

ROAD
TEST

HIGH IN FIBRE

We test six £1000-£1200 carbon fibre-framed bikes to see which affordable composite chassis is worth choosing







+ **↓** Below The Venon even gets the excellent SLR-EV brakes **Bottom** The Vitus frame has a very tidy look



The price has been dropped to deliver 11-speed 105 within spitting distance of £1000

VITUS VENON

£1079.99 > Can this Irish Rover set a new standard?

There's no escaping the fact that more of us are shopping online to get the best deals. And if your chosen website is doing a good job of getting you your spares and upgrades faster and cheaper than your local shop it's tempting to get your next complete bike by clicking a mouse. The Vitus Venon proves that could be a really smart move too.

Admittedly you can't judge frame quality online, but the component value offered here is self-explanatory. Like the Norco the price has been permanently dropped to deliver 11-speed Shimano 105

gears, chainset, cassette and shifters (the chain is KMC) within spitting distance of £1000. The excellent 105 SLR-EV brakes, Fulcrum's smooth-rolling Racing 7 wheels and impressive new Continental Grand Sport Race tyres in an up-to-date, rattle-quelling 25mm width round out the spec. You even get a carbon-shafted seatpost to reduce the buzz of the big diameter seat-tube.

The obvious potential downside of getting an online bike is that you'll be getting it delivered in a box rather than via the hopefully helpful set-up advice of your local shop. Chain Reaction pre-assembles all its bikes before shipping, though, and

SPECIFICATION

Weight 8.52kg (56cm)
Frame T700 HM UD carbon
Fork T700 HM UD carbon tapered
Gears Shimano 105 11-speed
Brakes Shimano 105
Wheels Fulcrum Racing 7
Finishing kit Vitus stem, bar, 31.6mm carbon seatpost and saddle, 25mm Continental Grand Sport Race tyres

straightening the bar reveals a really well-shaped bike. The head-tube is reasonably low and the seat-tube relatively steep, which creates a more committed and combative feel. It also puts plenty of weight onto the grippy Continental front tyre and, together with a stout head end and fork, makes the Venon a naturally encouraging playmate on steep and twisty terrain. The steeper seat-tube promotes powerful seated climbing, while the stout down-tube, seat-tube and chainstays – and broad top-tube – transfer torque well whether you're in the saddle or not. Add the second lowest weight on test, smaller steps between →



The Venon delivered a performance far beyond price expectations

HIGHS

Excellent chassis with outstanding kit selection for the money

LOWS

Not everyone will be confident enough to get a bike in a box

BUY IF

You can stretch your £1000 budget a bit and want an outstanding ride for your cash

gears and powerfully controlled brakes and you've got a bike that relishes challenging terrain whether you're going up or down.

Looking at the subtly curved seatstays and very shallow arched top-tube reveals the other side of the Venon's character. Together with carbon lay-up changes for 2015, the spring-form tubes create an impressively shock-shrugging, vibration-damping ride that's amplified by the extra cushioning from the 25mm tyres. Even the extra length of exposed carbon seatpost inherent in the compact frame design adds a suspension effect.

The Venon frame isn't just designed to make going the distance easy, it's got some obvious component longevity-boosting features too. Press-fit bottom brackets are getting more reliable with every evolution but you still can't beat a traditional Shimano

screw-in setup like the one in the Vitus for a quiet, trouble-free life. The rear brake cable is internalised but both gear lines are external for a more direct cable run and easier lubrication and servicing. Even the clamp-on – rather than riveted plate – front mech mount is a stronger solution in the long run.

The result is a bike that delivered a fast-but-friendly performance far beyond price expectations and was universally praised and thoroughly enjoyed by all our test team. It even held its own when, out of curiosity, we rode it alongside other test bikes costing three times the price.

THE VERDICT

Outstanding all-rounder that blows other budget bikes into the weeds



Also consider...



GOT MORE CASH?

VITUS VENON VR £1279.99

The same Venon frame and fork but with a Shimano 11-speed Ultegra groupset and Fulcrum Racing 5 wheels with red paint highlights.



ON A BUDGET?

