

Prorides

The bikes of the peloton

Pryde & glory

Marcel Wüst tests the Diablo, the first road bike from windsurfer manufacturer NeilPryde

WRITER: Marcel Wüst || PHOTOGRAPHER: Kai Dudenhofer (unless otherwise stated)

My first encounter with the NeilPryde brand was back in the 90s in an Australian surf shop. I remember thinking it was cool looking kit and wondered about the name. Many years later, at the 2010 Eurobike show in Friedrichshafen, Germany, I met Michael Pryde who introduced himself as Neil's son. That explained the brand name.

He gave me some information on the brand new bike, the Diablo, which was already in the boot of my car, ready to be tested the next day. He explained

that all his father's knowledge of carbon engineering, which had revolutionised windsurfing many years ago, went into the development of the Diablo and that they believed they had made something that could really make an impact against the established cycling brands.

But why branch out from making windsurfers to bicycles in the first place? The answer is a pleasing one, as it is much more about their own passion for cycling than a cold business decision. As well as being cycling fanatics themselves, they also knew ▶





◀ Cables are neatly integrated and don't rattle. The headtube shape is smoothed for aerodynamics



▲ The integrated seat clamp has a neat cover for clean looks and aerodynamics

The power transfer feels perfect when climbing and even pulling hard on the brake hoods doesn't trouble the FSA stem and bar combination. A stiff cockpit is something I really love on a race bike. Especially when sprinting or with grades steeper than 10 per cent, it becomes more and more important in order to get the maximum pedal power onto the road.

I started taking aggressive lines in the corners and really stamping on the pedals coming out. In the switchbacks I could experience the Diablo's incredible acceleration. It really does fire out of the turns.

The Shimano Dura-Ace groupset worked as smoothly and perfectly as always, even when the momentum I gained in the corner was neutralised by gravity and I had to get back on the 25 with lots of tension on the chain.

Further up the grade it got a bit smoother, and whenever I could, I stayed in the saddle. Because I didn't tighten the seat clamp to the max there was a little creaking noise. I'd felt a lot of resistance when I'd tightened it, caused by a screw which was too long. I'd rather put up with some irritating noise than suffer a broken seat clamp in the middle of the Austrian mountains.

A week later I talked to the German importer and he told me that as this had been an issue with the pre-production prototypes, a new seatpost clamp had been developed for the final production bikes. The one on my test Diablo came with two rubber gaskets. This is ◀



◀ Marcel found the bottom bracket to be very stiff but thought the Dura-Ace cranks look out-dated

▶ The incredible Lightweight Obermayer wheels always make a bike feel great and go fast



from their research that the majority of their windsurfing customers were equally keen cyclists.

As they already have so much knowledge of both carbon fibre and aerodynamics, acquired over many years of research and development, it turned out to be an easy decision to make.

Using different types of carbon fibre on specific parts of a bike's frame is an increasingly common idea in the bike industry today but I took Michael's comments on board and was really looking forward to spending a day away from the trade show on Michael and Neil's pride and joy.

The visual impact of the frame, especially with matching top-of-the-range Lightweight Obermayer wheels, is fantastic. That said, I like the all black version even more – it made a big

▲ The Diablo is a striking bike and Marcel found it rides as good as it looks

impression on me when I spotted it in an advertisement in the German version of *ProCycling* magazine just after the Tour.

The frame design reminds me a lot the latest Orbea Orca, especially the shape of the downtube. The rather modern style of the 'tubes' – the term barely applies to a monocoque – makes the Diablo a real head turner. Riding it fast or parked at the coffee shop, it looks great either way.

Race bikes with extremely light and stiff wheels usually ride very well, so it was no surprise to me that the pre-production frame I tested just over the

border in Austria made it all happen. The low weight in combination with the solid and rigid bottom bracket area convinced me within minutes that all my pedalling power was going straight to the road.

My ride began with a relaxed cruise through the Tannheim Valley – itself a welcome change after the hectic vibes of the Friedrichshafen Expo – and I enjoyed every single pedal stroke. With warm temperatures and a bright blue sky, I turned off to the right after half an hour into a beautiful side valley and found the first steep climb.

Knowing I had a 39x25 bottom gear, I was quite optimistic and went through the first two corners with two sprockets in hand. But less than a mile into the climb, I needed my lowest ratio and comfortable pedalling in the saddle was no longer an option.

IN THE SWITCHBACKS I COULD EXPERIENCE THE DIABLO'S INCREDIBLE ACCELERATION. IT REALLY FIRES OUT OF THE TURNS

Specifications

- ▶ **FRAME:** NeilPryde Diablo hi-mod monocoque
- ▶ **FORKS:** NeilPryde Diablo full carbon monocoque
- ▶ **GROUPSET:** Shimano Dura-Ace
- ▶ **CRANKSET:** Shimano Dura-Ace
- ▶ **CHAINRINGS:** 53/39
- ▶ **CASSETTE:** Shimano Dura-Ace, 12-25
- ▶ **WHEELS:** Lightweight Obermayer tubular
- ▶ **TYRES:** Continental Competition
- ▶ **STEM:** FSA SL-K
- ▶ **HEADSET:** FSA Orbit 11/8" - 11/2"
- ▶ **HANDLEBAR:** FSA SL-K Compact, carbon
- ▶ **SEATPOST:** FSA SL-K, carbon 27.2mm
- ▶ **SADDLE:** Selle Italia SLR XP
- ▶ **WEIGHT:** 6.75kg (Ksyrium SL), 6.24kg (as tested)
- ▶ **PRICE:** £3,680.10 (K SL), £TBC (as tested)
- \$5,400.00 (K SL), \$TBC (as tested)
- ▶ **CONTACT:** 020 7193 4518 (UK), 864 252 0001 (US)
- ▶ **WEB:** www.neilprydebikes.com



probably an homage to surfing, like the circle logo on the headtube, a feature of all NeilPryde sails and boards as well.

