

PROBIKE

TEAM ISSUE BIKES - TESTED BY PROCYCLING

ORBEA ORCA M11I LTD

Procycling's **Robin Wilmott** enjoys a stable and sure-footed ride on Orbea's flagship Orca, a bike with tonnes of character, as sprinted upon by Cofidis's Nacer Bouhanni

SPECIFICATION

Weight: 6.58kg
(size 55cm, no pedals)

Frame: Orbea Orca carbon OMR

Fork: Orbea Orca OMR

Chainset: SRAM Red, 50/34

Bottom bracket: SRAM Red

Cassette: SRAM Red 11-28

Chain: SRAM Red 22

Derailleurs: SRAM Red eTap

Gear levers: SRAM Red eTAP

Wheels: Fulcrum Racing Quattro Carbon

Tires: Vittoria Corsa Competition G+ 23mm

Stem: FSA OS99 CSI carbon wrapped alloy

Handlebar: FSA Energy Compact aluminium bar

Headset: FSA Integrated

Saddle: Selle Italia SLR

Seatpost: FSA K-Force carbon

Brakes: SRAM Red

Orbea boasts one of the longest histories of any road cycling brand, originally producing guns, then bikes from 1930. The Basque Country's tradition of cooperative ownership proved the company's saviour when it nearly went bust in 1969, and since being bought by its workers, it has functioned successfully as a cooperative.

All bikes are built in Portugal or in Orbea's Mallabia home, and they're a familiar sight to professional cycling fans. Long term sponsorship of Euskaltel-Euskadi created an almost totally Basque pro team. With the closure of Euskaltel, Orbea have maintained a high-profile presence beneath the French Cofidis squad, whose team leader is sprinter Nacer Bouhanni. The most notable result aboard an Orca so far was Samuel Sánchez winning the 2008 Olympic road race.

The Cofidis team riders have an unusual combination of Shimano Dura-Ace Di2 mechs and shifters, mixed with FSA SL-K brakes and crankset, then Vision Metron 5D integrated carbon bar plus Vision Metron 55 wheelset with Kenda tubulars. The top specced Orca available to mere mortals has a less eclectic component mix, but an identical frameset.

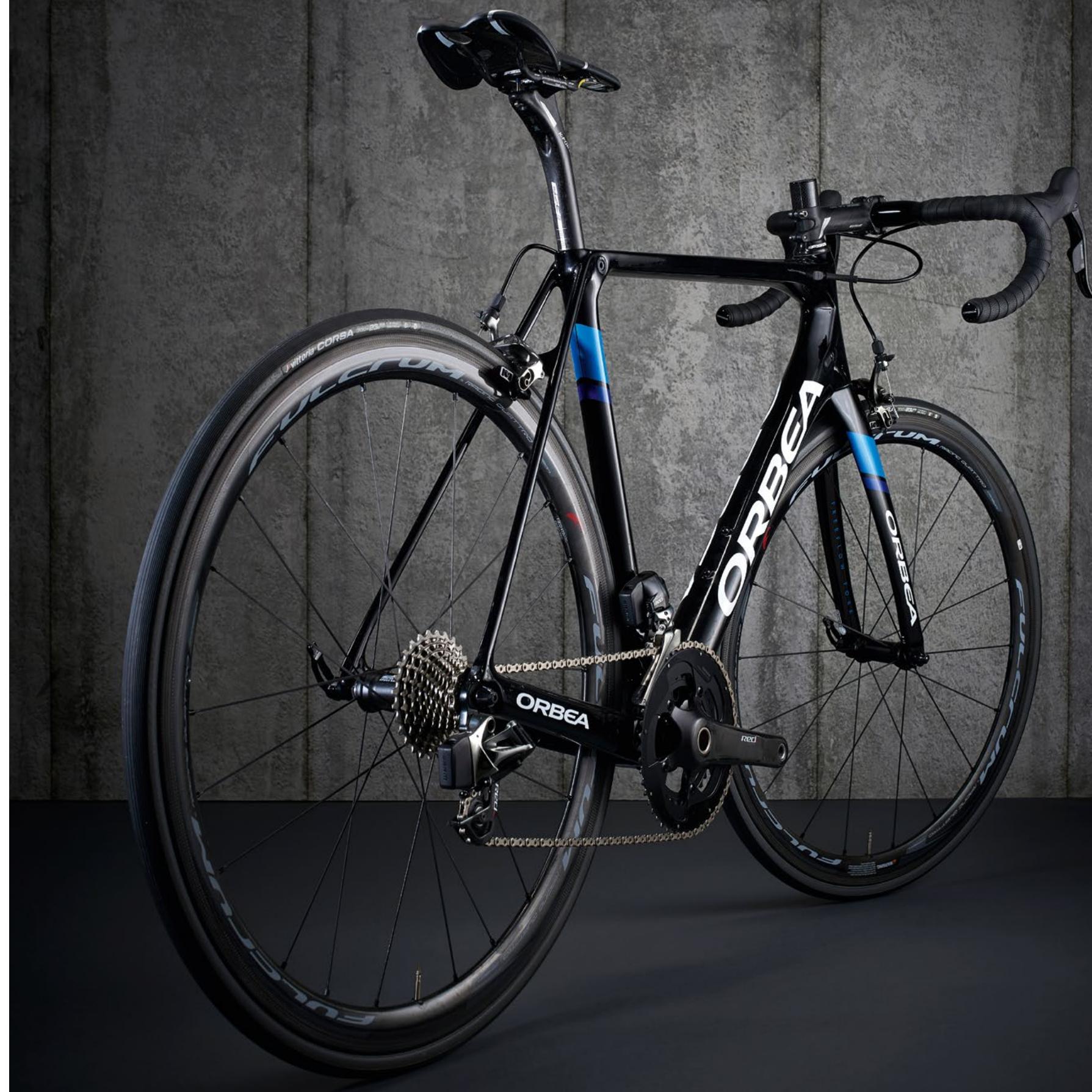
The latest Orca's lines are much more, well, normal than some Orcas of old, which stood out from the crowd with angular tube shapes and profiles that may have defeated radar. This bike's lustrous, glossy black paint accentuates the flowing curves, with only a hint of designs past behind the head tube. Orbea claims an unspecified size of the new frame weighs 795g, with a 315g fork, and it has clearance for 28mm

