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ISSUE 37 • SUMMER 2015 • £5



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SUMMER 2015

COLLECTORS'
EDITION

037



Vitus Vitesse Evo Team

Reborn brand Vitus claims to have a pro team bike at a price accessible to the masses



Words PETER STUART



THE SPEC
Model
 Vitus Vitesse Evo Team
Groupset
 Shimano Dura-Ace 9000
Deviations
 FSA SL-K Light BB386Evo chainset, FSA SL-K Light brakes, Shimano Ultegra cassette
Wheels
 Fulcrum Racing 3
Finishing kit
 FSA SL-K UD carbon seatpost, FSA SL-K carbon stem, FSA SL-K compact handlebar, Prologo Scratch Pro saddle
Weight 7.35kg
Price £2,699
Contact
 chainreactioncycles.com

Vitus is a bike brand that's been on a journey. In the late 1970s it became one of the few brands to experiment with aluminium, and created stunning frames with unusually skinny aluminium tubes. The consequence was a light and comfortable ride, but a frame that a powerful rider could flex under pressure. Despite that, it became a favourite for Grand Tour winners such as Sean Kelly and Lucho Herrera. The modern iteration of the brand has changed materials, and ownership, but has that essential character remained the same?

Back in issue 12, we reviewed Vitus's flagship Sean Kelly Ltd Edition. That was the first frame by Vitus to be used by the AnPost Chain Reaction Pro Continental racing team, and followed the brand's acquisition by online retailer Chain Reaction. With that frame, Vitus opted for an open-mould design – a design that is offered openly to any brand, usually by a Far Eastern factory, but with the specifics of the lay-up of the frame being

prescribed by Vitus. With this new version, Vitus has created its own design, and with that it has sliced a sizeable chunk off the overall price too.

When we saw the Sean Kelly, we were thoroughly impressed with a bike equipped with Sram Red and Mavic Kysrium SLS wheels for just under £3,500. Yet this new iteration truly puts the Sean Kelly to shame. With the majority of a Dura-Ace groupset, spliced with a fully carbon (and arguably more handsome) FSA crankset, this is a level of value offered by very few competitors. Add in the carbon finishing kit and Fulcrum Racing 3 wheels, and we're in a slight state of disbelief that Chain Reaction can sell this bike at just £2,699 (the components alone would cost more than that at retail price). Yet that value all hinges on the quality of one key element – the frame.

Stepping forward
 On first impressions, the Vitesse was very much to my tastes, but I felt as though it may not find as much

GEOMETRY
 Vitus has generally sided with endurance geometry akin to the likes of the Specialized Tarmac, but with a shorter racier head tube. The front end has also been designed with considerable stiffness to aid handling.

◊ favour with others. As with the Sean Kelly, the Vitesse is fast yet harsh, but this bike is very much a different experience to its predecessor.

Having been designed in conjunction with the AnPost pro team, designer Dale McMullan confesses that the team's performance criteria were narrow: 'The pros just want the bike to be as stiff as possible all the time, and in all honesty they don't care much about the possible comfort sacrifices.' Of course, Vitus has designed the bike with the consumer in mind, so it is not a complete concession to stiffness.

'We had in mind guys riding sportives too, so that bike has to be comfortable as well,' McMullan says, 'and ironically one of the first things the team said about the bike was how they preferred the comfort aspect.'

That said, it is still extremely stiff. In fact, after just a few pedal revolutions I was immediately planning to take the bike to a crit circuit to test it against the field in a race. No matter how hard I stamped on the



pedals, it seemed to resist any impulse to flex, especially around the bottom bracket.

An increasing trend among manufacturers is the use of wider bottom bracket shells to create more stiffness at the rear without sacrificing comfort from the rest of the tubes. The Vitesse uses BB386, which is the widest bottom bracket and also has the thickest axle width.

'For me it was a no-brainer,' McMullan says. 'That wide pedalling platform offers so many advantages. It means that we can create a frame with a lower weight - we don't have to throw extra carbon layers in there to help stiffen it up, and the pure size of the structure has meant that we can use asymmetric chainstays.'

Comforting thoughts

Despite its stiff, racy feel, comfort has not been thrown out of the window. Over small disturbances or generally heavy roads, it does an excellent job of filtering out the buzz, but while not numbing the rider to the traction and feel of the road. That's likely to be a consequence of the top tube and seat tube offering some forgiving flex for lesser impacts. It's over serious dents or imperfections in the road that the bike is a little too robust and unsettled. Part of that may come down to the stiffness of the straight-bladed fork, which offers little mediation between road impact and the rider's hands. ◊



COMPONENTS

The Dura-Ace 9000 shifters and derailleurs are a great addition to the Vitus build. While the Vitesse is short of a full Dura-Ace groupset, swapping in some FSA components, the group's excellent shifting is in no way sacrificed, and contributes a lot to the bike's racy character.

I always felt confident heading into corners, aided by informative feedback of the road surface through the frame



CHAINSET
The FSA SL-K chainset is both lighter and shinier than the Dura-Ace equivalent. FSA was an early adopter of the four-arm crank design.



in fact Vitus hasn't skimped on the specification. The FSA chainset, for instance, offers a carbon finish that complements the aesthetics of the overall build, but with no palpable stiffness sacrifice. And it comes in 60g lighter than the Dura-Ace equivalent. Indeed, I'd guess that Vitus opted for the FSA crankset more for compatibility with the BB386 than for any reason to do with costs. For this level of racer, the mid-compact 52-36 chainrings are perfect for the task at hand, meaning you'll never spin out in a fast group but can still tackle a formidable ascent.

The Vitesse is an extremely well-considered build, but its greatest strength is probably that it creates a sensation of rigid power delivery that means the frame begs to be ridden hard, and offers copious speed as a reward. With the bike's low weight, impressive spec and handling prowess, this is a fully capable, fully fledged race-ready machine that wouldn't be out of place in a pro race. That's saying a lot at this price. 🌸

▶ The geometry of the frame also does something for the general comfort of the bike, as its curves seem to place it into the endurance road category. The geometry is strikingly similar to the likes of the Specialized Tarmac, only with a shorter (arguably racier) head tube and marginally longer wheelbase, which adds a little to the smoothness of the bike on descents.

Indeed, handling was consistently impressive on the Vitesse. I always felt confident heading into corners, aided by informative feedback of the road surface through the frame. It encouraged me to push harder and pick up speed faster without fear for the bike's stability, hampered only by the weakest aspect of the build – the FSA SL-K Light brakes. The brakes are certainly capable, but in comparison to the Dura-Ace alternative for which they were swapped, they were slightly lacking. The power and modulation were both ever so slightly diminished, which caused me to brake slightly earlier into corners than I would have wanted.

That's not to give the impression that the non-standard parts on the Vitesse are a sacrifice, and

The detail



Vitus has equipped the Vitesse with FSA componentry throughout the build, also using FSA in place of some of the standard Shimano transmission. While the FSA SL-K kit sits just below the top-tier K-Force components, this is still high-end equipment for a bike in the £2k-£3k bracket. Seeing a carbon stem, seatpost and handlebar on a build at this price is astoundingly rare. The finishing kit provides a welcome combination of stiffness at the cockpit and some flex in the seatpost – ideal for long, strenuous days. While the SL-K brakeset left a little to be desired in comparison to Dura-Ace, it still did its job efficiently enough. It's encouraging that at a price point where finishing kit is commonly sacrificed for cost purposes, Vitus has surpassed expectations with the Vitesse.