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CAMPAG'S NEW CENTAUR

THRASHING THE CENTAUR

Tested:
Campagnolo's
new
groupset

The name of Campagnolo does things to cyclists. News of a new competitive groupset excited PAUL HINTON. He spent hours with the makers just talking about it, took a week just looking at it, had Swallow build a bike especially for it, then persuaded us to send him to Fuertaventura to test it. He came back impressed, if not entirely satisfied.

Just when you thought you'd be using groupsets from the land of the Rising Sun forever, here comes **Campagnolo** MTB groupset No 2!

Since Campag brought out their first mountain bike groupset (that made everyone go 'Ooh' and 'Ahh') they have been working on it and have now come up with a groupset aimed at knocking the socks off **Shimano's** excellent *Deore XT*.

For some unknown reason they have called it the *Centaur* which in my *Little*

Oxford Dictionary means 'a creature with the head, arms and trunk of a man joined to legs and body of a horse'. I suppose it all makes sense.

Unlike *Euclid*, the *Centaur* won't go blowing holes in your pocket, it will be priced at a little over £400 which is what you pay for the best of **Shimano**.

So what do you get for a tad over £400? MBUK went to see the men from Campag in a hotel opposite Hyde Park. Do nothing by halves these blokes. They really seemed pleased to be showing us

their new toy. After 3½ hours talking we thought we knew everything about this groupset and how it was going to shoot the giant of the East off its high perch.

A lot of the *Centaur's* components can be found on the *Euclid* which we reviewed in Vol 2 No 1. A quick re-read of that will give you the full picture.

BRAKES

To start off with, Campag have retained the 'mono-planer calipers' with a hard anodised coating. These feature adjustable double return springs which allow precise positioning of the brake blocks should the pivot bosses be out of alignment.

Unfortunately they haven't fixed the problem with the system – the brakes don't open up far enough to allow a 1.75 – 2.20in tyre to pass the blocks. Having to deflate the tyre every time you want to take the wheel off is a bit of a hassle.

To help bring the price down, they have changed the cable yoke for the standard *Weinmann* type but have added a plastic cover. The brake cable can be secured with a 5mm allen key.

CHAINSET

Belissimo is the only way to describe the chainset. The lines on this little beauty are as sleek as the ones you'll find on the *Super Record C* road groupset. It again comes with a highly anodised, polished finish. I was dead scared of scratching it! You can order the set with 170 or 175mm crank arms.

The teeth on the chain rings are all individually machined out of high quality alloy. You also have the choice of five different size rings for the inner, four for the centre and four for the outer, enabling you to have from a 24 inner to a 52 outer in increments of 2.

BOTTOM BRACKET

All this is attached to a world renowned bottom bracket which has the best sealing system I've seen for MTB's using small double-sided gaskets. The balls are held together by resin cups which, like all things Campag, are intended to last a long time. As with every race bearing surface the cups are ground to specific tolerances so that the bearings run like silk.

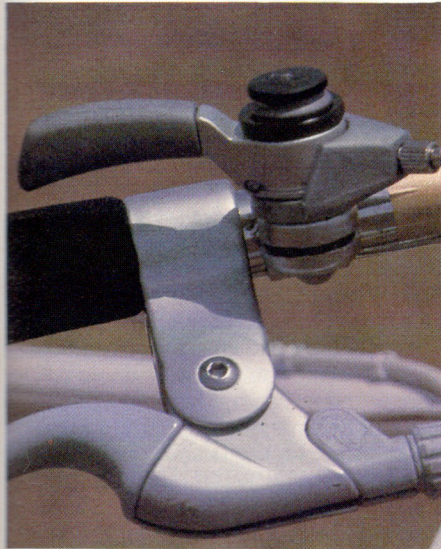
LEVERS

The brake levers have changed little from the *Euclid* but for the *Centaur* two-finger levers are standard. (You can if you want order the four-finger or the biofitting levers).

