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If there's one thing that divides cycling opinion even more than road disc brakes and Bradley Wiggins's tattoos, it's electronic shifting.

Wiggo's tats are obviously here to stay; disc brakes are already hugely popular with amateurs and are to be trialled in the professional peloton next year, but what about electronic shifting? Although the vast majority of professionals have abandoned mechanical shifting in favour of Shimano's Di2 system and Campagnolo's EPS equivalent (SRAM doesn't have a production electronic groupset quite yet), it seems that six years after Di2 was launched, the every-day cyclist remains to be convinced. It's expensive, heavier, impossible to fix yourself and doesn't make a measurable difference to your performance — those are the most common objections to electronic shifting. So is there

really any need for it outside of pro racing?

To try to answer this question, we've got three bikes built for different purposes each equipped with Shimano's Ultegra Di2 groupset — the commonest and most affordable electronic system, the one that was intended to bring electronic shifting to the people.

At the time of writing, Ultegra Di2's RRP of £1,999 had been slashed to £899 for the entire group, including crankset, brakes, cassette and chain on Chain Reaction's website. So perhaps it's not surprising that the online giant has put together what could well be the most competitive — in terms of both price and performance — Di2 bike available this year. Chain Reaction sponsors the An Post Pro Continental-ranked squad, and the Vitesse has been developed with and for the team riders. For a penny under £2,400, you get the carbon Vitesse frame with the coveted UCI-approved sticker on

it, plus the whole Ultegra Di2 11-speed groupset and Fulcrum Racing Quattro wheels.

Trek's Domane, as ridden by the greatest Classics rider of his generation, Fabian Cancellara, needs no introduction. With a patented 'decoupler' at the seat tube/top tube juncture that works like micro-suspension, this is a bike built for challenging roads. Is the Domane 5.9, paired with Ultegra Di2 and sold for £3,300, the ultimate sportive bike?

Genesis's stainless steel Volare throws something of a curveball into this test. It's really quite novel, and very cool, to create a skinny-tubed, retro-looking frame (in fact it's anything but old fashioned) that's Di2-specific. Distributor Madison, the parent company of Genesis, also has considerable buying power, so £3,399.99 is a relatively low price for such a unique machine made from expensive materials and produced in relatively small numbers.



Battery

The latest Di2 battery is stick-shaped and designed to fit inside a round seatpost, held in with a plug. Shimano also sells the older-style external battery that has its own mount and can be fitted anywhere — under the BB is a favourite. Shimano estimates the battery will last 2,000km between charges, but obviously it depends how often you change gear.

Vitus Vitesse EVO VRi £2,339.99

Shimano Ultegra Di2 6870

The latest version of electronic Ultegra is 11-speed and is fitted to all three bikes in this test. It includes specific shifters and derailleurs and requires a Di2-ready frame with entry and exit ports for wires rather than (or as well as) cables. Some frames are both mechanical and Di2-compatible.

£2,000-£3,000 What to expect

- Di2-ready frame
- Full Ultegra Di2 groupset
- Reasonably good wheels
- Own-brand finishing kit

Vitus Vitesse EVO VRI £2,339.99

All-new carbon machine with race pedigree

Vitus bikes have been back in circulation since 2011, when the formerly French brand was relaunched as Chain Reaction Cycles's house brand. Eighties Irish superstar Sean Kelly took the majority of his wins on board bikes built by Vitus, but Vitus went on to spend a couple of decades in the doldrums until Chain Reaction acquired it. Getting Kelly back on board as brand ambassador was a smart move. Probably just as smart was taking over bike sponsorship of the Pro Continental An Post team that Kelly set up in 2006 to help up-and-coming Irish riders compete in Europe — and that's where the Vitesse comes in.

The flagship Vitus model was built to be raced in Belgium, where the team is based, including over cobbles, but it also had to be suitable for Chain Reaction customers to ride.

