

SPORTIVE BIKES – A BEGINNER'S GUIDE.

Part 1 – What makes Sportive Bikes different?

Sportive riders are not generally subject to the cut and thrust of the big bunch sprint and relish those occasional 'special' days when they can unfurl their invisible wings to float like an angel over the highest of mountain passes. Whilst professional riders, labouring for a living at such things, demand the very lightest and stiffest bicycles on the planet to display their talents, sportive riders need something else from their bicycles.

Comfort is the Holy Grail of sportive riders. That's not to say that endurance riders don't want their bikes to have most of the stiffness, lightness and sheer 'bling' of their professional cousins but, quite rightly, they want to go back to their day jobs at the end of a hard weekend and at least be able to sit down...if not quite walk properly.

Choosing the right frame can be the difference between a heavenly ride and purgatory. Steel frames are still a favourite, especially amongst the financially prudent. Steel is easy to custom build, reasonably light and comfortably springy. Aluminium despite its stranglehold on the world's massed produced bike market doesn't tend to rate highly on the wish list of sportive riders, its harsh ride characteristics being good for racing but not for the sportive market.

Carbon is popular in the bunch being 'the' material of choice for the ex-racers but its very stiffness, especially mated to a lovely set of deep section carbon rims, can allow a carbon machine to glide gracefully over smooth roads whilst biting back with a bone jarring ride on bad surfaces.

Top of the Pops with sportive riders until now has been the magical metal, titanium. The flexible, shock damping properties of NASA's top tubing as well as its longevity making it well suited to the job in hand.

There is a green revolution going on in frame building. Frames, produced by classics racing legend Johan Museeuw, and bearing his name, combine super stiff high modulus Carbon fibre sheets with strands of woven flax fibre. Stiff, light and exceptionally vibration damping, there is now a real alternative to riding the other 'big four' materials.

So what else makes all the difference to performance and comfort on a sportive bike?

The biggest variable is the humble, or these days not so humble, wheel. Keeping weight down is good, the lighter the rotating mass the easier the pedal stroke becomes and that is just as important for sportive riders as for racing cyclists. Carbon has worked its way into hoops over the last decade and the choice of rims is mind boggling, but remember, like carbon frames, carbon wheels are stiff. 'Spokes are springs' continues to be the mantra for both hand built and factory wheel sets and good quality aluminium rims flex a little allowing the spoke to work efficiently.

Finally, sportive riders pore for hours over the set up of their 'points of contact'. Simply put, they agonise about what pedals and shoes, saddles and handlebars to clamp to their prize machines to make the prospect of another 100 miles more palatable.

Once a sportive rider finds nirvana on a particular saddle, that old, tired, battered perch will follow him or her from bike to bike throughout their riding life. It's a symbiotic thing.....

So don't be swayed by the wannabe Armstrong's out on the club run. Wear that comfy extra padded pair of shorts with pride! Ride that knackered old Brooks saddle with style! Remember, sportive riders are always the last left standing.