The gear shifters are no longer attached to the brake levers, they've moved leaving the hole into which the cylindrical stalk of the shifter once fitted. The shifters are now fixed to the handle bar via a hardened steel clamp which has a little rubber insert to help keep the clamp from slipping if knocked. The shifters can be made compatible with a 6-speed block by changing the

micrometric inset in the body of the shifters. One distinct advantage over **Shimano** – you are able to take apart the body for cleaning and replace it without a degree in Engineering.

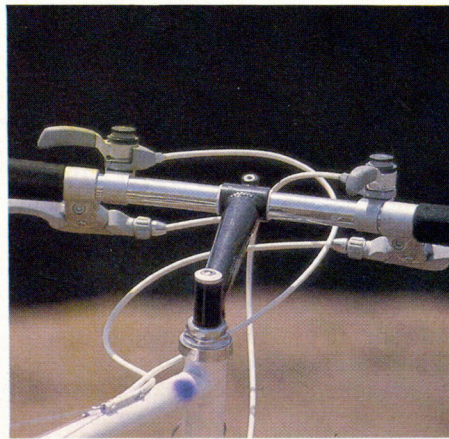
With the *Euclid* we had the cumbersome chromeplated quick release on the brake levers, with the option of a small plastic one. With the *Centaur* it is the other way around. So you will be able to cut down your handle bar if you wish without distorting the cable into the wrong curvature.



PEDALS

To make a bike go forward you need to be able to stick your feet on something and what better than a pair of pedals? Campag, along with **SunTour**, have brought out the smoothest rolling pedals I've tried. The difference? **SunTour** doesn't get the same quality of finish that Campag does.

The *Centaur* bearings are protected from any infiltration by the use of O-rings and a double-lipped gasket and, mark my words, these pedals are designed to last. The cage on this competition pedal has been cut away on the bottom outer edge to allow pedalling further into corners.



HEADSET

The headset is the same as the *Euclid*, made out of high quality steel. It has a O-ring seal to both halves of the unit. When I put top cup and the frame race together the O-ring had about a 1/4mm gap all round.

'Surely' I said to the gentlemen from Campag, 'water and grit will get in?' The reply was a simple:

'Wait and see when you have fitted it to a frame!

The cable guide that fits around the headset to prevent it from coming loose has been made out of plastic to keep the cost down. Of course you can't use it if you have a roller stem.

REAR MECH

The standard setup for the rear mech uses the medium length jockey cage. As with *Euclid* you can choose between the small, medium and large cage. As has been proven, a small cage will give you a better change but limits the range of gears you can select while in the inner or outer chainring.

Don't ask me why Campag didn't put a barrel adjuster on the mech, because *they* couldn't tell me. As it is, when adjusting your bike you will have to reach forward to the handlebar to alter the cable tension.

The front mech stays the same as

Euclid but you have a choice depending on what diameter seat tube you need to attach the mech to. The first is a fixed clamp for the standard 28.5mm seat tube, the second is a fixed clamp for 35-36mm and the third is a fully adjustable clamp for 28-33mm tubes.

SEATPOST

The seatpost is sweetly polished to the nth degree. On this racing model Campag has lost all the knobs and levers from the *Euclid* post to make a sleek one-bolt job.

All this is clamped to the frame by what appears very much like a shortened quick release from a hub.



HUBS

Which brings on the subject of hubs. Campag have produced the best cycle hubs for years, so there is no reason why they should stop now. Because they can't make them much better, they have used hubs similar to those on the *Euclid*. These have to be the lightest hubs made for MTB's. They have even made a front hub with 28 holes but you can still get 32 and 36. Again a choice of large or small flanges.

Campagnolo recommend the use of the *Rigina* freewheel and chain as the spacing between the cogs is the correct size for the index system.

