



# A Bike Fit For a King

**Andy Blow** gets the royal treatment from Cyclefit, before testing their new Guru Chrono TT bike on the course of The Blenheim Tri. But will the Chrono live up to its regal billing?



**Andy Blow**

is a respected coach and sports scientist who won the Xterra Age Group World Champs in 2000

**T**he way you're growing, you'll soon be able to reach both pedals at the same time." That was the verdict of the first bike-fitting consultation I ever had. It was conducted in the driveway by my Dad, when we popped round to pick up my cousin's old racer that was to become my first road bike. £20 it cost, frame make unknown as Damien had sprayed it a rustic gold and black in his garage. It had either five gears or 10 depending on how well you kept the front derailleur lubed. After my cast-iron Raleigh Marauder mountain bike, it seemed super-fast to me.

Suffice to say that when I arrive at Cyclefit's Covent Garden HQ, their assessment of my riding position is somewhat more in-depth than my Dad's fitting session back in '92. Between them, Julian, Phil and Warwick have placed their slightly threatening wooden seat-height measurer tight into the crotch of hundreds, if not thousands, of cyclists in

the last few years. These are the guys to go and see if you want your bike to fit like a glove, no question.

We start with Warwick molding some custom footbeds for my shoes. This involves standing on a rubber plate that creates an impression of my foot, and then heating a multi-layered inner sole up to get it to mold to the imprint. Apparently these inner soles will help my foot to apply more power to the crank and more evenly distribute the pressure of pedalling about the forefoot. In the first instance, all I detect is that they're quite comfortable and supportive to my high arches, if a little odd-feeling at first.

Fancy footwork completed, we move into the fitting room where I am measured, prodded, videoed and analysed while standing, lying on a couch and finally pedalling an adjustable bike. Julian has a practised eye for dialling in the approximate measurements and, with a few minor tweaks here and there, we settle on a comfortable position for a standard road bike. Then a mixture of logic, mathematics and trial and error adapt it for a TT set-up. We also spend a considerable amount of time looking at my right knee (or 'the bugger' as it is known, having kept me out of serious training and →



"A bike this grand needs an equally grand setting," says Blow, seen here sweeping over Capability Brown's sculpted lake

competition for nearly two years), and experiment with cleat wedges to correct some imbalances in the pedal stroke that may be contributing to my injury woes. I am sure the ins and out of this would be boring to anyone except the most dedicated cycling anorak, but on a personal level I'm deeply impressed with the guys' attention to detail in getting my position correct. They take real pride in their work.

### Dripping with bling

Once Julian clicks 'Save' on my measurements in Excel, I get my first look at the bike I'm going to be riding. It's a Guru

Chrono TT frame and fork, dripping with some of the finest bits of mechanical jewellery that large quantities of money can buy. And I have to admit to being childishly excited at the idea of getting it on the road. Normally the Guru Chrono would be a full custom build (the frameset is built to your dimensions), but thankfully their stock frame is close enough that with some handy spanner work we can get within a few millimetres of my measured ideal position. Being 'average' does have its benefits!

The Guru Chrono frame comes all the way from Canada, where it's designed and hand-made – being, to Cyclefit's knowledge,

the only truly custom carbon TT frame in the world. It uses top-notch high modulus carbon (minimum resin and maximum matting) to make it stiffer, lighter and more compliant than many full carbon frames. The unique tube shaping aims to maximise stiffness around the bottom bracket with aerodynamic features intact – the aesthetic effect is stunning.

At £3,699 for frame and forks alone (and a mind-boggling £7,784 for our build – this is top-end stuff), you expect something not only functionally brilliant but also beautiful, and the Guru has the wow factor in terms of looks. To evaluate the ride, I decide a bike this grand needs an equally grand setting...

### Royal appointment

A few hours later, I leave a voicemail message for 220 lensman Jonny: "Jonny, can you do Wednesday at 7:30am for the Guru photo shoot? It's at Blenheim Palace and we need to be there early to catch the groundsman who can show us around. We really can't be late. He's a busy man."

7:50am Wednesday comes and I arrive to find the groundsman (Paul) and Jonny sat patiently waiting for me at the Woodstock gates of Blenheim. No-one says anything about my continental approach to time keeping but, once we start driving the course, I still mumble an apology, which seems fairly well received. Well, no-one shouts at me.