Frameset

The 2015 Vitesse EVO is exactly the same frame that the team rides — and sports the UCI accreditation sticker to prove it. It is competitively light — 860g for the size 54cm, according to Chain Reaction. It is made from unidirectional high-modulus Toray T700 carbon, meaning that the fibres can be oriented to improve stiffness or comfort in specific areas of the frame.

The An Post squad wanted a bike that was stiff under power, so the Vitesse is built around an oversized BB386 bottom bracket shell. The beam-like down tube is the full 68mm wide at the cranks. As is generally standard in race bikes, it has a tapered head tube that houses a full carbon fork made from the same T700 carbon.

All the models in the Vitesse EVO range are Di2-compatible, but interestingly the team itself rides mechanical Dura-Ace.

Why don't they ride Di2? Chain Reaction's Simon Corder explains: "It adds a little bit of weight, and secondly Dura-Ace mechanical is so nice now that there's not much between Di2 and mechanical, in their minds. Mechanics in the An Post squad prefer mechanical bikes so they can strip everything down and make sure it's all fresh for every race. The guys do have the option — some of them in previous seasons have opted for Di2. Maybe next year we'll make a decision and everyone will be on Di2, but... we'll see."

Components

Ultegra Di2 is here in its entirety — including the crankset (52/36t) and brake calipers. The junction box is mounted in the usual place under the stem and the Di2 wire enters the down tube through the left-hand port, with the right-hand one plugged. With the rear brake cable also internally routed, the overall impression is of sleek unclutteredness.

The handlebar and stem are Vitus-branded aluminium and the seatpost, which houses the Di2 battery, is FSA SL-K. the Prologo Scratch Pro saddle is a good, neutral shape.

Wheelset

Fulcrum Racing Quattros are good mid-range clincher wheels with an RRP of £299.99 (Chain Reaction discounts them to £192.99). They're aluminium and feature a 35mm aero rim section. Inevitably that means they're not the





Di2 EXPLAINER

How long does the battery last?

It's hard to say exactly how many shifts the battery will support, but it can go months without being charged. To check its status, there's an indicator light on the side of the junction box under the stem that displays green or red lights, solid or flashing, depending on how much life the battery has. If it goes, the front derailleurs stop first. If both go, it's possible to move the rear derailleurs by hand to a suitable sprocket to get you home.



Integrated Di2 provides slick shifting

lightest available, with a claimed weight of 1,950g, but they're stiff, aerodynamic and have red anodised spoke nipples that match the Vitesse's graphics, creating a coherent look.

The Continental Ultra Sport tyres are from the lower end of the German company's tyre range and could be upgraded to something like the Continental GP4000 for better performance and ride feel.

Riding

The Vitesse frame and Di2 are made for each other. The snappiness of the lightweight carbon frame is enhanced by the smooth, precise electronic shifts. The big, hollow tubes amplify the sound of the chain engaging with the next sprocket, which enhances the thrill of changing gear at the touch of a button.

The Vitesse is everything a good carbon frame ought to be. The balance between stiffness and comfort is excellent, and the geometry is spot-on. With the steerer uncut and 4cm of spacers under the stem, there's enough effective stack height to achieve a more MAMIL-friendly, all-day riding position, but if the steerer is cut and the stem slammed you've got a real UCI-stickered race bike on your hands. Chain Reaction has achieved its aim of creating a genuine race bike that can be ridden by Joe Public too — though it's unusual that the Di2 version is specced for the public while the pro team rides a flagship mechanical version.

Specification

Frameset UD HM T700 carbon-fibre
Gears Shimano Ultegra Di2
Chainset Shimano Ultegra 52/36
Brakes Shimano Ultegra
Wheels Fulcrum Racing Quattro
Tyres Continental Ultra Sport II
Handlebar Vitus alloy
Stem Vitus alloy
Saddle Prologo Scratch Pro
Seatpost FSA SL-K
Size range 49-62cm
Weight 8.0kg/17.6lb
www.vitusbikes.com

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|-----------------------|---------------|
| SPECIFICATION LEVEL | 18/20 |
| BUILD QUALITY | 18/20 |
| ROAD HANDLING | 19/20 |
| RIDE COMFORT | 18/20 |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | 19/20 |
| OVERALL RATING | 92/100 |

A toute Vitesse

To Di2 or not to Di2 — that is the question. Each of these three bikes provides a slightly different setting for Ultegra Di2 which is, as we've noted, the 'entry level' electronic groupset.