tyres, which only reinforces our surprise that this one came fitted with 23mm rubber.

As far as tube shapes and looks can inform us about a frame, the Orca's wide, flat top tube and giant rounded down tube flare massively where they meet the slim but deep hourglass headtube, and with the outwardly curved fork legs, suggest plenty of front end rigidity. The straight, asymmetric chainstays are a mammoth 50mm deep when exiting the BB386 Evo bottom bracket, and very slim seat stays lead to the integrated seat clamp, which is hidden between the top and seat-tubes, allowing the greatest length of its 27.2mm FSA SL-K carbon seatpost to protrude from the frame. This combination of beef where it's needed and subtlety in between seems ideal, and has become the blueprint for high performance road bikes.

Those relatively conventional lines cloak a frameset of real finesse that's available in either OMR or OMP fit for more or slightly less racy positions. Our 55cm OMR example's 168mm head tube meant no spacers were needed for a 178cm tester used to a fairly aggressive position, and the 25mm offset seatpost allows plenty of scope for the long-legged rider who needs a lot of saddle setback. Somehow the geometry manages to suit tall rouleurs as well as featherweight climbers, although anyone wanting an ultra-low position may need to investigate negative rise stems.

The chunky headtube area, plus stable fork provides an unwavering root to any leverage on the compact bar, that along with the 408mm Cervélo-esque, girder-like chainstays, and unambiguous downtube give the bike a solid backbone that's





BRAND HISTORY

The Orbea company dates back to the first half of the 19th century, when it was set up by three brothers, Juan Manuel, Mateo and Casimiro Orbea in the city of Eibar in the Basque Country. The company swapped bullets for bikes in 1930, and one of their sponsored riders, Mariano Cañardo, rode an Orbea to a stage win in the 1937 Tour de France, and second place in the 1935 Vuelta a España. By the late 1940s, Orbea was producing 50,000 bikes a year, but the factory in Eibar couldn't keep up, and in 1969 the company moved to Mallabia. In the 1980s, Orbea returned to cycle race sponsorship, signing Pedro Delgado in 1985. Delgado won the Vuelta for Orbea that year and would go on to win the Tour de France. In the 1990s the company was instrumental in the establishment of the Euskadi cycling federation and continues to support local teams to this day.

the core of its power and efficiency. It's composed at all speeds, with a light, positive feel, but it only takes a few extra watts' input to feel its velocity increase. Attacking steep climbs or head down, deep drop sprinting both result in energy being channelled rearwards as focused acceleration with no intrusive torsional flex – something that Bouhanni must love.

