

Epoca R60

£8,200

In a parallel universe where the UCI sticker hasn't been invented and labour is not cheaper in the Far East, this is the bike professional cyclists would be riding

Words Simon Smythe Photos Chris Catchpole, Daniel Gould



Epoca is a new Anglo-Italian joint venture specialising in custom frames handmade in Italy. Although the Epoca name is new, there's a traditional Italian family business behind it that has been making bicycle frames in the Veneto region since 1952 as a 'terzista' for other companies.

Frames built by Valentino Stocchero's factory, La Ver Mec srl, which was set up by his father-in-law Mario Bittante, have also been ridden badged as team sponsors' machines in all three Grand Tours.

The business employed 40 people at its peak but — like many Italian specialist factories — had been in decline since 2003 after the big European brands moved production to the Far East. In 2011, when the UCI approval sticker was introduced as a requirement for bikes ridden in its races, there was no longer even the possibility to make custom frames for pros.

Stocchero was ready to close the factory doors before a chance encounter in 2014 with the team behind Viner and most recently Legend's custom frame-building programme.

"My colleague Ali bumped into somebody in Umbria who had one of [Stocchero's] frames," says Epoca's Peter Cole. "He said, 'where did you get that?'"

So we went to see Valentino.

"Valentino had heard of us, which was nice. He'd heard what we'd done with Legend. We created a joint venture company between us to develop Epoca. We agreed on a strategy and it's taken us nearly two years to get to a point where we're ready to launch it."

Frameset

Epoca offers three carbon frames with the R60 at the top of the range. Not only is every tube made to measure and made to order in Italy but the lay-up in each tube is manipulated to suit the customer's weight and riding style.

"The 60 is very much the pinnacle of what we can do with the tubing," says Cole.

The moulds for each tube are Epoca's property. There is no Asian-style monocoque construction since no stock sizes are offered. Each tube is mitred and 'wrapped' to the next using up to 160 pieces of pre-preg carbon.

"The individual handmade joints are effectively tailored because they all have to have their own position when they're applied," says Cole. "And they've also got their own shape." 122

RIGHT: Miche brakes stand out from the usual suspects
BELOW: Clean looks of Deda bars and stem. Sticker says 'Made by hand in Rosa, Veneto, Italy'

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SPECIFICATION

Frame R60 custom carbon
Fork R60 full carbon
Gears Shimano Dura-Ace 9000
Brakes Miche Supertype
Chainset Miche Supertype
Wheels Miche Supertype 358 RS
Tyres Vittoria Corsa CX 23mm
Bars Deda Zero 100
Stem Deda Zero 100
Saddle San Marco Concor
Seatpost Thecno integrated
Sizes custom
Weight 7.0kg/15.6lb
Cost £8,200
www.artisancycles.co.uk

A local autoclave is used meaning the entire frame is made in the Veneto region — a matter of pride for Stocchero.

The R60 is finished by hand too — a time-consuming process since Europeans cannot use the banned products that the Asian factories use.

“What they use in Asia doesn’t meet EU environmental laws,” explains Cole, but they are very good, effectively sealing the frame. It means we have to rub it down, put a primer on, let it sit and rub it down again. Because unless you use a product which is really heavy, really thick, which does a similar job to the banned product, it adds 200g to the frame.”

The benchmark weight for the R60 is just over a kilo, varying slightly according to size. Epoca can make an 800g frame if required, but it has to be an R30,

BELOW: Miche chainset with grey anodised rings. Extended seat tube has post with 6cm of adjustment



Outstanding

The Italian handbuilt renaissance

It's not just design flair or quality of finish that has always made Italian bikes so desirable — passione always been such an important ingredient in bikes from the bel paese.

The Italian cycle industry is full of heroic characters and real-life epics. A broken leg ended Ernesto Colnago's racing career but as a young mechanic he solved a problem with the great champion Fiorenzo Magni's cranks and so took his first step towards becoming a famous framebuilder.

Virtually every Italian artisan has a similar story, but with the majority of Italian bikes now produced in the Far East in anonymous factories by indifferent and poorly paid workers —

with the Colnago C60 a notable exception — it's difficult to detect the heritage in them no matter how high tech they are.

This explains the renewal of interest in custom frames by the likes of Sarto, Legend and Epoca — Italian framebuilders with superior levels of expertise and decades of experience, who found themselves in the wilderness after the big brands they worked for as 'terzistas' moved production to the Far East, but who are now making high-end frames under their own names. All three offer custom frames made in any of the principal frame materials.

Are we about to see a renaissance of Italian handbuilt frames? Epoca's Peter Cole, who is himself half Italian, says: "A

few of those Italian brands who have known that we set this up have come hurrying back to at least make one frame. Effectively what happens is that you lose capacity [if you don't produce in Italy any more]. So they're trying to keep their hand in by just having one frame made here."

Of course £4K for a frameset is not within everyone's budget, but there are people willing to invest in what will not only give them their fix of Veneto heritage but will also undoubtedly be the best bike they've ever ridden since every element will have been made especially for them.

"Even before we launched we had sold 70 bikes," says Cole.

which doesn't have the aero-profiled tubing.

"We make everything ourselves, so if somebody asks for something different, within reason we can do it," says Cole.

All paint — custom of course, but with stock schemes also available — is done in house.

Components

Epoca distributor Artisan Cycles can build a bike exactly to the customer's requirements.

This R60 is specced with Miche's Supertype 11-speed groupset, with mechanical Dura-Ace shifters and derailleurs — though of course the R60 frame is Di2 ready.

In weight, materials and engineering Supertype is on a par with the other groupset manufacturers' flagship components. The distinctive-looking

chainrings and sprockets are grey anodised for harder wearing. The forged alloy calipers use titanium bolts to save weight.

The integrated seatpost has +/- 6cm of adjustment — a sensible move even though the frame is made to measure.

Wheelset

The Miche Supertype 358RS wheels are aerodynamic and lightweight at a claimed 1,215g. As pure race wheels they are only available for tubular tyres.

The front has a rim height of 38mm while the rear is deeper at 58mm — the idea being that a shallower front makes for better handling in crosswinds.

The straight-pull Sapim spokes (18 front and 24 rear) are super skinny, helping the wheelset achieve that very impressive low weight. **END**

ABOVE: Frame spars are lovingly finished by hand. Bottle cage made in Italy, naturally