



ENTRY-LEVEL ROAD BIKE

Merlin S2200

How low can you go and still get a reasonable quality road bike? Cycling journalist **Mike Davis** tests one from Merlin for just £330

▶ **ENTRY-LEVEL** bikes from mainstream brands like Trek, Specialized, Giant or Scott start at £500-£600. For real budget bikes, you need to turn to direct sales. Lancashire-based shop Merlin Cycles lists its S2200 with an RRP of £429.95, although at the time of writing it's £329.95 and that looks set to be the case for the foreseeable future.

Despite its bargain-basement price, Merlin has managed to get a couple of rungs up the component ladder. The S2200 features an 8-speed Shimano transmission with Sora derailleurs and 2200-series combined shift/brake levers. Even Shimano's cheap parts perform well, with clean, accurate shifting, although the short, thumb-operated brake-hood lever on the 2200 shifters isn't as ergonomic as the sweeping-lever-only setups on its higher-end components.

The spec lists an Truvativ Isoflow chainset, but the test bike arrived with unbranded arms and Lanhang 50-34 chainrings. One budget square-taper chainset is much like another, however, and the S2200's front shifting was smooth enough.

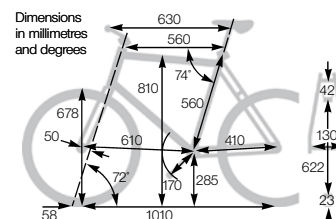
The parts are hung on a 6061

aluminium frame. Not surprisingly, there's nothing very out of the ordinary going on with the tubing, although the top and down tubes have a teardrop section and there's a semi-integrated headset. There are mudguard eyes, although there's only just room under the short-reach brakes for mudguards if you stick with narrower tyres, such as 23mm ones.

Weight expectations

The fork apes the appearance of a carbon aero unit but, as you'd expect for the money, it's actually chrome-moly steel. There's nothing inherently wrong with a steel fork. There is a lot of steel in this one. The big legs are stiff and somewhat unyielding on broken surfaces. A more traditional tapered-blade fork would deliver a more comfortable ride, as well as being lighter.

At 10.9kg (24lb), the S2200 is heavy by race bike standards. You only notice this when accelerating or climbing. Once it's rolling, the weight makes very little difference. Clearly you have to make compromises to get an STI-equipped road bike for this kind of price, but Merlin has done a



MERLIN S2200

Price: £329.95

Weight: 10.9kg/24lb (no pedals)

Sizes: 50cm, 53cm, 56cm (tested)

Frame and fork: 6061 aluminium frame, two bottle mounts, mudguard eyes; chrome-moly fork, mudguard eyes

Wheels: Joytech hubs, unbranded deep-section rims, unbranded 700×23 tyres

Transmission: Lanhang 50-34 chainset, square taper BB, 12-25 8-speed cassette, Shimano Sora mechs, 2200 shifters. 16 speed, 36-110in

Braking: Radius dual-pivot callipers

Steering and seating: Merlin Aluminium bar, stem and seatpost, Velo saddle

Equipment n/a

Contact: merlincycles.com



1 The frame and fork have mudguard eyes, but there's not much room under the brakes

2 A compact double gives some climbing gears. A bigger cassette would help

good job to get an entirely functional, usable bike together. It would be good to see a more subtle fork and longer-reach brakes, neither of which would impact the price much. But if you're on a restricted budget and don't want to take a risk on a used bike, the S2200 will do the job perfectly adequately.

Also consider



1) Revolution Sabre '13 £364.99

Only 7-speed Shimano A070 STI, but gears go lower (12-28 cassette) and the brakes are 57mm reach. edinburghbicycle.co.uk



2) B'Twin Triban 3 £299.99

The entry-level bike from sports giant Decathlon features a carbon fork, triple-chainset Shimano 2300 gearing, and a choice of seven sizes. decathlon.co.uk