

In rare company

The Scott Plasma Limited combines aerodynamics and light weight

By Jay Prasuhn



In the ever-evolving landscape of tri-bike design and wind-tunnel testing, the age-old question of "Cool... how light is it?" has lost ground to "Cool... how aero is it?" But for years we've accepted a trade-off between light weight and aerodynamic design. Recently, however, Scott Bicycles showed us how we can have both.

In its first foray into triathlon, Scott made a bold statement with its ultralight Plasma line and the top-end Plasma Limited. The aero, carbon Plasma Limited weighs in at 16.1 pounds with Zipp 606s. Much of the bike's svelte disposition comes thanks to the Plasma's integrated seat mast, which is built into the frame. Once you determine your frame size and seat height, the seat mast is cut to fit and a saddle bracket mounts atop it. The saddle clamp allows for about two inches of vertical adjustment, so measure twice (OK, measure 10 times) and cut once. Scott will offer a taller clamp aftermarket in case of cutting mistakes.

For those who travel, the Limited, with its seat mast, isn't as problematic to pack in a bike box as one might think. We traveled with a size large test bike and an uncut mast, and all we had to do was remove the saddle bracket and chainrings to fit the bike into a hardshell travel case. To boot, Scott will soon offer a soft-sided bag designed specifically to accommodate the Plasma for travel.

Slimming down

To allow Scott to reduce the overlays of carbon-fiber sheets at high-stress junctions such as the head tube, the company has developed a proprietary method of carbon welding to join and hold the mitered tubes. Our test bike came stock with Shimano Dura Ace, a Zipp 606 tubular wheelset and Profile Design CBX Pro aerobars and tipped our scale at 16.1 pounds. And with some tinkering, we managed to get it down to 15.18 pounds, sans pedals. At \$6,900 the Plasma Limited isn't entry-level, but it's offered in two lower-spec models and as a frameset only.

We were fortunate enough to spend a few months on this bike and were nothing short of impressed at the attention to detail. The fact that marketing manager Scott Montgomery, a longtime triathlete, had a say in the process, and the fact he brought in 2001 Ironman USA Lake Placid winner Steve Larsen to help with the design suggestions, is evident.

A close look reveals aero vertical rear dropouts, aero water-bottle bosses, but we love the seat-tube cowling. On some bikes, you can actually fit several fingers between the tire and seat tube, defeating the aero benefit of the cutout. Not even close with the Plasma, with a cowling that extends well back and flares slight-

The race-ready Scott Plasma Limited prices at \$6,899 with a Zipp 606 tubular wheelset and a full Shimano Dura Ace group.

ly to smooth the airflow onto the Zipp's deep-dish sidewall.

We were concerned, however, that the thin-wall tubing would make for a soft, whippy frame, but the Plasma was all power, thanks to a massively oversized bottom-bracket shell and oversized aero tubes. The test bike was put through its paces in a half-Ironman-distance race and boasts a comfortable position with a 76-degree seat angle and a low front end. The frame sucked up the bumps that littered the course, while on the inclines the bike climbed like a superlight road bike. While the frontal look of the CR1 all-carbon fork confirms it's not the most aero fork on the market, it gets the job done with confident steering.

In its first go at triathlon, Scott managed to minimize weight while maximizing aerodynamics—which puts the Plasma in rare company as an aero bike that can climb. Think Wildflower, Coeur d'Alene, that all-important grade to Hawi in Hawaii as places the Plasma will shine.

You'll find more on the Plasma Limited, and the rest of the Plasma line, online at www.scottusa.com. ▲