The rear brake cable, which I was about to stress on the descent as much as I'd hammered the cranks on the climb, runs neatly through the toptube. Even on rougher parts of the road it stays completely quiet which is very pleasing. To me, there are few things more annoying than a rattling cable when riding an expensive road bike.

At the end of the climb I was happy to get off the bike and take a well deserved breather. While my heart rate recovered I had a close look at this high end bike from the Far East.

The lower part of the seat-tube has an aero cut-out for the rear tyre which looks really good and matches the Alize sister road model that puts more focus on aerodynamics. The carbon shapes of the frame and the seatpost are a perfect match too and all together, the spec and

▲ A sunny ride in the Alps was just what Marcel needed and the Diablo was perfect for the job

design of the Diablo does not leave much room for improvement.

The only thing that might spoil the look is the bulky Dura-Ace alloy crankset on an otherwise full carbon bike. To me, it looks out of place but I think the limited edition carbon-wrapped crankset is sold out. It's time Shimano produced a full carbon fibre crankset as Campagnolo have done.

Safe in the knowledge that Dura-Ace brakes, when equipped with suitable carbon brake pads, are among the very best, I threw myself into the descent. The road on the way down was steep, twisty and narrow, and the Diablo's fork, frame and wheels did not disappoint me one bit. All I felt was great handling, precise cornering and the confidence to brake late and descend the way I like it most: fast and furious.

There were no cars around so I could really explore the excellent grip of the Continental tubulars by using loads of

The Inside Track

Talking to **Michael Pryde**
Bikes Div Manager, NeilPryde

When and why did you decide to produce carbon fibre road bikes?

MP: NeilPryde is the technology and market leader in windsurfing and we know that at least 60 per cent of our end consumers also cycle. Therefore it felt like a natural extension of our core skills to consider bicycles as an evolution of the NeilPryde brand.

What is the plan for the future? Is pro team sponsorship likely?

MP: Our approach to sponsorship is a little different. We want to sponsor people who love to do epic rides in exotic locations. Which is why we launched our 'NeilPryde Epic Project' aimed at grass roots enthusiasts. Cycling is a very emotional experience and our approach seemed like an appropriate strategy.

What's the best point of the Diablo?

MP: The handling of the bike is very responsive yet predictable at high speed. The Diablo was specifically designed and engineered for one purpose - to go fast! The C6.7 blend of High Modulus Fibre has been strategically placed in high stress locations such as the bottom bracket and headtube whilst working together with the variable tube profiles to yield a very stiff yet responsive bike.

Is there any specific surf industry knowledge used in the Diablo?

MP: Our Alize model was developed using our vast knowledge of aerodynamics and many years of composites development, and many of these features were also incorporated into the Diablo. We were one of the early pioneers in carbon fibre use in windsurfing and whilst the forces on a windsurf boom and mast are quite different from that of a bike, the physics behind the dynamic forces are comparable.

What do you consider more relevant in a race bike: stiffness or comfort?

MP: There is always a necessary balance between achieving the desired stiffness yet having a ride quality that ensures that you can hammer it all day long on various road conditions. Stiffness is only one of the many characteristics we built in - we also looked carefully into low and high speed handling and tube profiles to achieve power transfer.

lean angle in the switchbacks. When the road opened out towards the bottom I did a speed test - full sprint and then tuck in. I must have hit at least 80kph. Given that I was riding a pre-production bike, I was surprised about its smoothness and how accurately it tracks a line when ridden close to the limit.

No matter how much I leant it over or how rapidly the road switched back on itself, nothing got it into trouble. If someone gets dropped on a descent riding a NeilPryde, they should book themselves a riding skills course...

On small side roads I found that the frame gives lots of feedback from the



road without being too harsh. Don't think that this is a high comfort cruiser though: the Diablo rides like a true race bike. The Selle Italia SLR saddle suits the bike, offering good long ride comfort for its low weight of 180g.

A major part of the heavy price tag is the Lightweight Obermayer wheels (over £3,000 alone). When I took the bike home to Germany after the test ride I tried the Diablo with a pair of aluminium clinchers and it still won me over.

▲ Aggressive descending is Marcel's favourite pastime and the Diablo excels too

I'M IMPRESSED BY NEILPRYDE'S FIRST MODEL. FROM A STANDING START THEY HAVE DESIGNED AND BUILT A BIKE THAT IS ON THE PACE

It was no surprise to me that the frame did not set a new benchmark compared to all the other high end race bikes I test month after month but I was impressed by NeilPryde's first model. From a standing start they have designed and built a bike that is on the pace.

As they develop the range over the next few years I think this brand will become a true contender against the very biggest names in cycling. This isn't just a side project or a bit of fun for NeilPryde – they're completely committed to establishing themselves on land as they have done on the water. This bike is a great start. Usually it takes some time before new products conquer the market but the Diablo looks set to make a remarkable impact. 🇩

Ridden by...
Grand tour multi-stage winner
Marcel Wüst



Born: Cologne, Germany 6/8/1967
Residence: Frechen, Germany; Majorca, Spain
Pro Career: 1989 – 2001
First Team: RMO
Career Highlights: 14 grand tour stage wins (1 Tour, 1 Giro, 12 Vuelta)

During his career as a top sprinter, Marcel won stages in all three major tours. A bad crash in 2000 forced early retirement. He now works as a journalist and television pundit, as well as running cycling camps from his base in Majorca, *Casa Ciclista*. He stays enviably fit and pushes every test bike to its limits.

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