



THE SPEC
 Model Argonaut Road Bike
 Groupset Shimano Dura-Ace
 D12 Disc Deviations None
 Wheels Enve 3.4 on Chris King
 R45 Disc hubs Finishing kit Pro
 Vibe bars, Enve Road Stem,
 Enve Seatpost, Fabric ALM
 Ultimate saddle, Vittoria Corsa
 G+ 25mm tyres Weight 7.08kg
 Price \$15,300 (approx £12,200)
 Contact girocycles.com



Argonaut Road Bike

How can an independent framebuilder get it so right?

Words JAMES SPENDER



To my ears, metal bikes go *tink-ping*, endurance bikes *smooosh* and aero bikes *whoompf*. But my favourite sound of all is the *scud*. It occurs when certain bikes encounter uneven ground through fast corners, and I think it's a mixture of tyres fighting for grip as bike and rider slice the air with concurrent fizz. If you've never heard a *scud*, I can only liken it to sitting inside a car while its windows are sprayed with a pressure hose.

It's also not a sound I come across too often when riding. It takes a certain tackiness of tyre tread and a certain quality of road surface. But above all else it takes a certain type of bike. One with just the right amount of flex to track the road, yet stiff enough still to dance across miniature peaks of uneven macadam. It takes a bike with absolute poise and balance. It takes an Argonaut.

Ultimate experience

If you want you can save yourself the time of reading the rest of this review by stopping at the end of this paragraph: the Argonaut Road Bike is very, very good. I can't say it's the best bike in the world (I haven't tested all the bikes in the world), but it's certainly in my top one.

That might seem strange given it comes not from a brand pouring hundred of thousands into



CHARACTER

The chief facets of a road bike are all here, but the Argonaut delivers them with harmonious aplomb to create a bike that is stable yet nimble, stiff yet smooth and, above all else, beautifully balanced.



GEOMETRY

Argonaut frames are monocoque yet custom, thanks to adjustable moulds and touches such as dropouts bolted to the seatstays using titanium hardware (below), which allows for infinite angles for the same part.

◊ R&D for each new project, but instead from an independent framebuilder in Bend, Oregon, that produces little more than 100 framesets a year.

That's not to do the Argonaut down in any way. For one, it's desperately pretty, its paint lustrous and shiny, its silhouette an agreeable mix of elegance and intent. But beyond that it lacks the hallmarks of the modern top-end racer. There are no dropped seatstays, covertly kamm-tailed down tubes or bow-legged forks here. It even has a few cables on show. Yet the Argonaut is about as far from simple as the Hook of Holland is from Istanbul.

However, before we get on to what makes this bike tick, I should tell you how it feels to ride, and that is *absolutely scudding fantastic*.

From the first cruisy pedal strokes the Argonaut presented that wonderful feeling of newness and difference, yet it also felt familiar. Less like I'd ridden it before, more like it knew how I wanted it to ride.

Often I'll get on a test bike and the change in handling will take at least a few kilometres to get used to, testament to the fact that I think geometry is quietly being played around with more than we might realise thanks to things such as wider tyres, disc brakes and the advent of the multi-terrain bike. On paper those geometric tweaks are little more

Hit a long, bumpy corner fast, give it some lean and you can feel the frame working beneath you



than millimetres here, fractions of degrees there, but they're enough to make a significant difference – the Specialized Tarmac today, for example, rides nothing like one from two years ago (it is significantly better).

So without boring you with the numbers, the Argonaut's geometry lends the bike fantastically fast, precise handling at lower speeds that gets progressively more stable at higher speeds while still remaining responsive enough. I PBed my go-to twisting descent not once but twice, all the while feeling totally in control, each run thrillingly rapid but never reckless.

It's on such descents that the Argonaut really stands apart. Its brakes give it confidence, of course, so too the tyres (at some point Dura-Ace discs and Vittoria Corsa G+s will be usurped, but today is not that day), however it's the frame that ties these things together, making everything more than the sum of its parts.

Within that frame there is less a balance and more a conversation between stiffness and flex – stiffness to pedal effectively, flex to move sympathetically with the road surface. Hit a long, bumpy corner fast, give it some lean and you can feel the frame working beneath you to ◊



the more malleable world of composite materials. Yet while most custom carbon fibre framebuilders work in the tube-to-tube method, Farver makes what he describes as 'modified monocoque construction' frames.

In essence this is what the big guns do, moulding sections of a frame, such as the head tube with partial down tube and top tube, in single pieces before bonding them all together. Building in this way means fibres flow continuously across high-stress areas such the tube junctions, meaning less material is needed to ensure strength.

Moreover it gives a designer like Farver wider scope to play around with the carbon fibre layup, as each section is made from dozens of individually specified plies. Thus far more of the frame can be tuned to serve certain characteristics.

Unlike large-scale manufacturers, who must play a game of best fit since a handful of sizes and layups must suit all their customers, being a custom builder means Farver is able to design to a specific customer's needs, creating each layup to suit each client, such that no two Argonaut's geometries or layups are the same.

People will contest the idea that a mass-produced monocoque bike can't rival a custom one, and indeed bikes such as the latest Tarmac, Trek Madone and BMC Teammachine are certainly very fine. But having ridden those bikes, I feel the Argonaut just has an extra modicum of tailored refinement that elevates it above anything I've tested thus far. It really is that good. Stop whispering at the back about the price. 🌸

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► accommodate the imperfections, tyres feeling evenly loaded with force throughout the arc, as opposed to suffering the stutter of a too-stiff bike or the slight bob of one too flexy.

The Argonaut excels when it comes to sprinting, climbing and straight-line speed, too. To be super nit-picky maybe it could shed a few grams on the climbs, but otherwise it's snappy and reactive to ascend, punchy to sprint on and beautifully smooth in every other instance. I even hit a few gravelly trails, and the bike lapped it up.

The custom element

So, how has Argonaut arrived at this point? It's a custom bike company set up by Ben Farver, a framebuilder who cut his teeth in steel before switching to carbon fibre, having become 'frustrated with my lack of ability to control the materials'. That frustration led Farver into

TUBE SHAPES

Although creator Ben Farver does admit there are some fashion-driven flourishes about the frame, the form is driven by function, with each tube being a certain shape and profile for a reason.

