRUARY 2014  
**ENTRY FEE** €250  
**REGISTRATION** BY 31 JANUARY 2014  
[WWW.ROVANIEMI150.COM](http://WWW.ROVANIEMI150.COM)



These are the kind of frozen conditions the boys can expect – with no singing snowmen in sight



Matt's been doing his best to make his fatbike even heavier



Loneliness has a new name... bikepacking



Matt's been turning plenty of heads on the daily commute



**Matt Orton**  
 MBUK's weirdy beardy deputy art editor is a self-confessed fatbike addict who's more at home under canvas than in a hotel and spends his holidays hiking alpine routes, wilderness canoeing and riding his bike into the back of beyond. Grrr... manly!

With a month to go, I don't think I've ever been fitter. That isn't saying much though, because I'm still paying for an unhealthy university lifestyle that carried over into real life for quite a few years. It was only after hitting 30 that getting fit became a priority.

Fitting training in around a working lifestyle is never easy. The important thing is to spend as much time in the saddle as possible and make every mile count. With this in mind, my trusty singlespeed has been relegated to the back of the shed and my long-term test bike and Rovaniemi race bike, the Surly Ice Cream Truck Ops, has been my one and only bike for every occasion – including my daily

commute of 24 miles. Sticking with the deeply-treaded Nate tyres and dropping the psi for added drag may have added a few minutes to the ride to work but it's paying off. Throwing in some longer rides at the weekend has given my endurance a much needed boost too.

The biggest test of my training was taking part in the Bear Bones Bikepacking Winter Event ([www.bearbonesbikepacking.co.uk](http://www.bearbonesbikepacking.co.uk)), which involved two days of riding and wild camping in mid Wales. It proved to be a great opportunity to test ride a fully loaded fatbike and rack up some miles. Some serious headwinds and cold, short days meant I never got too comfortable and added to the

challenge – you can read more about my experience on our blog at [bit.ly/1EsgVXF](http://bit.ly/1EsgVXF).

Confidence is running quite high at the moment. I'm feeling fit and I know I can manage the distance. I'm realistic about my chances – I won't be breaking any records and know there are going to be far more serious racers taking part, but I think completing the race in a respectable time is an achievable goal. I'm aware that could all change once I reach Lapland though. As several other first-time snow racers I've spoken to in the past few weeks have said, none of us really knows what to expect once we hit the snow. Which makes it all the more exciting.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



## GEAR HIGHLIGHTS

**Snow-specific riding** kit is pretty thin on the ground, especially here in the UK. Luckily there's plenty of gear for other winter activities that should work just as well in the saddle as out of it. Here are a few key items of clothing GO Outdoors have supplied us that should help see us through the worst the Arctic can throw at us.



**Marmot Thermo 1/2 Zip baselayer**

**Sweating in sub-zero** conditions is seriously bad news. This thermal layer uses a mix of two different fibres to wick moisture away quickly and keep you dry without compromising warmth.

£95 (£51.30 with discount card)



**Montane Sabretooth softshell jacket**

**Wind and cold** are likely to be the worst elements we'll face, and they'll probably be combined. This softshell is designed to shrug off wind and water while remaining breathable and unrestrictive.

£175 (£157.50 with discount card)



**Montane Terra Stretch pants**

**The ideal partner** for the Sabretooth jacket, these trousers offer the same level of wind and water resistance and won't restrict movement thanks to the 4-way stretch fabric and articulated knees.

£85 (£76.50 with discount card)

Pic: Simon Toplak



Tom only just survived the Strathpuffer. How's he going to cope in Finland?



**Tom Marvin**

Our sister mag *What Mountain Bike's* tech ed spends most of his time thrashing trail bikes around the country but he's always on the lookout for interesting races. Having tested his mettle in the Trans Nepal and Cristalp Grand Raid, he can't wait for the Rovaniemi 150. OK, maybe that's not quite true...

When we first signed up for the Arctic Death March Rovaniemi 150 it was all jovial, backslapping, "you'd better get some training in then, eh!" type banter, laughed off with witty retorts of how long we had to prepare for it and how short 150km is. All of a sudden it's got serious – heck, I even got my turbo trainer out over Christmas.

