

Zapping into winter

Allan Peiper rides into the off season on two GAN team bikes, one with the latest electric gear shifting system.

It seemed like it had been raining for as long as I could remember. The summer of '93 was gone, swept away in rainy days. As I stood contemplating whether or not to get

my rainwear on, get my bike and go, I remembered my early cycling years. Cold winter nights in Australia, training on the coast road outside Melbourne as the rain came down, I would try to

ride through all the puddles and get as wet as I could, because I had this crazy idea that the tougher I made myself, the tougher I would be as a cyclist.

Yesterday John, a friend of

mine, saw TVM's Aussie pro Scott Sunderland at a bike shop here in Belgium. John asked him if he had been out training as it had rained all day. 'I'm not Allan Peiper,' Scott replied. I wonder if I



All photography by Graham Watson

The dull metallic grey paintwork makes a striking contrast to the yellow forks and 'bumblebee' bar tape.



Peiper's new test route for the Cycle Sport bike test allows him to compare each pro team bike over a demanding mix of Belgian terrain.



didn't go over the top trying to be the best...

My contact with GAN was the team mechanic, Julien Devriese from Ghent, who had arranged the loan of two bikes for me — one with and one without Mavic's new Zap gears.

He asked if I would like to go for a drink with him. As he guided me through the small lanes of the expensive Saint Martens Latem area of the Renaissance town, we hit the main subject, Greg LeMond.

Julien was Merckx's personal mechanic in his heyday at Molteni and has been Greg's personal mechanic since 1989, the year of his famous comeback. He is a man who isn't awed by great bike riders anymore, he has seen too much. I feel the relation-

ship between Greg and Julien goes deeper than work. I heard that when Greg won his Tours he gave Julien and masseur Otto Jacomé a big monetary present as a gesture of appreciation for their help. That kind of thing doesn't often happen in pro cycling.

As we drank tea under a walnut tree I asked about Greg's bike company. Julien said it was still afloat and not bankrupt as I had heard. Years ago, Greg had offers from companies like French constructor Vitus, to use his name on their bikes, but he didn't want that, he wanted his own company.

At the time, Julien had advised him not to invest his own money in the business. He argued that he had witnessed the uncertain way that

Merckx's company began. Launching that enterprise had nearly cost Eddy his fortune before it finally began to pay.

It's almost gone that far with Greg from what I hear. Yet after a year of uncertainty, and despite all rumours to the contrary, Greg LeMond Cycles stays afloat. Word has it that the company is now being managed more effectively and is slowly building up clientele. Let's hope so for Greg's sake.

I stopped at Ted's house on the way home to get the frame checked. The Greg LeMond frame looked pretty good. The bracket height was correct and the top tube was dead level. The top tube on the bike I rode measured 56cm and the saddle tube 55cm. The seat tube angle is really steep on this bike and for that reason Pascal Lance wouldn't ride it.

On this particular bike, Julien had asked the factory to make the seat tube with one centimetre more lay back, but what they did was make the rear stays a centimetre longer so there is a gap between the rear wheel and the frame. This has pulled the front of the bike in and the distance between the bracket axle and front wheel axle is only 58 cm. This makes the steering really nervous as the head angle and fork rake are already steep.

When riding the bike slowly, the front of your shoe hits the tyre as you turn. Of course you never turn this

much at speed, but the point is, even though it's only a small distance too short, there is then too much weight on the front wheel, which means more under you and less on the back wheel. Geometrically speaking, this puts the whole bike out of balance. Later, when I rode this bike, I could feel the nervousness and I didn't really trust the handling of it.

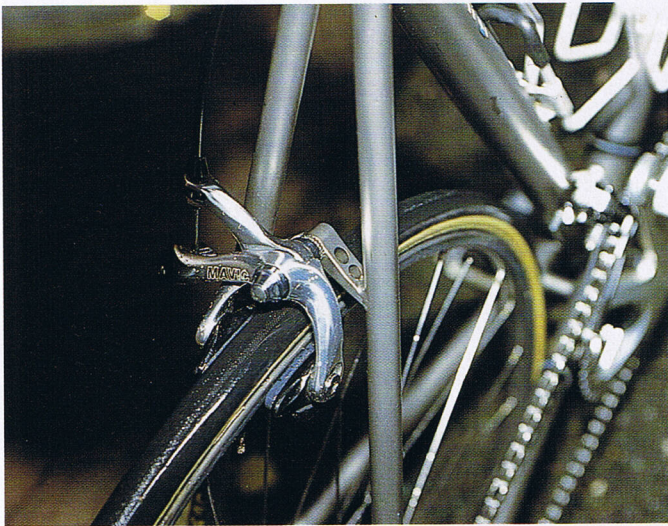
The ends are really chunky but look pretty good. Ted says the finish of the frame and the welding is really good from what he has seen of titanium frames. Personally I



