

Pro-Lite Bracciano-S £339.99 a pair



TECH INFO

WEIGHT: F: 645g R: 895g
RIMS: Campagnolo Bracciano
TUBUS HUBS: F: 0.2mm R: 0.2mm
TUBUS AXLES: F: 0.2mm R: 0.2mm

ROADNESS AFTER

F: 0.7mm R: 0.7mm
TENSOR HUBS: F: 810 R: 810
TENSOR AXLES: F: 810 R: 810

NEW ADJUSTMENT POINTS

F: Perfect R: Perfect
HUBS: ROADNESS AFTER
F: Perfect R: Perfect

AXLES: ROADNESS 3.5mm

THESE HANDBUILT WHEELS are based around 27mm deep V-section 6066 aluminium rims, radially laced to 20 evenly tensioned Pro-Lite double butted stainless steel aero spokes at the front, and 24 rear spokes laced in a 2-cross pattern. All the nipples are heat treated aluminium. The hubs have top quality adjustable angular contact cartridge bearings and a needle roller bearing unit on the inside section of the freehub (to make the overlap between freehub and hub body stiffer).

The Pro-Lites don't sprint as well as the Fulcrums and Campagnos but they have a turn of speed that's hard to find elsewhere at this price. They also give a comfortable ride. The rear went slightly more out of true during testing but was easily fixed. Roundness was slightly out from the start but got no worse. There's a 30 per cent discount on the cost of replacing a crashed wheel. www.chainsreactioncycles.com

Light, fast and a great value set of raceday wheels

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Roval Échappée £299.99 a pair

ROVAL BRIEFLY APPEARED in the 1980s with the first mass produced low spoke-count wheels for racing bikes, and the name has re-emerged as part of Specialized's empire. The chunky anodised alloy hubs are slotted to accept straight-pull spokes and you can access the bearings for servicing using two Allen keys.

The DF New Aero butted spokes – 20 front radial, 24 rear crossed on the drive-side – were evenly tensioned and the wheels true out of the box and throughout the test. These are the most affordable wheels on test, and Specialized says they are suitable for heavier riders and training, but we still don't reckon they're as good as some in our sub-£300 wheels test (issue 219). Some commonly used tyres were also extremely hard to fit. On the plus side, you get a good double wheel bag, a lifetime warranty, and a crash replacement policy (£100 front/£150 rear). www.specialized.com

Attractive and strong wheelset, but no lightweight

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TECH INFO

WEIGHT: F: 770g R: 950g
RIMS: Shimano
TUBUS HUBS: F: Perfect R: Perfect
TUBUS AXLES: F: Perfect R: 0.2mm

ROADNESS AFTER

F: 0.2mm R: 0.1mm
TENSOR HUBS: F: 810 R: 810
TENSOR AXLES: F: 810 R: 810

NEW ADJUSTMENT POINTS

F: Perfect R: Good
HUBS: ROADNESS AFTER
F: Perfect R: Good

AXLES: ROADNESS 3.5mm

Fulcrum Racing Zero £799.99 a pair



TECH INFO

WEIGHT: F: 645g R: 870g
RIMS: Campagnolo Bracciano
TUBUS HUBS: F: 0.2mm R: 0.2mm
TUBUS AXLES: F: 0.2mm R: 0.2mm

ROADNESS AFTER

F: Perfect R: 0.2mm
TENSOR HUBS: F: 810 R: 810
TENSOR AXLES: F: 810 R: 810

NEW ADJUSTMENT POINTS

F: Perfect R: Perfect
HUBS: ROADNESS AFTER
F: Perfect R: Perfect

AXLES: ROADNESS 3.5mm

FULCRUM IS A company created by Campagnolo to satiate the thirst for wheels compatible with Shimano gear systems, but it also makes these with a Campagnolo freehub. Not to be confused with the 2-Way version that uses black rims and is 70g lighter, these clincher-only versions are recognisable by their red anodised spokes, hubs and rims. The oversized aluminium spokes add stiffness and reduce the likelihood of spoke breakage; the back of the rim is – like the Campagnolo Euris – smooth so there's no need for rim tape. Such is their stiffness that only the deep section wheels on test can match them for an all-out feeding of acceleration in the lamppost sprints, and on the climbs the Racing Zeros walk away from all but one of their rivals – the Easton EA90.

These are one of the best on test but their complexity means specialist knowledge is required to replace spokes or rims when the need arises. Wheel bags included. www.fulcrumwheels.com

Outstanding performance, though red won't suit everyone's bike...

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THE VERDICT

WINNER



First off, there were a lot of very decent wheels on test here, and as always judging it was a close run thing. At not much more than £300, both the Pro-Lite Braccianos and Pete Matthews' Pianni wheels proved strong performers out on the road – and the latter can also be built to your own personal specifications.

The same is true of Paul Hewitt, who once again built a pair of top quality race wheels that should last for years. This shows that even in the age of branded, big name, machine-built wheels, the bespoke

wheelbuilder is far from an endangered species in the British cycling world.

When it does come to the big hitters, it's no surprise that Easton, Fulcrum, Campagnolo and Mavic all delivered excellent quality hoops. The handbuilt Eastons were the lightest wheels on test and at £600 represent great value, but the Braccianos just edge it as our best buy. Mavic's Cosmic Carbones also proved a great wheel, though at a price. But you can rest assured that any of the wheels that scored 9/10 won't let you down.