With the Volare Stainless, Genesis has shown that electronic shifting needn't be limited to super-light carbon-fibre race bikes fit for the Tour de France. Pairing a modern steel frame with Di2 is a masterstroke — and a talking point — and the Volare is without a doubt the most appealingly idiosyncratic bike here.

Compared with carbon, steel is at a weight disadvantage before you even start building the frame, and therefore there are limits to what can be achieved with it. However, cyclists who buy steel frames are generally not looking for ultimate performance above everything else — they want something a little different, something that tips its hat to tradition, perhaps, a classic that marks them out as more discerning. So if you're prepared to accept that your bike will be at least a kilo heavier than a similarly priced carbon bike, the Volare Stainless is an excellent long-term purchase.

Trek's special one

The Trek Domane is an incredibly sophisticated bike. In a world of 'me too' bike designing, it stands out as a genuine original. It's easy to be sceptical about its IsoSpeed decoupler micro-suspension system, but it's an ingenious and well executed piece of engineering that actually works. The geometry may not be for everyone — especially if you like a lower, racier front end, but for sportive riders it's all their Christmases come at once. Di2 shifting only enhances this.

For ride quality the Domane would win the test but, as we're focusing on its




application of Di2 too, it doesn't score as highly for spec as it might have. It's disappointing that it doesn't have the neater, more sophisticated internal-battery and stem-mounted junction box with the integrated charging port that connects it to a PC. We asked Trek about this and it is certainly feasible to use the stick-shaped internal battery with the Domane's seat cap/IsoSpeed seat tube, so it's possible that in the future the 5.9 will use this version.

However, Trek has abandoned the concept of the 'model year', releasing new products at the most suitable time rather than just before the Eurobike show, so it's difficult to say if and when this might happen. However, it's worth noting that regardless of battery location and front junction box functionality, the shifting itself is exactly the same — brilliant.

Vitus has done a super job with the new Vitesse EVO, for which Chain Reaction has created a brand new mould rather than opting for an 'open mould' design (i.e. one used by other brands). It is already race-proven — it won both Irish national championships in 2014 and got plenty of TV coverage later in the year when An Post's Mark McNally won the King of the Mountains competition in the Tour of Britain.

“The Vitus is a great-riding bike and, provided you can ignore the dull paint scheme, represents the best value”



| VITUS VITESSE EVO VRI £2,339.99 | GENESIS VOLARE STAINLESS £3,399.99 | TREK DOMANE 5.9 £3,300 |
|--|---|---|
|  92 / ₁₀₀ |  90 / ₁₀₀ |  91 / ₁₀₀ |
| Spot-on... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Racy-fast ■ Good spec ■ Great price | Spot-on... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Feel of steel ■ Aesthetics ■ Di2 integration | Spot-on... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Game-changing plushness ■ Lightest on test ■ Innovative features |
| Near-miss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Boring colour scheme | Near-miss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Overall a bit heavy | Near-miss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ External Di2 battery |

The Di2 Vitesse EVO is the exact same frame that the team ride — all models are both mechanical and Di2-compatible — but the classic shamrock green is reserved for the actual team model with mechanical Dura-Ace. The black, red and white is slightly underwhelming — the magnolia of bike colourways — so we had to deduct a couple of points from the build quality score to reflect this. That said, this is down to personal preference and of course it's sensible to go with a neutral scheme if you want to keep the resale value as high as possible (be it house or bike).

The Vitus EVO VRI is a great-riding bike, but it's what you get for the money that clinches it. At nearly £1,000 cheaper than the other two, it arguably offers the best price to performance ratio of any Di2 bike this year.