

RALEIGH JOHN TOMAC CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

So what's in a name, you ask?

It first showed up underneath Johnny T himself. There were NORBA National victories, Grundig World Cup runaways and, finally, a stunning combo of silver and gold medals at the World Championships. Following all of that, of course, was the obligatory presence at last fall's trade shows. Then it disappeared. The John Tomac Championship Edition Raleigh was nowhere to be seen. After all the victories, and after all the hype, what was undoubtedly one of the most sought-after bikes on the planet by the cycling press couldn't be found. We put in requests to Raleigh for a test, but got nowhere. The bike came and went last year, and before we could get our paws on it, the '92 season began, and once again there was the "Tomes" astride his ultra-trick-looking Raleigh. It seemed like the ads for the bike were as close as the magazines would ever get.

Then one day it happened. A huge box appeared at our office, blocking the doorway. No one had a clue as to its contents. We lifted off the top of the box and there it was—Raleigh's carbon fiber/titanium wonder with a \$6000 price tag. Wow! Raleigh's John Tomac World Championship Edition was finally ours to test.

THE BIKE'S ROOTS

Why carbon fiber and titanium, you ask? Well, besides the simple fact that the two frame materials are the most expensive and hard to work with, Johnny T has a personal history with both. When he was a Mongoose rider back in the late '80s he finished off his contract on a titanium bike. Then he picked up a Yeti ride which had him on a bonded steel and carbon fiber frame. When Raleigh picked him up over the winter of '90, he made it clear that he wasn't about to ride just any old bike. Raleigh made it clear that they weren't expecting him to. After all, who would ever expect to see the World and Grundig Cup Champion aboard some chromoly heap from Taiwan?

The design was the product of Tomac's own fertile mind. He wanted something that was trick, but light as well. Raleigh was already famous for their bonding technique due to their established line of Technium bikes that used glue to join all the tubes. For the aluminum tubes used in their Technium line, Raleigh had also come to depend on Easton, which happened to be the supplier of the carbon fiber tubes for Johnny's old Yeti. The carbon fiber tubes used on the Tomac bike

are actually thin-walled aluminum tubes with a carbon wrap.

Originally, the titanium lugs and rear triangle were being provided by Merlin Metalworks, but Raleigh has since made a deal with Litespeed to do all the titanium fabrication. No doubt helped along by all the bikes they build for themselves, as well as the 12 to 14 other companies that they build for, Litespeed's construction was very impressive.

One reason the Raleigh is so visually appealing is that the carbon fiber wrap is visible to the eye. In other words, along with the dull-gray finish of the titanium parts, you know what you are getting for the expensive price tag.

OTHER PARTS

Since Tioga has been one of Johnny's main sponsors ever since he took up his fat-tire pursuits, the signature bike is full of their name-brand products. From the Prestige handlebars and T-Bone stem to the Hound Dawg tires and Tension Disc rear wheel, the bike features a full selection. Out of all of them, we only had problems with the disc wheel. There is, without a doubt, no other wheel assembly on the market that makes tire changes so difficult. The two Kevlar halves create an



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opening for the valve stem that is almost impossible to get to, even with the aid of a pre-drilled hole in the disc. We raced the bike at the Mammoth Mountain World Cup and had difficulty on the windier parts of the course, when the bike would actually be pushed around by strong gusts hitting the disc. It was over the stutter bumps when the suspension quality of the wheel would come into play. The damping effect was especially appreciated midway through the event when the rider preferred not to feel the sharp edge of every bump through the saddle.

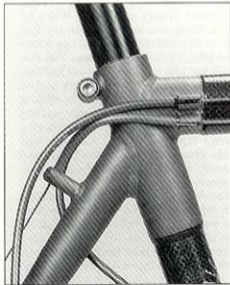
Remember, this is the Championship Edition model, based on Johnny's winning ways at last year's World Championships in Lucca, Italy. As such, there are a few differences between the production bike and the bike Johnny is riding in the '92 campaign. Though Johnny was the rider who made Manitou forks famous,

The best of both worlds: Raleigh's Tomac replica bike uses a high-tech and high-dollar combination of carbon and titanium materials to make the frame. Each frame is bonded in Seattle, WA. The Litespeed-constructed rear triangle is almost exactly like the one they make for the Greg LeMond bike. Construction on the Raleigh is flawless. ►

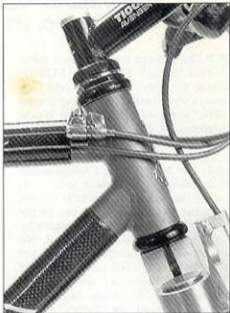
he's now riding on Rock Shox. You will find a set of Grafton Mag-Lite brakes on his current mount, along with a Ringle Super Bubba front hub. The production Raleigh runs a complete Shimano XTR gruppo.

