

FOUR-SEASON CARBON ROAD BIKES

BIKE TEST



HEWITT CARBON AUDAX

£1300 & £2150 CARBON ROAD BIKES

Carbon originals

Carbon fibre and practicality can go hand in hand. Journalist **Mike Davis** tests two road bikes from Lancashire that are designed for mudguards

▶▶ **IF YOU** want a nice road bike, you won't want mudguards. That seems to be the consensus of opinion among bike manufacturers. But what if you do? Britain can be soggy in any season, and there's no reason a practical road bike has to be an inexpensive 'winter trainer'. Perhaps you want one nice bike you can use all year round. Perhaps you've only got space for one bike.

Some manufacturers are starting to produce bikes that combine the low weight and lively performance of the 'best' bike with the practicality and versatility of the winter trainer. Unsurprisingly, given our climate, it's smaller British companies that are in the vanguard. The two bikes here

You can have a free bike fit when you buy the Hewitt Carbon Audax. See page 38 for details

– Ribble's Sportive 365 and Hewitt's Carbon Audax – are among the few that offer carbon fibre frames with deeper-drop brakes that give room for 28mm tyres and mudguards.

Ribble's website allows you to customise its Sportive 365 to your exact requirements. Then you click 'order' and Ribble will deliver it to your door. You can buy a basic Sportive 365 for less than £900, although our test bike came in at £1300.

Paul Hewitt offers a different kind of interactivity. Visit his shop for a bike and you'll get a full bike fit (see page 38). Time and geography prevented me from doing that, so Paul requested a slew of measurements from my own bike and replicated them on the

Carbon Audax. I felt immediately at home on it.

Frame and fork

The usual benefits touted for carbon fibre are strength and low density, allowing high-volume frame tubes to be made for stiffness without an undue weight penalty. For the year-round bike, carbon has some other important attributes. First, it doesn't fatigue as metal can; a well-made carbon frame should last indefinitely in normal use, so it's a great option for high mileages. Also, it doesn't corrode, so salted winter roads aren't a problem.

Carbon frames are made in moulds, which gives designers lots of scope to make the tubes interesting shapes.



RIBBLE SPORTIVE 365

This is particularly valuable on bikes like these; by manipulating the tubes, it's possible to have plenty of tyre clearance without hugely long chain-stays or cutting into heel clearance.

The Ribble is the more curvaceous bike here, with an arcing top tube and tall, wavy chain-stays. The Hewitt is a little more subtle, although with significantly more volume to the down tube and around the bottom bracket, combined with slender seat-stays.

Both bikes employ conventional threaded bottom bracket shells rather than utilising any of the myriad new bottom bracket standards that have come along. Only the Hewitt features a tapered steerer tube, a set-up that's close to ubiquitous on new bikes. Usefully, the Hewitt frame includes rack mounts as well as mudguard mounts, an extremely unusual feature on a carbon frame. It also has internally-routed cables.

Components

Both bikes stick largely to single groupsets, rather than a mix-and-match approach. The Ribble comes with Shimano 105 transmission, the Hewitt

Campagnolo Athena. They're both slick and reliable. Some riders will prefer the twin-lever layout of Shimano's STI units; others will favour Campag's Ergopower lever/thumb trigger set-up.

The drivetrains are quite different. The Ribble is equipped with a compact 50-34 chainset and 11-25 cassette. The Hewitt has a triple chainset with a 30T inner for really steep stuff, combined with a 12-27 11-speed cassette. The Ribble has a bit more range at the top end, while the Hewitt goes lower. Its Campag 3×11 set-up also offers smaller jumps between gears, particularly dropping down from the big ring. Note that you could specify something different on either bike.

Both bikes diverge from groupset uniformity when it comes to the brakes. In large part, this is because of the smaller choice of callipers with a 57mm drop. Ribble stay with Shimano, while Hewitt spec a pair of Tektro brakes whose shiny, polished finish looked entirely at home next to the Campag whirly bits. Both provide competent control, although the Ribble's Shimanos could use better pads.

As well as bike fitting and custom

frames, Paul Hewitt has a fine reputation as a wheelbuilder, so it's no surprise to see a pair of traditional handbuilt wheels on the Carbon Audax. Miche Primato hubs and Ambrosio Excellence rims continue the Italian theme from the Campag transmission, and it's refreshing to see a well-built pair of conventional 32-spoke wheels on a bike. They're light, durable and easily repairable. That isn't to say that the Fulcrum 5 wheel-set on the Ribble don't perform well – it's just that if anything does go wrong you'll

There's a big menu of component choices when ordering the Ribble Sportive 365 online. You can get one for less than £900

Also available



Dolan Dual £1112.99

On the face of it, the Dolan is similar to the Ribble and Hewitt, but standard-drop callipers limit tyre options to 23mm at most with mudguards. dolan-bikes.com



Lynskey Sportive Disc £1,299.99 (frame only)

Not carbon fibre, but titanium mean corrode either, disc brakes mean huge tyre clearance, and there are rack mounts too. hotlines-uk.com



have to do a bit more legwork to track down spare parts.