The Mazda Blenheim Triathlon has been going strong for five years and has become one of the biggest mass participation events



While not an undulating course, the 6.45km bike loop still provides some technical passages

## The Blenheim Triathlon: the course

Taking place entirely within the grounds of the historic Blenheim Palace – birthplace of Winston Churchill – and including a swim in the famous lake, the Blenheim Triathlon is now in its fifth year. Here we chart the bike course profile...



1 The initial dragging climb, about 1.6km (1 mile) into the course



2 The course's main climb, halfway round the lap



4 The return approach to the Palace to start the next lap



3 Nearly there! Crossing over the old bridge

### The bike course spec for The Mazda Blenheim Triathlon

Location Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, Oxon Date 6-7 June 2009 Lap length 6.45km Course length two laps for the super-sprint race; three for the sprint

in the UK multisport calendar. With an anticipated 5,500 entrants in the sprint and super sprint events, this is where a lot of triathlon virgins 'do it' for the first time, as well as offering a spectator-friendly elite race where youngsters get the chance to race top pros over the sprint course.

The bike course takes place on closed-road laps around the grounds: two laps totalling 12.9km for the super sprinters and 19.3km for the full sprint event. The transition area is probably the most impressive I've ever seen, set in the palatial courtyard overlooking Capability Brown's wonderfully sculpted

than I would normally have set myself but, on Julian's advice, I give it a try: he felt that power output could be much higher if I was less contorted and it certainly makes for a comfortable set-up. The Zipp tri bars and Vuka base bar are very solid and secure feeling; if I was hanging onto the bike I'd probably take a hacksaw to shorten the S-bend extensions a little, but I can live with them being a little long for now.

Next I swoop left as the road narrows and drops away fairly sharply. I pick up some speed before a cattle grid (not covered as it will be on race day) stampedes towards me.

**"A cattle grid stampedes towards me. SwissStop brake pads bite reassuringly into the Mavic wheel and I gently roll over the girders without incident"**

lake, with a lovely downhill slope to roll out onto the start of the lap. I fire into the first corner of the course, just as Jonny leaps clear of an articulated lorry delivering catering supplies to the palace kitchen. I'm sure Brake Bros will be firmly instructed to stay away on the 6th and 7th of June...

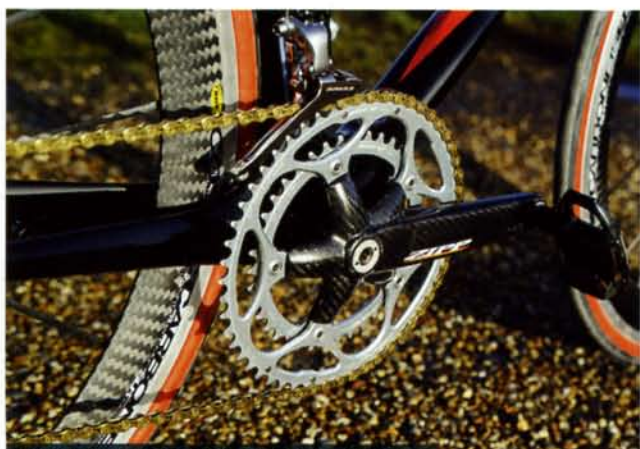
Having crossed the lake, I bear left and start up the first incline of a surprisingly lumpy little race route. The Guru is very, very light and, standing on the pedals, I get the message that it loves to attack hills. I stay in the big chain ring (albeit up at the top end of the block) and reduce the hill to an annoying drag so I can drop onto the tri bars. My position on the bars is marginally higher

SwissStop brake pads bite reassuringly into the aluminium braking surface of the Mavic Cosmic SLR wheelset and I gently roll over the steel girders without incident. Over the years I've had a few sets of Cosmic carbonones and the latest SLR version does look the part. They're not super-light – around 1,500g/pair, compared with just over 1,000g for Carbonsports Lightweights – but will always be a very versatile and robust option.