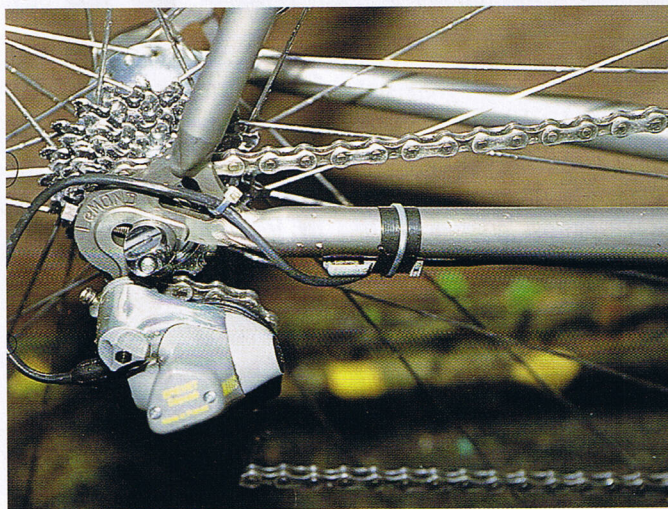
Welds on the titanium frame are cleanly and smoothly executed — and the Zap wiring adds to the sleek appearance.



The bike's racing pedigree explained in a single transfer.



Above: no complaints about the Mavic brakes, but the freewheel sprockets (below) needed one of those tweaks that only a pro mechanic would know before they worked smoothly.



like the paint-job of this titanium frame. The grey-metallic colour is dull and the transfers look really cool, especially the one on the seat tube which says, 'Junior world champion, World champion, Tour de France.'

At home I had to put the seat up by two centimetres and the reach was still one centimetre too short. One thing I have noticed with these bike tests is that you can have a good ride on any bike. Some of these test bikes have been two centimetres too big for me and yet I can still go fast. It's when you want to go really fast that the bike helps. The better the frame fits you, aerodynamically and geometrically, the faster you can go.

Once I'd lathered the chain with grease and oil, ready for the rain, I was ready to go.

I was glad I had left. The air was cool as the rain continued to fall and I knew I would be the only one on the

road today. The GAN team uses Cinelli cork ribbon on the bars. It's really good in bad weather as your hands don't slip and the cork insulates them from the metal of the bars. The best part of this tape is that if it is dirty you can just grab some liquid bath

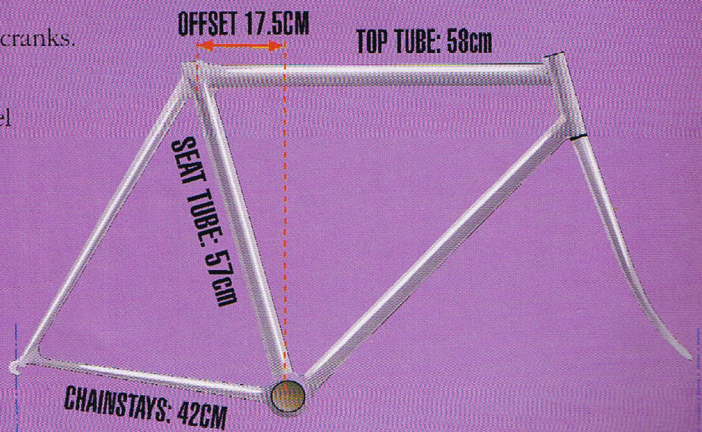


Above and below: with two switches built into the Zap system, it is possible to change gears whether riding on the tops or the drops. The battery powering the set-up is hidden inside the bars.



GAN team bike

- Frame:** Greg LeMond.
- Tubing:** titanium.
- Chainset:** Mavic, 175mm cranks.
- Deraileurs:** Mavic Zap.
- Pedals:** Time.
- Bars:** Cinelli Campione del Mondo, Cinelli cork bar tape.
- Stem:** Cinelli 13.5cm.
- Seat Pin:** Selcof.
- Saddle:** San Marco Rolls.
- Brakes:** Mavic.
- Hubs:** Mavic.
- Rims:** Mavic Special Service des Courses, 32 spokes.
- Tyres:** Vittoria Corsa CX.
- Bottle Cage:** TA.



Electric shock

IF you think that Look pedals, STI or Ergopower were revolutionary, forget it: Zap is the most revolutionary thing I have ever seen or ridden, combining electronics with the most important part of the bike, the gears.

I must admit I was sceptical when I first heard of Mavic's new idea. I thought it might be another hair-brained gadget like the Campagnolo clipless pedals of a few years ago. Because Campag didn't want to buy the Look patent as Shimano had done, they nearly lost their whole market share by sinking their money into a white elephant that never worked.

Before I went for a ride, Julien Devriese showed me how to put the plug in and out, before and after riding, so the battery doesn't go flat. As an afterthought he mentioned a screw in the end of the bars which held the battery, in case it went flat while out riding. All these batteries, cables and buttons freaked me out, but I was determined to keep an open mind. I remember that in 1986 my Panasonic director Walter Planckaert said that Look pedals were just a fashion and in two years you wouldn't see them again. Eat dirt, Walter!

Three weeks ago I had ridden Pascal Lance's bike over the usual route, and written a review. But because it was a reserve bike it didn't have Zap electric

gears. I despaired of ever testing the device, and was only saved by Julien's generosity (and a bit of luck).

