

bike test

The fit's right, the colour spot on, the comfort exemplary — so what if it tips the scales?



Dave Yates 631 Custom

ARE you the wrong side of 21? Are friends and rivals giving you a hard time when the going gets tough and those extra digits start to feel like the dead hand of time clawing on the back pockets of your jersey? If you ride a steel framed bike the wrong side of 21lb, yes, we're talking weight not years, you could be history, if not today then pretty soon.

Anyone equipping themselves with a hard-working, honest to god machine with a regular steel frame and mid-market groupset could expect to be on par with the opposition until quite recently. Give or take a pound or two you could rest easy in the knowledge that your bike was not going to let you down on the first steep hill. To put together a racing bike which weighed under 20lb took time and money. Time to find trick bits or modified components and money to pay for specialist help from wheel- and frame-builders. And for every ounce shed, there was often a trade-off in strength and stiffness.

Today you can walk into a shop and emerge minutes later with a bike that weighs four pounds less than your old one with an off-shelf groupset and factory-built wheels. Not a prototype part in sight, just an aluminium frame and proof that Japan and Italy have cracked the art of trick. Go mano a mano with one of these bikes and you had better have good legs and a good head to block thoughts of the three bags of sugar strapped to your back.

At anything less than race pace Dave Yates Reynolds 631 custom is all you could want in a road bike. It's tailor made to fit, handles just so and is made and

Go custom, get exactly what you want or, in Luke Evans' case, a bit more than you bargained for

painted by hand, in the colour of my choice, which feels good. It exists for two reasons. The first is to be the mark two evolution of a previous custom frame built by Mr Yates which didn't quite complete a fairly major revision of my riding position, based on an original idea by the tech ed. The second was to see how an upgrade from eight to Nine-Speed Campagnolo gears worked out.

Tweaking the riding position on Dave Yates Mk I resulted in the fitting of a 140mm stem and the repositioning of the saddle as far as it would go on a seatpost with extra lay-back, so Mk II involved slackening the seat angle by one degree and reinstating a standard lay-back seatpost. This maintained weight distribution between the front and rear wheels without altering the fine handling balance of the old frame. Hello a great looking frame in the Continental style. Position accomplished.

All I had to do now was get used to the 72-degree seat angle which promised all-day comfort with a less top-down pedalling position. Professional riders have the strength to sit further behind the bracket and motor along for hours in big gears. Everything about the bike looked right, big but not ungainly and beautifully proportioned front and rear. Not a bad colour either. All I had to do was ride the thing but in the back of my mind loomed the long reach to the bars, the Ferrari-esque riding position, the

172.5mm cranks — come on big boy, they mocked, try shifting this lot if you're man enough.

I needn't have worried. It's a pussy cat. We purr along in steel-damped heaven, the balance fore and aft is perfect, tracking as secure as a ocean liner thanks to a stable front end. Hills are best as you just sit there in a lowish gear and concentrate on pedalling. A fidgety bike demands constant micro adjustments as you progress and that's fine, it's lively and you feel frisky. On the Dave you feel like Big Mig on the Galibier; all power and composure and not too much out of saddle action. It's a little too heavy (see above) to respond to little surges. On the descents you don't have to push your weight back to alter the balance as it's already spot on. Just hit the drops, turn in, hit the apex and power out.

If there is one big lesson to be learned from Mk II it's that it's worth having a good think about your riding position and what a custom frame can offer in helping you achieve a new riding style. Get some advice if necessary, you won't regret it and of course a frame-builder like Dave Yates can build an aluminium or steel frame which gets pretty close to the latest one kilo frames now ridden by most top pros. Dave's Mk II may be outclassed as a racer but as a summer training, holiday or L'Étape machine it could be a friend for years. **LE**



Athena mech copes with nine — just



Big hoods are comfy

information

MODEL: 631 Custom

MANUFACTURER: M. Steel Cycles

DISTRIBUTOR: M. Steel Cycles

0191 234 4275

PRICE: £900

WEIGHT: 21.1lb

FRAME: Reynolds 631

FORK: Reynolds 631

SIZE RANGE: To order

GROUPSET: Campagnolo Athena

DEVIATIONS: Nine-Speed upgrade, Record front mech

WHEELS: DRC ST17 rims on Campagnolo Record hubs with 32 stainless steel spokes per wheel

TYRES: Hutchinson Krono Competition 700x23c

BAR: ITM Eclipse

STEM: ITM Eclipse

SADDLE: Selle San Marco HDP Squadra

SEATPOST: ITM Big One

SIZE TESTED: 58cm (centre to top)

GEAR RATIOS: 53/39 with 12-23

EXTRAS: Chris King headset

BB HEIGHT: 270mm

for: Position, handling, stability

against: Outgunned by newer, lighter models

