



Tested by Andrew Juliano

Orbea Orca M20i2

When I first took the Orca M20i2 out of the box, I was a bit confused—it was a size 53 (I normally ride a 55) and came with a bold pink highlight across the top tube. “Did Orbea send me a women’s bike,” I pondered?

Out on the road, other cyclists must have thought the same thing. As I passed one rider a bit too close, my pink frame and unkempt hair caused him to holler, “Take it easy, cupcake!”

Being a man, this was my maiden receipt of misogynistic *assholery*, and in a confused rage I pedaled even harder. I realized it was difficult to tone it back on the redesigned Orbea Orca. The bike enjoys the stiffness and efficiency of a thoroughbred race bike with the reliable and stable handling of my trusty, custom ‘cross rig. This strange combination of characteristics comes in an even stranger looking package that dovetails a hodgepodge of tube shapes with tweaked geometries to deliver a bike that rides and feels oh so right.

The sizing is definitely worthy of note as the 53 cm test bike actually had a 54.85 cm top tube. However, the 385 mm reach and 552 mm stack adjust for the labeled sizing. The lower stack height stretches riders out a bit more and puts riders in a more aggressive position thus compensating for what seems to be a smaller size on paper. The wide size range, from 47 cm to 60 cm, makes the Orca available to a broad spectrum of rider dimensions.

Orbea reengineered the Orca for 2015, and the company claims the new model is lighter, stiffer and more energy efficient. The carbon layup is a blend of high-modulus fiber, for the stiffer portions of the frame (headtube, downtube, bottom bracket shell and chainstays), and lower modulus (seatstays, seat tube and toptube). The seatstays have been downsized as the diameter and cross section shrunk compared to last season. The square profile seat tube also reduces the amount of material, while a standard seat collar further shaves weight over last year’s aero version. The company also uses EPS molding in the carbon layup process, which they claim reduces variations in tube thickness and also reduces leftover material in the shaping process. The tube shapes of the bike combined with the carbon layup give the bike its improved ride characteristics. Though the bike is a race machine, the geometry and tube shapes provide a ride that’s not the feel of a pure competition bike.

The M20i2 comes with Shimano Ultegra brakes and an electronic drivetrain. The 50/34t chainring paired with the 11-28t cassette is a good all-around gearing for recreational riders or amateur cyclists. The 34x28 keeps the steepest climbs reasonable without terrorizing knee ligaments, while the 50x11 is suitable for all but the quickest of downhill, tailwind-assisted sprints. The Vision Trimax T30 Wheels are a decent set of training wheels, though they feel heavy at 1,570 grams. The wheels didn’t seem to do the bike justice. I swapped out the 23c Challenge Forte Race ►



tires immediately because the poorly maintained roads around our home spell flats and rough rides with such small tires. The wheels and tires were the first upgrade we made to the bike as a pair of Ritchey aluminum tubeless wheels and wider Schwalbe tires improved the performance of the bike for under \$1,000. At the very least, a larger more robust tire is suggested for the Orca. The frame and fork accommodate a 28c tire with ample clearance and the larger tires better stabilize the bike and complement the solid handling feel.

The relatively slacker 72.1-degree head angle (where most race rigs are around 73 degrees) and the 70 mm bottom bracket drop make the bike excellent on descents and through corners. It lacks the twitchy feeling of many other “race” bikes, which makes it far more stable on technical descents and courses. The stiffness and efficiency of the bike are other major highlights. The spectrum of tube shapes, from rectangular chainstays and tapering diamond downtube to a tapered headtube and flared fork, give the bike excellent stiffness. Out on the flats, the bike feels fast and efficient when pushing a large gear. The real demonstration of stiffness comes when attacking climbs in the big ring or sprinting for the line. The flex seems

insignificant and the bike truly shines when pushing hard on stout gear ratios. The 405 mm, oversized chainstays along with the oversized downtube and PF86 bottom bracket certainly help with this characteristic.

The bike climbed well on long, steep ascents—however the bike did not have the same excellent feel that it had during explosive moments or harder efforts. Still, the Orca makes it up steep climbs and the low 34x28 gearing provides ample mercy when getting to the top is more important than how fast you get there.

At \$5,199, the Orca M20i2 is a slightly above average value for a carbon race bike equipped with Ultegra Di2. A swap to the tires and wheels (in our opinion) is a necessity—however, the rest of the spec is dialed. Strong riders will especially appreciate the stiffness of the bike, while the forgiving and stable handling make this bike a blast to rip down and around any stretch of pavement—especially if you’re buzzing crusty, cupcake haters. **R**

orbea.com / \$5,199