

BEAUTIFUL, STUNNING & OUTRAGEOUS:
INSIDE THE HANDMADE BIKE SHOW

ROAD BIKE ACTION MAGAZINE

CCC 02985
JUNE
2014

**A Real
Chance
to Win
a FREE
Bike**

Page 118

**3 NEW
ALLOY
HOOPS:**
Save Money
& Roll Faster

**DIRTY
KANZA:**
RBA Challenges
All Comers—
Be There!

**PRO
TIPS:**
How to
Train Your
Sprint

Attn:
retailer:
Please display
until June 5

\$5.99



BIKETEST

NEILPRYDE ZEPHYR

Talk of compliance but style assured



BIKETEST



NeilPryde is not a traditional bike company. Following decades of success designing high-performance wind surfing products, it was just three years ago when they decided to use their years of carbon fiber expertise to jump into the world of carbon fiber road bikes. New to the game as they are, they've made some moves that, to an outsider, seem to make good sense. They hired an outside design firm to get the bikes penned on paper, and they sponsored a Pro Continental team to help provide some valuable R&D. They also kept focused on a small line of bikes that reflect solid user groups: aero road, lightweight road, comfort road and a tri bike.

With our first test of a NeilPryde going back to 2013 (*RBA*, September

2011), we got a taste of NeilPryde's version of a lightweight bike and found an impressive level of design and craftsmanship. This time around we're looking at the Zephyr, which they say is for anyone looking for a compliant ride.

THE FRAME

Without a doubt, the Zephyr is one of the swoopiest frames we've seen of late, and that can be attributed to the fact that, like the three other bikes in the NeilPryde catalog, the Zephyr, too, relied on the talents of BMW Designworks to lay down its blueprint. The Zephyr uses a mix of high- and medium-modulus unidirectional Toray carbon for a claimed 1050-gram frame. As with most modern bikes, the NeilPryde uses a tapered head tube, a Di2 battery mount

(on the underside of the downtube) and an internal cable routing that's friendly to either mechanical cables or electrical wires.

NeilPryde relies on what they call an Optimized Tube Profile specific to the Zephyr as the means of providing the desired vertical compliance. With the Zephyr taking its place in the ever-expanding category of endurance road bikes, you'll find all the industry-wide design cues that make up the visual language that speaks of added compliance and comfort: tall head tube; curved fork; cantilevered front and rear dropouts; and, of course, the sultry, shapely and curved rear stays.

It would seem that much of the Zephyr's design philosophy owes its roots to Cannondale, whose own Synapse has pushed the boundaries of purposeful tube shapes for added compliance. Also, in addition to being credited for popularizing the modern-day use of cantilevered fork dropouts, historians will also recall Cannondale's use of severely cantilevered rear drops on their aluminum bikes in the early '90s.

THE PARTS

Unfortunately, other than the frame, our test bike had nothing to do with the production Zephyr. The parts spec we had would easily push our bike into the realm of \$5000 bikes. In stock form, the Zephyr is available with a mechanical Shimano Ultegra drivetrain, Shimano wheels and a mishmash of house-brand NeilPryde components.

Our test bike was a different creature altogether with its Reynolds Assault wheels, Shimano Dura-Ace drivetrain and brakes, Hutchinson Atom tires, Rotor 3D crank, 3T stem, Enve handlebars and a carbon-railed Fizik saddle.

THE RIDE

As it sat, our NeilPryde test bike was a blast to ride, but that could easily have something to do with a very non-production parts spec that it was built with. So, unfortunately, while we're left to speculate about the performance of a stock bike, we can speak to the handling and ride qualities that result from the geometry and frame design.

After riding the Zephyr, there were two other bikes that came to mind—the Cannondale Synapse and the BH Ultralight RC. The Synapse currently sits at the top of the compliant heap—and the NeilPryde is not close. The BH was one of the best-performing mid-priced bikes we've tested recently—and the NeilPryde was very close to that. Again, since it wasn't built with stock parts, we can't say that in any definitive

BIKETEST

sense, but still, we think we're close. Rare was the moment during a test ride when we paused to make a mental note of how compliant the frame felt, and that was for two reasons: 1) We didn't think it was all that compliant, and 2) we didn't care because we were too busy having fun hammering it like the race bike it rode like.

If there is one thing that a variety of carbon bikes has taught us in the last few years, it's that beyond a stylish, extraneous tube shaping does not necessarily define reason. As with anything that shares the BMW name, swoopy design goes hand in hand. But while swoop here does not automatically relate to compliance, it is nowhere near being harsh.

Even though the taller head tube and longer wheelbase stand opposed to classic race geometry, we never felt held back when it came to riding aggressively. And, as racy as the ride was, the Zephyr was never as uncomfortably rigid as any of the real out-of-the-box racers we ride, so there was some added compliance in there somewhere.

THE VERDICT

First of all, let's remember that this is not a production bike, so while the sub-16-pound weight is impressive, there's no way (starting with a 1050-gram frame) that a stock bike will hit that number. More important, what's missing here is any notion of how a heavier production would also ride.

Still, after just a few rides, the Zephyr nonetheless came away as the latest name to be added to the burgeoning niche of compliant race bikes. If you're solely concentrating on a compliant ride, there are other bikes that better maximize comfort by damping road shock. If, however, like a growing percentage of cyclists you are looking for a bike that capably bridges the gap between comfort and performance, then the Zephyr should surely be on your list. ■

PUNCH LINES

- Beautiful design and construction
- Not as compliant as it is racy
- Graphics we actually like

STATS

Price: \$2595 (frame and fork), \$3695 (complete bike)

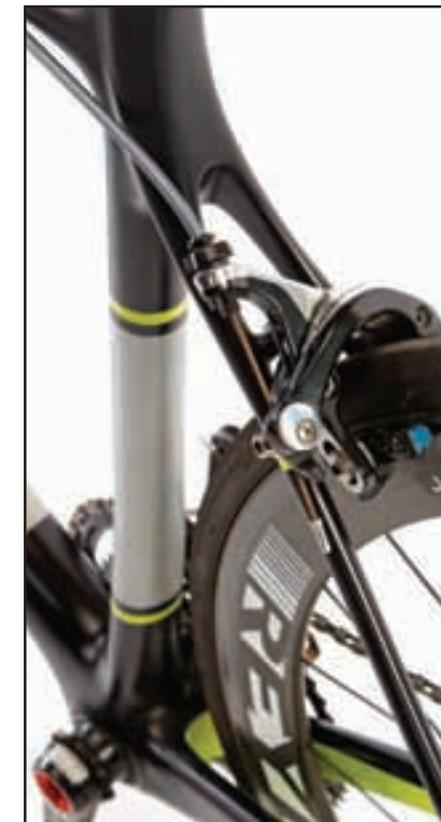
Weight: 15.8 pounds

Sizes: XS, S, M, L (tested), XL

www.neilprydebikes.com



As tired of black bikes as we've grown, we have to admit that the NeilPryde is a looker, and we wish they made it available as a complete bike.



If there's one frame feature any bike that talks comfort and compliance must have, it's the ability to run at least a 25c tire. Inside the Zephyr's curvaceous chainstays and fork you will find room for a 28c tire. Hooray!