I've spent hours awake in bed coming up with scenarios of being stuck in whiteout conditions for 30 hours, fighting off bears and wolves with the Gerber knife my girlfriend got me for Christmas. I've been cold before, but I've never had to sign a disclaimer signing my life away to frostbite, psychological trauma and quite possibly being the first fully cryogenically preserved human being in history.

The first kick in the backside was our trip to GO Outdoors, where we selected the kit we'd need to race in. Their outdoors expert made no bones about the fact that -20 °C is really, really bloody cold. This was reinforced by a chat with one of the UK's foremost long-distance mountain bike racers, John 'Shaggy' Ross, a veteran of the

Rovaniemi and Iditarod, its big Alaskan brother. If it does get as cold as it could (-30 °C), things will get serious very quickly.

With this in mind, I've been getting out on the bike whenever possible, as well as making the most of BikeRadar's turbo sessions on YouTube. I've also spent a fair amount of time out in the wind and rain on bike tests and photoshoots, preparing, psychologically at least, for being cold for hours on end with not enough food.

Come January, I made my annual pilgrimage to the Strathpuffer 24. Northern Scotland can get pretty gnarly in winter – it might only be a few degrees below, but the wind is known for chilling you to the bone. Ideal conditions then for a 24-hour race. I raced in a team of four, which meant 40-minute bursts of seeing-red effort, followed by two-and-a-half hours of, quite literally, chilling out before heading out again.

Between laps it was a case of wrapping up warm – softshell trousers, baselayer, jumper, and doubling up on insulated jackets – and huddling as close as possible to a fire. Come lap time though, clothes were shed. Lycra shorts or 3/4s with waterproof baggies over the top were more than enough below, while a baselayer and jersey up top kept me from overheating. During the night we split the team in half and rode back-to-back laps while the other pair slept so we could all get a few hours' kip. It was tough and our times suffered, but come daybreak, with just a few hours left, our team spirit lifted and we managed to finish second. ⚙️



Tom ponders the complexity of fatbike rear hub spacing. Either that or he's thinking of excuses...



**TOM'S SARMA SHAMAN**

Tom's bike for the race will be a carbon Sarma Shaman. We caught up with company CEO Dmitry Shindyakin to find out more about the brand and bike.

**MBUK: Tell us about Sarma Bikes...**

DS: We're a global company but we're strongly influenced by Siberia, where several of our founders grew up. During very long winters with lots of snow fatbikes have a big advantage, and we fell in love with them from the first ride. Siberia is the best place to develop and test fatbikes, with average winter temperatures well below -18°C. We're all about state-of-the-art design and handcrafted products, and are attempting to be one of the leaders in innovation to expand the advantages of the fatbike platform.

**Why use carbon fibre?**

Everyone knows carbon is lighter and stiffer than aluminium. There's a huge aircraft plant close to my house in Irkutsk and most of my neighbours and friends work there. Good connections in this field helped me find specialists with corresponding expertise.

**Tell us about the Shaman...**

The Shaman is designed specifically for racing. Its geometry, stiffness and weight are optimised for fatbike or even cross-country races. It's a full-carbon bike, designed around our Naran 80mm carbon rims, and is light, strong and responsive. Our 69-degree head tube angle is purposely slacker than others, which along with the ultra short 445mm chainstays makes for a frame geometry that racers will love. A mix of Sarma products and SRAM components makes for a bike weighing less than 10kg (22lb). That makes it closer in feel to a standard 29er but with all the fatbike's advantages. It's perfectly suited to most adventure races, where you don't need to carry bulky luggage.

**What's so great about fatbikes?**

They're a lot of fun and you can ride where others can't. They're great on snow, frozen lakes, and so on. But the big tyres also act like a small amount of suspension, giving a huge level of grip and extra confidence on beaches, rocks, roots and anywhere where conditions are loose and rough. We see a lot of people riding fatbikes year-round and as their only bike. They've already carved out a niche and following. How big they're going to become, we don't know, but they're here to stay.

Find out more about the bikes the guys will be riding on the MBUK blog – [www.mbuk.com](http://www.mbuk.com)