VITUS ZENIUM VR DISC £944.99

The Zenium VR has a triple-butted alloy frame and Tektro Spyre disc brakes on Fulcrum Racing Sport Disc wheels for all-weather anchorage. →



WINNER

Vitus Venon > The price is Vitus

A round £1000 has always been a critical price point but now the dice are loaded even more heavily between success and failure on the four-figure borderline.

Increasingly advanced alloy frames are mounting a very real challenge to carbon fibre, especially if they're carrying a component advantage that costs too much to be combined with a carbon chassis. There's a real performance divide among components too: Shimano's outstanding 5800 series 105 11-speed gears, the same groupset's SLR-EV brakes and even different

tyres can make a big difference to control, confidence and ride quality.

No surprise then that with gears, tyres and brakes all counting against it, Raleigh's Criterium Elite is out of the running first. While both 13 (aero) and Lapierre (comfort) have distinctive advantages in some respects they can't compete with the best bikes here in terms of overall performance balance.

On that basis Boardman has done a typically excellent job with its Team Carbon bike, which handles with a great blend of efficiency and enthusiasm, turning in a powerful performance without being punishing on longer rides. If your

budget has to stay under £1000 then that leaves the Boardman the winner.

But Shimano's new 105 is so good that if there's any chance of stretching your budget it's worth it. Norco's Valence combines 22 gears with a really well-thought-out and detailed frame to deliver an impressively dynamic and enjoyable ride. With a cheaper price, 105 brakes, lighter weight and a great combination of confidence, comfort and responsiveness the Vitus Venon is a truly remarkable bike. A clear winner at this price, it also outguns many bikes we've ridden for double the money or more in terms of real-life performance. **PLUS**

The Valence delivers a well-thought-out frame and an impressively dynamic ride

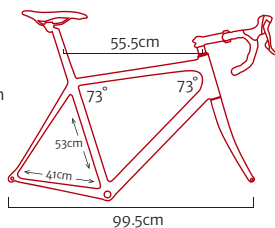
NEXT MONTH

Is steel really real? We ride the modern retro steel renaissance on £20,000 worth of premium road machines from gaudy Italian works of art to stripped back stainless piped UK brands to see what the oldest bike material really brings to the ride. Are steel frames really something special or just all show and no go? *Issue 304 is on sale 21 July 2015*

