

SPORTIVE BIKES – A BEGINNER’S GUIDE.

Part 4 – Wheels, tyres and Finishing Kit

With the Dragon Ride just around the corner it's time to put the final touches to your all new sportive machine, namely wheels, complete with appropriate rubber and the bike's finishing kit.

Richard Hallett of RoadcyclingUK.com is clear about the way the selection of wheels should be approached;

“Firstly they have to be reliable so ultra light racing wheels are not really the perfect choice. In fact even good quality factory built wheels can sometimes be a little harsh for some riders. I still think a good set of hand-built wheels is best. Go for 32 spoke wheels, crossing 3 times for comfort and reliability.”

You may however feel that buying off the peg wheels is the way forward. If so Ben Atkins of Cyclingnews has some advice:

“Remember that there are some great wheels out there, manufacturers like Easton and Mavic has really good all-round wheel sets as do the big manufacturers like Campagnolo and Shimano. Strike a good balance between cost, weight and comfort. Also remember that rotational weight is significant on a bike so a slightly lighter set will help a lot in the feel and performance. Wheels are also a great area to consider an upgrade in the future too and certainly one of the easiest upgrades to achieve.”

When it comes to tyres don't be led up the garden path. The fact is that tubular tyres are not really the thing for sportive bikes, they are time consuming to change and require quite a bit of practice to get right and the quality of clincher tyres is now so good that there is bound to be a tyre out there for you.

Ideally you should aim to mate supple ride qualities with excellent grip and longevity. In addition don't be fooled into thinking thinner section tyres pumped to rock hard ride pressures will roll faster or feel better, they won't. 23mm or 25mm tyres are ideal and 100-110psi is more than enough air to squeeze into your hoops. Our favourite tyres of the moment are Michelin Krylion Carbon, Continental GP4000s and the excellent value Schwalbe Blizzard Sport.

Remember to buy good quality patches, inner tubes and mini pump and carry at least one or the other with you at all times.

When cycling magazines talk of finishing kit they mean handlebars, handlebar stem, seatpost and saddle. All these areas are not only the finishing touches on your new sportive bike but a vital area to get right. They are the 'contact points' between rider and machine, so take your time to choose what's comfortable for you.

Handlebars can be had in either carbon or aluminium and as the latter can provide excellent durable and cheaper items we'd plump for those. The shape of the bend and width are highly personal so don't be afraid to sling your leg over bikes in your local shop and get a good feel for what you like.

Handlebar stems are once again available in either carbon or aluminium and sometimes steel, here the most important attribute is not weight or material but the length and angle. There is a fashion for ultra-long stems on race bikes and conversely a fashion for upright shorter stems on sportive bikes but we suspect that these are as much driven by marketing as practicality. Remember that you have to spend hours in the saddle so try all lengths and elevations. The one golden rule is not to have the centre of your handlebars forward of the axle of the front wheel, this makes the bike unstable and a real handful to ride.

Seatposts in carbon or aluminium can vary hugely in weight so here is one obvious area to shave off grams. Take a good look at the saddle clamp bolt and make sure it's easily accessible, surprisingly many are not! Pay close attention to the compatibility of seatpost and frame in both materials and size, if it's an overly tight fit don't get it.

And finally, saddles. These are so personal that it's almost impossible to give any advice at all. We would suggest that like all other contact points you try as many as you can in the local shop as possible but hey...you knew that already didn't you...