



British asphalt surface is that a steel bike feels both smoother and faster. You aren't actually going any faster, but the smooth ride certainly gives the potential to ride further – hence the steel bike's continued popularity in audax and touring circles. With its laid back seat angle the Lemond has the most traditional riding position for a tall rider but it combines this with the most up to date ride feel – direction changes are lightning fast and there's a sense of unflappability when sprinting or chasing that breakaway down the road.

The Orbea Marmolada has a short top tube for its size and is one of the heaviest performance frames we've tested. In spite of this you don't really notice the weight when riding. To get a fair picture of the Orbea's handling abilities we swapped the Rigida Contour wheels for Mavic Ksyrium Elites, similar in weight to the wheels of the Lemond and the Simoncini. As expected the Ksyriums boosted acceleration but the Marmoladas stayed true to its pleasingly smooth and stable character once up to speed. It's more compliant than any aluminium frame we've tested, closer in feel to a titanium frame – and it actually belies its chunky nature. Like the Omega titanium (C+140), the Orbea has a fairly long trail creating a stable, rather than fast, steering response. This should, in theory at least, require more effort on your part to make small direction changes when riding in a race or bunch situation. In practice, though, it inspires a high level of confidence when riding close to others.

The Simoncini has classically Italian frame

geometry: a steeper 74 degrees for the head and seat angle as opposed to a more standard 73 for head and seat for this frame size. The resulting 'over the bracket' riding position makes it particularly easy to maintain a constant cadence on flat roads, but could mean that you'll end up moving the saddle back when riding hills. In every other respect the geometry is perfect for criterium and general all day riding – you can get 'on top' of the cranks, and the short wheelbase and sensible trail figure make it rewarding to ride on the flat where a constant cadence will keep your speed up. If you like the feel of speed this is the bike for you.

WHEELS
LEMOND 9 ORBEA 6 SIMONCINI 9

The Lemond's Bontrager Race-Lite wheels are appropriate on a bike costing between £1300 and £1600 where they are up against Shimano Ultegra and Mavic's Ksyrium Elites. The Bontragers use 24 aero bladed spokes, crossed for strength and grouped in pairs. Thankfully trueing is easy as the standard-type nipples aren't concealed beneath the rim (as they are on some Campag wheels, for instance), and they ran true for the duration of the test.

At first glance the Orbea's Rigida Contour wheels seem appropriate on a bike at just below a grand. However, a closer inspection shows some distinctly average quality Rigida hubs. The scales also tell us that Orbea could have done far more for the appeal of this bike by speccing traditional, lighter wheels. The Rigidas have a similar spoke pattern to the



SIMONCINI GENIUS
£1,395

"If you like the feel of speed this is the bike for you"

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Great finish quality and fine attention detail – though the orange colour won't appeal to everyone

The ProLink's saddle has a flexible nose – this should help on longer rides



Strong, reliable and easy to maintain wheels, and the Conti tyres should shrug off punctures

Bontragers but with an extra four spokes per wheel; round spokes are used in keeping with the lower cost of this bike. At 3.1kg a pair (including tyres and cassette), these are 400g heavier than the other bikes' wheels and we'd strongly urge upgrading to Mavic Cosmos – around 360g per pair lighter – later.

Simoncini's distributors have specced Mavic CXP33 rims – these budget priced V-section rims are shallower than Mavic Ksyrium and Campag Eurus rims. Many riders prefer this depth as the wheels are relatively unaffected by strong cross winds compared to semi-deep rims like Mavic's Cosmics and the Shimano's range of wheels.

Boasting CXP33 rims mated to Campag Centaur hubs with triple butted spokes, the Simoncini's wheels are an ideal choice for league racers. Rims and spokes are easy to replace and repairs are straightforward too – without the hassle of ordering special spokes or rims: most shops stock Mavic CXP33s. You could trim more weight by specifying the Mavic Open Pro rims, however, and the distributors can spec this if required. Of the tyres, the Bontrager Race X-lite (the same name as the wheels) have the best overall performance and are very similar in feel and construction to Continental's Grand Prix Supersonics. The Orbea's Hutchinson XL tyres grip superbly on fast corners, though we would

upgrade to better tyres for wet conditions. The Simoncini uses Continental's Grand-Prix 4 Season – an excellent multi-ply Kevlar belted and beaded tyre, but conditions were too dry to test it in the wet. But we'd expect it to be particularly effective in resisting punctures after heavy rainfall washes flints into the road and under your tyres.

EQUIPMENT
LEMOND 9 ORBEA 7 SIMONCINI 8

The price differences of the three machines is evident in the level of kit specced. The Orbea – the cheapest at nearly a grand – has an entry level race groupset in the shape of Campag's Mirage – it's perfectly adequate with only the Mirage bottom bracket on the heavy side. ITM supply stem and handlebars – the unimaginatively named Road Racing. And on the whole this is a good choice. It's stiff, reasonably light and functional, just the kind of thing we would expect for the money. Handlebar width is a matter of personal taste, though thankfully none of the bikes on test were fobbed off with overly narrow 40cm bars we've seen on some bikes as a weight saving exercise.

Like most bikes at this price, the Lemond has Shimano's evergreen Ultegra equipment. The rest of the kit is race oriented including the oversized 3TTT

Forge XL bar/stem combo which helps to keep everything stiff and straight when following a wheel in the sprint, though long distance riders will probably find this bar setup a little harsh. Marsas tape fitted beneath the bar tape should take care of this. A point worth noting is that while the oversizing increases stiffness, the bulge from part of the handlebar means you might have trouble fitting some cycle computers.

The Simoncini is also very well specified with the emphasis on hand comfort; the Cinelli Eubios 260 bars have a square bend which makes them ideal for use with Campag's Ergopower levers. The ITM Four stem fitted is a piece of high end kit and has, as its name suggests, a four bolt front opening clamp – aiding strength and stiffness.

The Orbea's unbranded dual pivot brake callipers look similar to Shimano's but with a less lustrous finish. They have a cam lock quick release in addition to the release on the lever itself; the brake blocks are quite similar to Campag's. The plastic Mirage Ergopower levers feel effective and powerful when the need arises to pull up smartly, and they are just as effective as the Simoncini's Centaurs.

The Lemond's brakes are less friendly if you have small hands – as you have to stretch further than with the Ergopower levers on the other two bikes – though power and control are first rate. While an