DOWNSIDE

So that all the good news. Unfortunately there is always an evil. In this case it has got to be the *weight* of the overall group set. It weighs in at approx 1 1/2 pounds heavier than *Deore XT*. As a result you needn't even *think* about breaking any part of this groupset, it has been built to last. If you do break a bit you can replace it. It's a new concept for those of us brought up on the idea that if you break a bit you replace the whole unit. With Campag if you break a cage on a pedal, say you can replace just the cage and not the whole pedal.

THE HAMMER

The only way to test a groupset is to stick it on a frame and hammer the hell out of it on some harsh terrain.

That's exactly what we did with *Centaur* when we went to Fuertaventura in the *Islas Canarias*. (That's Canary Islands for us non linguists! Ed)

Having stuck the groupset on a frame specially built by the boys from **Swallow**

(more on the bike next month), I proceeded to thrash bike and body over mountain and volcanic plain.

In the end the bike came out Better for wear!

Volcanic dust has got to be one of the most penetrating forms of grit around. But after a whole week of that, as well as riding up and down beaches, I have not had to clean any of the bearings. This goes for the headset too, which no longer had that ¼mm gap. When **Swallow** fitted the headset the gap closed to make a perfect fit.

After three days riding with straight forks I had to tighten the front cones as the bearings got used to being run over rough ground at high speed. (I know precisely how they feel).

Once the brake and brake levers were adjusted correctly, the two finer levers were a pleasure to hold. It's a pity the coating Campag puts over the levers to prevent them getting scratched, scratches so easily itself it leaves them looking a bit tatty.

Try as I might, I could not get the brakes to open far enough for the tyres to pass through.

The quick release on the brake levers worked easily, but you have to make sure the outer cable is slotted into the housing when replacing the QR.

The brake blocks gave me cause for concern when I found out that they didn't grip as well as other blocks I've used. Maybe a softer compound is needed.

The coating that Campag puts on the front and rear mech means it is easily cleaned with a wipe of a cloth, a good thing with all that dust around.

Something I didn't like about the fixing of the cables to both the mechs and the brakes was the need for a 10mm spanner to tighten the nut onto the cable bolt. Why couldn't they have used an allen key fixture so we wouldn't have to carry around extra tools?

The jockey wheels use ball bearing and cones to provide the smoothest running wheels I've felt.

Throughout the week I was adjusting the set up, trying to get the rear mech to move smoothly down the gears. I finally found the right combination of jockey cage and hanger bolt springs to get what I was looking for, but it took awhile.

The front mech, provided even shifting while on index or friction. No complaints here. In conjunction with the strong chainrings the change between things was crisp especially in index mode.

And what can you say about a bottom bracket that's been designed by some of the best cycle brains in the world? Not a lot. It has a hollow axle, and should give you years of service if looked after properly.

CONCLUSION

Apart from the err, ahh....weight (oops naughty word), which Campag promises to bring down in the near future, this groupset should give the big 'S's something to think about.

EXTRA, EXTRA!

At our meeting with Campag, they brought out a little box with a sticker in Italian which meant **CANTILEVERS!** Oh joy and tears of happiness!

Unfortunately they only had one set. But when they send us the other I'll tell you about them.

NOTE

The *Centaur* groupset will probably not fit directly onto many production MTBs. If you're considering a change consult your favourite frame builder or dealer first.

We hear that at least one major manufacturer is keen to fit a Campag groupset to top of the range MTBs in 1990.

The Campagnolo Centaur Group Set was photographed in Fuertaventura, Canary Islands. Next month we feature the amazing island in our Superbike report, Swallow Griffin and Campag Centaur. MBUK would like to thank **TRADEWIND HOLIDAYS**, and especially their 'on site' Director, Dave Smith, who not only flew us down there and put us up, but enabled us to ride and photograph a mountain bikers mecca. More on the island, the rides, the bike and **TRADEWIND** next month. If you would like to know more about mountain biking in Fuertaventura you can contact **TRADEWIND** at their UK offices: 18-33 Church Street, Hampton, Middlesex TW12 3EG, or telephone 01 979 0728.



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