	BOARDMAN TEAM COMP £999.99 ★★★★★	13 INTUITION ALPHA CARBON £1000 ★★★★★	RALEIGH CRITERIUM ELITE £1000 ★★★★★	VITUS VENON £1079.99 ★★★★★	LAPIERRE SENSIUM 100 CP £1199.99 ★★★★★	NORCO VALENCE 105 £1200 ★★★★★
Size tested	M	54cm	54cm	56cm	M	56cm
Sizes available	XS, S, M, L, XL	51, 54, 56, 58cm	49, 52, 54, 56, 58cm	49, 52, 55, 58, 61cm	XS, S, M, L, XL	48, 51, 53, 56, 58, 61cm
Weight	8.91kg	8.49kg	8.87kg	8.52kg	8.73kg	8.7kg
Frame	Toray T700 carbon	Aero UD carbon	Endurance blend monocoque carbon	T700 HM UD carbon	Sensium carbon	Mid-modulus carbon
Fork	UD carbon, tapered	Aero UD carbon	Criterion carbon composite	T700 HM UD carbon, tapered	Sensium carbon, tapered	Mid-modulus carbon
Frame alignment	Head-tube and fork dropouts good, rear dropout perfect	All perfect	Head-tube good, fork and rear dropouts good	Head-tube good, fork and rear dropouts perfect	Head-tube and rear dropouts good, fork dropout perfect	All perfect
TRANSMISSION						
Chainset	FSA Gossamer Pro BB30, 50/34	FSA Gossamer Pro BB30, 50/34	Shimano Sora, 50/34	Shimano 105, 50/34	Shimano Tiagra, 50/34	Shimano RS500, 50/34
Bottom bracket	FSA PF30	FSA PF30	FSA	Shimano 105	FSA PF30	Shimano press-fit
Cassette	Shimano Tiagra CS4600 11-28T	Shimano Tiagra CS4600 11-28T	SRAM 930 11-28T	Shimano 105 11-28T	Shimano Tiagra CS4600 11-28T	Shimano 105 11-32T
Chain	KMC X10	KMC X10	KMC X10	KMC X11L	Shimano Tiagra HG4600	Shimano 105
Derailleurs	Shimano Tiagra front, 105 rear	Shimano Tiagra	Shimano Sora	Shimano 105	Shimano Tiagra	Shimano 105
Gear levers	Shimano Tiagra 10-speed	Shimano Tiagra 10-speed	Shimano Sora 9-speed	Shimano 105 11-speed	Shimano Tiagra 10-speed	Shimano 105 11-speed
WHEELS						
Front and rear	Mavic CXP22	13RS Aero	RSP AC2.0	Fulcrum Racing 7	Shimano WHR501	Shimano RS010
Tyres	Continental Ultra Sport II, 25mm	Vittoria Zaffiro III, 23mm	Schwalbe Lugano, 25mm	Continental Grand Sport Race, 25mm	Hutchinson Equinox 2, 25mm	Continental Ultra Sport II, 25mm
Wheel weight	F 1.36kg R 1.98kg	F 1.26kg R 1.84kg	F 1.43kg R 1.94kg	F 1.39kg R 1.8kg	F 1.4kg R 1.98kg	F 1.38kg R 1.97kg
COMPONENTS						
Stem	Boardman, 110mm	13RS, 110mm	RSP Alloy, 90mm	Vitus, 110mm	Ritchey 4 Axis, 110mm	Norco, 100mm
Handlebar	Boardman E4P, 420mm	13RS, 420mm	RSP, 420mm	Vitus, 420mm	Ritchey Comp Curve, 420mm	Ritchey Comp Curve, 420mm
Headset	FSA Orbit tapered	FSA Orbit tapered	FSA Orbit tapered	Token tapered	FSA Orbit tapered	Cane Creek 10 series
Saddle	Boardman	13RS	RSP	Vitus	Selle Italia X1	Norco
Seatpost	Boardman, 31.6mm	13RS, 27.2mm	RSP, 31.6mm	Vitus, carbon, 31.6mm	Ritchey two-bolt, 27.2mm	Norco, composite, 27.2mm
Brakes	Tektro R540	TRP T822/820	RSP	Shimano 105	Shimano Tiagra	Tektro R525

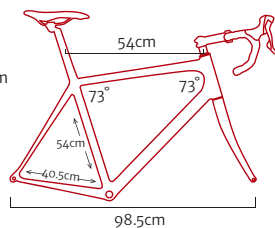
Boardman

Cockpit 70cm
Standover 77cm
BB height 27.5cm
Fork offset 5cm
Trail 5.2cm



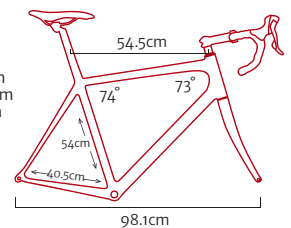
13

Cockpit 69.5cm
Standover 78.5cm
BB height 27cm
Fork offset 4cm
Trail 6.2cm



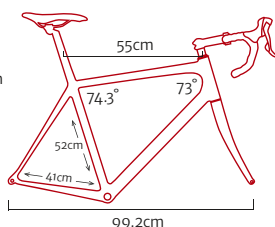
Raleigh

Cockpit 69cm
Standover 75cm
BB height 27.5cm
Fork offset 4cm
Trail 6.2cm



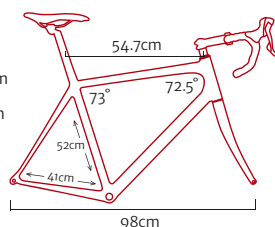
Vitus

Cockpit 53cm
Standover 75.5cm
BB height 27.5cm
Fork offset 5cm
Trail 5.2cm



Lapierre

Cockpit 68cm
Standover 75.5cm
BB height 27cm
Fork offset 4.5cm
Trail 6cm



Norco

Cockpit 68.5cm
Standover 77.7cm
BB height 27cm
Fork offset 5cm
Trail 5.5cm