SOMETHING ABOUT A WORLD CHAMP'S BIKE

There is a special feeling that goes with riding a bike like the Tomac signature model. The first time we encountered such a sensation was when we rode the Specialized Epic Ultimate that Ned Overend piloted to his World Championship



gold medal (MBA, Mar. '91). Call us star-struck wimps, but there aren't too many other sports where you share the same equipment used by the sport's biggest heroes. The Tomac Raleigh exudes a sense of high performance just sitting there. It



What do we know?: We didn't like the Dura-Ace cable adjusters, which were hard to use and could cause injury if used, or the high-rise Tioga stem, which gave some riders a cramped ride—but then who are we to criticize what John Tomac personally thought best?

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Do we have a consensus?: Opinion on how the Tomac bike rode was broken into two camps—those who said it was one of the best bikes they had ever ridden and those who said it was the best bike they had ever ridden. The only problem is that only a few will be made—and they will all cost \$6000!

wouldn't take much for your grandmother to get on the bike and suddenly start hammering the singletrack, mouth agape, mimicking Johnny T's famous air scoop attack mode! The bike plain hammers. It was one of the best bikes we have ever ridden—which hardly comes as a surprise. From test-riding the Raleigh on the trails overlooking Los Angeles to racing it at the Mammoth Mountain World Cup, rider after rider crooned about the bike's responsiveness and consistent handling.

Fresh from testing the marvelous full-suspension Manitou, some of our test riders were immediately reminded of the merits of a bike with a rigid rear end. With no flex, biopacing or suspension sag, the Raleigh climbs straight up and keeps climbing. One rider after another fell in love with the 23.5-inch-long top tube, although the longish bend of the bar ends limited their use to a single side position closest to the handlebars. Some riders would have preferred a lower-rise stem to accommodate the Manitou forks, but Tioga has yet to market a zero-rise version, so neither Johnny nor the public at large has access to such an item.

Raleigh's promo material says the bike weighs 24.5 pounds. Ours hit the scales at 26 pounds. Since Johnny rode a 19-inch frame, that's all Raleigh intended to make, but they have now decided to add a 17-inch model. Measured center to top, our bike was more like a 20-inch frame. The Raleigh has very good rear-wheel clearance. When it comes to clearance, though, the idea of running Shimano Dura-Ace derailleur adjusters on the top tube made no sense. This was Johnny's own idea left over from when he was using drop bars on his Yeti. In the event your derailleur goes out of adjustment, by

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flicking a small lever outwards you can adjust the derailleur on the fly (in the old days everyone had friction shift modes they could easily switch to). However, as the lever goes through its 180 degrees of adjustment, it becomes a sharp, exposed edge just waiting to do serious damage to an unsuspecting knee.

NOT A BIKE FOR THE MASSES

We suppose it only makes sense that the wealthiest and winningest mountain biker in the world would produce the most expensive mountain bike in the world. Of course, Johnny is no ordinary racer. The fact that Raleigh is only planning to make about 60 of the bikes is further evidence that what we have here is no ordinary mountain bike.

In the end it really doesn't matter. Even if we had said the bike handled like a beached hippopotamus, who would you believe, us or Tomac? It's a Tomac replica, after all. With only 60 bikes being made, each one fetching a cool six grand (if not more), this is not the bike Raleigh is expecting to hinge their financial future on. No matter what anyone says about the bike, each and every one will sell. It's more than a bike—it's a piece of history, plain and simple. Like the boat Columbus sailed on, or the shoes that Neil Armstrong moon-walked in, Tomac's Raleigh bike will find its place in history. □



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