

SPORTIVE BIKES – A BEGINNER’S GUIDE.

Part 3 – Groupset and Gearing

Having made your decision on the perfect frame to carry you through the Dragon Ride and many years of sportives or Gran Fondos your choices in groupsets and gearing are far more straightforward.

There are, without touching on the world of hub gearing or dynamos, 3 major manufacturers that provide standard derailleur based groupsets. Italian component company Campagnolo are the grand masters of equipment and their products have a loyal following, especially amongst older riders.

Since the 1970's Japanese giant Shimano have been the innovators in equipment for the mass market and their products also rightly command a dedicated following.

In the last 2 years American company Sram have opened up the market even further by bringing the technology they developed so successfully in mountain biking to the road. All 3 manufacturers currently provide equipment to top road racing squads so quality and reliability is assured.

As a rule of thumb, buy the best that your budget will allow you to. Spending a little bit more will allow you to fit lighter, better finished components that, apart from the inevitable wear and tear of big miles, will last the life time of your bicycle.

We would recommend the following groupsets as being ideally for your new machine, each one in ascending order of quality and price. From Campagnolo, Veloce, Centaur and Record are ideal. Shimano have the excellent 105, Ultegra and Dura-Ace range and Sram produce the Rival, Force and Red groupsets.

Don't be afraid to mix and match as well if you feel that you want to. Lever and derailleur combinations are usually specific so expect to fit those together but there is no reason why you shouldn't fit a mix of components different groupsets within a manufacturers range. Remember too that many smaller independent companies offer superb chainsets, brakes and hubs that will be compatible with any of the 3 major manufacturers.

With respect to gearing...be honest with yourself.

Sportive riders are leisure riders so make sure your gearing reflects this. Shimano especially offer a huge spread of sprockets on the rear wheel enabling you to climb just about any hill. If you are a fit rider a 12-27 spread is a good place to start at the rear wheel and should cover almost all eventualities.

At the front there are 2 good options; the 'triple' chainset as found on MTB's and the more recently arrived 'compact' chainset.

The 'triple', as its name suggests has 3 chainrings usually in even steps, for example 24 tooth, 34 and 44. Alternatively there can be a slight step up such as 28, 34, 48. When mated with a dinner plate sized sprocket range at the rear wheel and the appropriate long cage derailleur to keep the chain tension good, just about any hill is within your grasp.

The 'compact' is slightly more aesthetically pleasing and is essentially a double chainset with fewer teeth than and out and out racing set. Typically compacts come in a 34/50 tooth combination and provide that little edge on the climbs. Don't think you'll be missing out on high speed gearing with a compact either. If you do the mathematics you'll find you can easily match the high gears of those running bigger 39/53 standard chainsets by choosing the appropriate small sprockets at the back.

Watch out for our final instalment covering finishing kit and wheels in the near future, until then keep building!