Both bikes have 25mm Continental Gatorskin tyres, a sensible choice for all-season use. Continental's GP4000s roll a little quicker, but the Gatorskins offer better puncture resistance, and no one wants to be fixing flats by the roadside in winter. The Ribble has SKS chromoplastic mudguards, the Hewitt wider Axiom Rainrunners with a reflective stripe.

Ride

Both bikes weigh less than 9kg, including mudguards, and so feel sportier than a traditional winter trainer. The Hewitt feels a bit sprightlier under power. It's hard to say where that comes from; it's difficult to discern any difference in frame flex when pedalling, and overall weight is only a little lower. There is less weight in the wheels.

Despite using the same tyres at the same pressure, with similar amounts of seatpost extension and posts of equal diameter, the Hewitt also feels more forgiving on broken road surfaces. It's surely down to differences in frame construction. The Hewitt does have fractionally longer chain-stays and a slightly more relaxed geometry too,

making it spot on for longer distances.

The Ribble is far from uncomfortable, however. And its more agile handling is neither better or worse than the Hewitt's stability. It's down to personal preferences again.

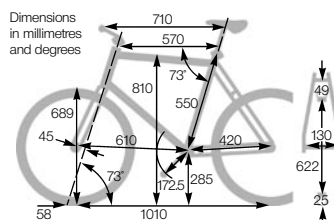
Summary

The concept of a lightweight carbon bike with room for slightly higher-volume tyres and proper mudguards is such a good one that it is, on the face of it, surprising that there aren't more to choose from. While conceptually similar, the Ribble and Hewitt have some key differences, not least the purchasing process.

The Ribble offers great value, lots of spec options, and a livelier ride. The Hewitt majors on personal service, attention to detail and smooth, mile-eating performance. They're so different in price that a straight comparison isn't really relevant. Each, in its own way, represents a great choice for a fast, versatile, year-round bike. If you can only have one bike, either of these would fit the bill beautifully. And if you buy one as a second (or third) bike, don't be surprised if it becomes your first choice for almost everything you'd do on a road bike.

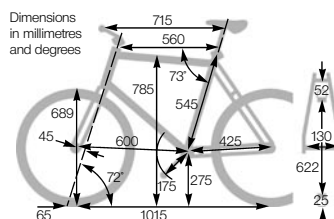
- 1 Carbon frames are easily curved for clearance or aesthetics
- 2 The Hewitt has eyelets for a rear rack as well as mudguards
- 3 Both frames fit 57mm brakes, but the Hewitt has 3mm more clearance

Tech specs



RIBBLE SPORTIVE 365

- Price:** £1,299.45 as tested
- Sizes:** 44, 49, 52, 55 (tested), 58
- Weight:** 8.96kg
- Frame and fork:** Carbon fibre.
- Fittings for mudguards and two bottles.**
- Wheels:** 25-622 Continental Gatorskin tyres, Fulcrum Racing 5 wheels
- Transmission:** Shimano 105 172.5mm 50-34 chainset, Hollowtech II BB, 11-25T Shimano
- 10-speed cassette, Shimano 105 STI levers and mechs. 20 speed, 36-120 in**
- Brakes:** Shimano R451
- Steering & seating:** 45cm Deda RHM02 bar, 105mm Deda Zero 2 stem, Selle Italia SLS saddle, CSN 31.6mm carbon seatpost
- Equipment:** SKS mudguards
- Contact:** ribblecycles.co.uk



HEWITT CARBON AUDAX

- Price:** £2150
- Sizes:** XS, S, M, L (tested), XL
- Weight:** 8.85kg
- Frame and fork:** Carbon fibre.
- Fittings for mudguards and two bottles.**
- Wheels:** 25-622 Continental Gatorskin tyres, Ambrosio Excellence rims, Miche Primato hubs, 32x3 butted spokes
- Transmission:** Campagnolo Athena 175mm 52-39-30 chainset, 12-27T Campagnolo
- 11-speed cassette, Campagnolo Athena Ergopower levers and mechs. 33 speed, 29-115 in**
- Brakes:** Tektro R539 callipers
- Steering and seating:** 44cm Deda RHM01 bar, 13cm Deda stem, f'zi:k Arione saddle, Deda RSX02 31.6mm seatpost
- Equipment:** Axiom Rainrunner Deluxe Reflex mudguards, Hewitt Arundel bottle cages
- Contact:** hewittcycles.co.uk