Beyond the grid, the most significant climb of the lap begins so I make an effort to look like I'm trying: Jonny's stalking me with his camera lens; I feel obliged! Once again I feel the responsiveness and stiffness of the Guru under load. There's virtually no flex in the →



Andy's booties hide a myriad of footwear technologies, the customised footbed being one



The gold-plated KMC chain looked great and merged well with the Dura Ace chainrings and cassette



Our test bike came fitted with a Vuka base bar and (rather long) Zipp 5-bend extensions

## TOP-END SPEC

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Frame and fork</b> | Guru Chrono full custom   |
| <b>Groupset</b>       | Shimano Dura Ace mechs, cassette, bar-end shifters; Shimano aero brake levers; Zero Gravity Ti calipers with SwissStop Race 2000 pads; Zipp 300 carbon crankset; KMC 10-speed gold-plated chain |
| <b>Wheels</b>         | Mavic Cosmic Carbone SLR clinchers (weight: 1,595g per pair); Michelin Pro3 race tyres  |
| <b>Cockpit</b>        | Zipp carbon tri bar with 5-bend extension; FSA alloy stem; Zipp Vuka aero base bar  |
| <b>Seating</b>        | Guru carbon aero seat post; Selle Italia SLR saddle   |
| <b>Weight</b>         | 7.16kg (supplied bike, without pedals); 1.28kg average frame/fork weight  |
| <b>Sizes</b>          | Full custom build   |
| <b>Price</b>          | £7,784.40 (as supplied); £3,699 (frame and fork only)   |
| <b>Contact</b>        | Cyclefit<br>020 7430 0083<br>www.cyclefit.co.uk   |



The test bike's Zero Gravity Ti calipers proved themselves adept at smooth, controlled braking



We tested the Guru riding Mavic Cosmic Carbone SLR clinchers fitted with Michelin Pro3 race tyres

bottom bracket area or in the narrow profile Zipp carbon cranks, so very little power is given away. Having used them a few times now, I'm also starting to really feel the benefit of the custom footbeds in my shoes. I start to wish I'd had access to this sort of kit when I was serious about Ironman racing.

"Tough climb?" shouts Jonny. My 'hard work' act has obviously fooled him.

"Not too bad!" I gasp back (dutifully keeping up the pretence). We regroup at the top and he asks me what I think so far. Well, we're only two or three miles in, but I can only be positive about the bike at this stage.

The next section drops away steadily, so I engage the big ring once more. The gears shift flawlessly with a very smooth action. Whether this is to do with the gold-plated KMC chain, I don't know, but it does look good and meshes with the Dura Ace cassette brilliantly. Very soon I'm doing a good 30mph on the tri bars and loving the stability offered by the higher riding position. Only some

rigorous testing with a power meter fitted would tell me if the gains Julian thought possible are greater than any aerodynamic losses. But in terms of confidence it's great. At the end of this fast section I drop down onto a very old and fairly narrow bridge before starting up the final rise on the lap.

Coming along the approach to the start of what would be lap two, I'm on the tri bars and feeling very 'at home' on the Guru. I'm getting used to my new riding position, foot beds and cleat wedges, and though the knee isn't going to improve instantly, I'm hopeful that some more miles in this set-up might nudge it further along the road to recovery.

## The verdict

As Jonny takes some static snaps of the bike in the car park, we chat about the morning. We agree that the Guru is undeniably a tasty machine and the attention to detail in getting it fitted correctly is worthwhile when you're looking to invest this kind of cash. The guys

at Cyclefit tell me they've picked Guru because they want to offer products that live up to their own high standards, and on initial impressions this bike fits the bill.

I'm always torn when being asked to comment on bikes at this kind of price – part of me thinks, 'How can any bike be worth that much?' But given the amount of time and effort many of us put into training and racing, it really comes down to what you can afford to pay and if you feel you can justify it.

What I do know is that, just like buying a tailor-made suit, being properly fitted for your bike increases the positive feeling of ownership and reminded me of the kind of connection I felt with my £20 black and gold racer all those years ago. It should also reduce the chances of injury and increase comfort on the bike – a massive consideration for triathletes needing to run after the ride.

Incidentally, Damien's old bike got moved on after a couple of years, again for £20. And by that time, I could reach both the pedals! **220**