A 50/34 SRAM Red compact crankset with 11-28 cassette is a fine all-round or mountainous terrain choice, though racers will likely want to spec bigger chainrings. The Fulcrum Racing Quattro Carbon rims are 24mm wide, and 40mm deep with great lateral rigidity and are claimed to weigh 1,550g for the pair. That's fairly competitive for their rim depth, and one of the main reasons they're responsive, and keen to accelerate efficiently. They're light enough to really complement the frameset's ability, and the ideal depth to blend decent aerodynamics with agility.

Their mildly rounded rim profile is pretty modern too, minimising crosswind interference and keeping things predictable. SRAM Red calipers have never lacked power or modulation, and with the appropriate Fulcrum pads fitted, the Racing Quattro Carbons exhibit strong, progressive braking in the dry, and

▲ Sleek lines and a tasteful paintjob reflect the high performance, unfussy ride quality of the Orca

we didn't experience any grabbing. They're better than average in the wet too, not class leading, but reliable, predictable and effective.

Sudden direction changes and confidently carved corners were a feature of our time with the Orca. Whether flicking around potholes or pushing on down a descent, the Orca was surefooted and utterly stable, even at speed when the road surface got choppy. This is a little more impressive when considering its relatively short 991mm wheelbase, and also that this is the first top race bike we've seen in a while that's come fitted with 23mm tyres.

Now that 25mm has become the new road tyre baseline, the thought of narrower rubber didn't fill us with great joy, but fortunately the Fulcrums opened the Vittoria Corsa Competition G+ carcasses out to a more useful 24.5mm inflated width. With the frameset's ample clearance, we'd like to think that 25mm tyres would make much better use of it, while increasing grip and comfort levels further. The minor volume reduction wasn't really noticeable, but the less rounded tyre required a little familiarisation before we felt comfortable attacking corners.

Even with 23mm rubber, the Orca produces an impressively smooth ride, able to dismiss erupting, buckled tarmac with no more than a dull ripple, and with no deflection from its course. It dulls high-frequency road buzz, and soaks up unavoidable big hits without drama, or wrist-hurting sharpness. Shifting the seatpost clamp to within the frame not ▶

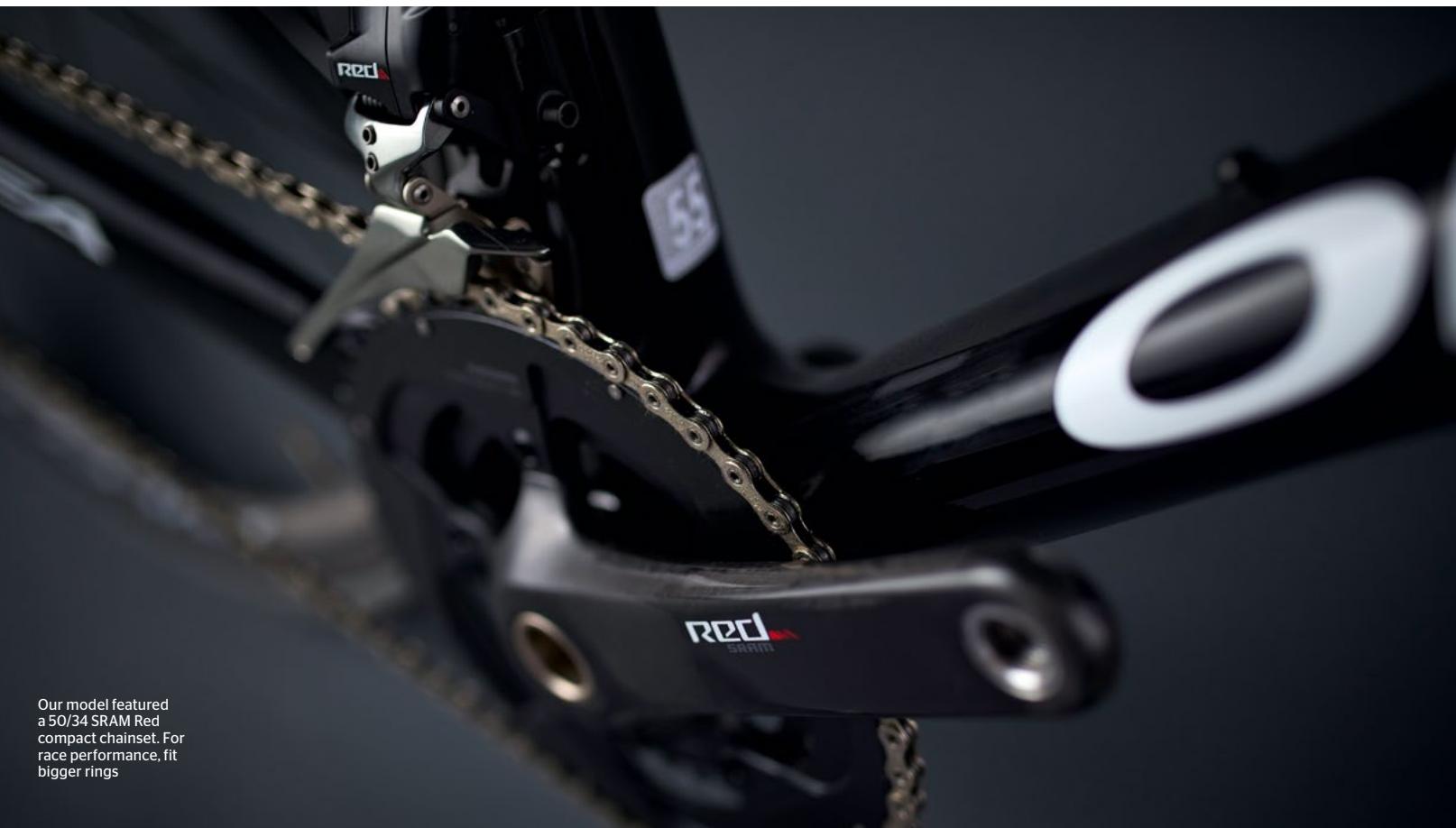
Whether flicking around potholes or pushing on down a descent, the Orca was surefooted and utterly stable