I was on the road at 8am on a cold, autumnal morning. I decided to take the highway to Brakel and then do some of the really rough cobbles they go over in the Tour of Flanders and throw in a few hills for good measure. Ironically, just when I wanted some rain to test the electronics in the wet, the month-long spell of bad weather suddenly stopped.

On the road with my head down, I couldn't help looking at the transmission. Previous Mavic drivetrains I have ridden always sounded rough, but with the Campag sprocket spacers fitted to the Mavic block in this set-up, the Rohloff chain was purring along, though the chainset still scores nil points for style.

These gears are really fun. There are two buttons, one on the top of the bars near the middle (with Cinelli bars it's hard-up against the sleeve), the other is situated just below the brakes. It's unbelievable how easy it is. With your hands on the tops or on the drops, the closest button to your hand is for changing down and the furthest for changing up. This is good because in tight situations like sprinting or attacking on the drops you are right on the button and if someone attacks while climbing you can change without even moving your hands.

One click is one change up or down. Click three times in one go and you jump three sprockets at once. Hold the button down and it goes from the smallest sprocket to the biggest in one go or vice versa.

The only thing I would move is the bracket under the brake lever. If, as on this bike, it is mounted a finger-width from the brake, it takes a rotation of the wrist to push the button if standing up and riding on the brakes. But with your hands wrapped around the brake levers, you can accidentally push a button. With the bracket set lower this wouldn't happen.

Also if you are on the drops and want to change gears you need to rotate your wrist to allow your pointing finger to push the button. If you could put the bracket a bit lower you might be able to ride with one finger between the buttons and 'zap' when you need to without releasing your grip and putting yourself off balance. This is a definite advantage over STI and Ergopower.

As I rode into Brakel I was having difficulty changing up. Changing down was no problem and changing up the first two sprockets worked all right. Then it dawned on me: the battery. There's a lot of resistance changing up and that's where the power shortage comes in first. Imagine being away alone on the Poggio in Milan-San Remo and you get a power failure!

Well Phil, my battery went flat...

Over three kilometres of cobbles there were no rattles, loose levers or jumping gears. This has to be the easiest way to change gears on cobbles — you don't even have to move your hands. Another point is that the maze of gear cables you have with STI and, to a lesser extent, Ergopower, are gone. Up three steep climbs and changing gears is easy as pie, even if you're standing up on the pedals.

I know that a problem with Zap is the battery, which costs about £8. How long it lasts I don't know. And there is no way of knowing when to replace it without waiting until it stops — you could be in your biggest race of the year.

If cycle computers have trouble in the rain why shouldn't Zap? No doubt, the system has problems. But one thing is sure, these problems can be fixed. That's why Zap is the most revolutionary gear system of them all. Go to your local dealer and see how it works, maybe you can even test ride one. Hats off to Mavic for this one. Instead of copying other systems, Mavic made their own, better version. All they have to do now is make a seat pillar, change that right-hand crank design, put some new spaces in the block and get some shine on their stuff.

cleaner and a scourer, give it a good scrub and, hey presto, new tape.

The bars and stem are Cinelli as well. Pascal uses a 12 centimetre stem and 42 centimetre bars — the 66 model which are really deep. I was thinking of putting Cinelli bars and stem back on my bike as I am getting a bit sick of these hand grip bars. Only thing is, my wife will kill me if she finds out. Maybe you know what I mean!

Riding along the canal to Geraardsbergen I could see the rain falling into the water, the ducks were having a field day. Out of the mist came a cyclist who looked at me like I was a space cadet. Hey, what was he doing out in the rain,

anyway?

I had put my Look pedals on this bike and taken off the Time pedals that GAN ride. When I rode with Tulip we had to ride Time shoes and I never liked the degree of movement in the pedal. Some like the shoes, but I never got on with them, even when I tried a set of the Time shoe plates that are supposed to make your feet more stable.

The only thing left that could take my morale away was the sight of the right-hand crank and rings. Wow! What a weird design — aesthetically it scores rock bottom. It isn't even aerodynamic. But at the same time I must say that the chain drive was working beautifully. This

surprised me. Last winter I had a Mavic group and remember cursing and swearing because the gears were always out of adjustment.

When I picked this bike up from Julien I had asked him if he had ever had any trouble with the smoothness of the gears. The way a smile spread across his face, I knew I had pressed one of his buttons. You see, mechanics are always hidden away behind the scenes and the work they do is never really appreciated.

Julien told me that they had found a remedy for the roughness. Normally the spacing between Mavic sprockets is three millimetres, he explained, so what they

did was replace the standard spacers with 3.2mm Campagnolo spacers, and that made the gears run really smoothly.

I used my smallest gear on the Leberg and Berendries climbs, and just before the last climb up to Saint Anteliks there was a set of road works where I had to get off and walk. It was really muddy and I got absolutely filthy.

I really enjoy seeing a dirty bike get clean again as you wash it off with suds and water and a good blast from a high pressure hose. Cycling in all weathers might make me tough, but youth is gone now, and all I am going to get out of toughening myself up is another bike test. ■