SRAM Red calipers work well with the Racing Quattro carbon rims for strong braking



SRAM's Red eTap shifters might not be as fast as Di2, but the intuitive functionality makes them a joy to use



Our model featured a 50/34 SRAM Red compact chainset. For race performance, fit bigger rings



▲ Orbea's bikes are locally built at their base in Mallabia, in the Basque Country, or in Portugal

only makes for cleaner lines, but maximises flex from the seatpost, which topped by Selle Italia's SLR, is a very comfortable place to be.

Maintaining the frame's smooth, sleek lines, SRAM's Red eTap groupset is like a hi-spec declutterer, doing away with two cables and simplifying the shifting operation too. Slim but tactile hoods plus carbon brake levers and large shift paddles feel good to hold. The crankset's black carbon finish, and the polished aluminium components perfectly complement the gloss black frame, and it's a joy to use. Even first timers get a handle on eTap's

Pros
Bags of character, comfortable ride, responsive and fast

Cons
Handlebar doesn't quite match the rest of the spec. 23mm tyres are narrow

Verdict
A well balanced racing machine which has the snap to ride fast and the comfort to hold its speed

intuitive function in minutes, and its simplicity allows you to concentrate on everything else. Shimano's Dura-Ace Di2 does shift marginally faster, but the choice of wires or wireless, and overall cost is yours.

The bike is finished with a smattering of FSA components, the classy SL-K seatpost out back, and carbon-wrapped alloy stem

clamping FSA's Energy handlebar up front. Its compact shape is great, permitting the rider to pull tight in to the drops or relax on a descent, while not interfering with the wrists when the town sign sprint kicks off. Our only gripe is that even though it performs well, the bar is of a lower quality than we'd expect to see on a bike of this class. With its cultured frameset, and generally excellent specification, this Orca's overall weight of just 6.58kg confirms both its racing heritage and modern day credentials.

The latest Orca has transitioned into a road terrain-neutral all-rounder that'll satisfy anyone looking for a great bike to race or just enjoy covering ground rapidly on. Tyres and handlebar aside, it's a well-specced package, with no major elements that don't hold their own, and the frameset even has a lifetime warranty. So if you fancy something a little different from the norm, with culture and character in spades, the new Orca is well worth considering. □

GOLD STAR

The biggest ever day for an Orbea bike was when Samuel Sánchez, representing Spain, won the Olympic road race gold medal in a six-man sprint ahead of Davide Rebellin, Fabian Cancellara, Andy Schleck, Michael Rogers and Alexander Kolobnev. Sánchez was a rare non-Basque on his Euskaltel team. He was from Asturias, but having developed as a cyclist in the Basque Country, he was eligible for the team. He is still riding, these days for BMC, in his 18th season as a professional cyclist.

