

Robert Millar enjoys riding the Tommasini Carbo Plus so much he's even prepared to give daytime TV a miss...



Comfort and Joy

This is the type of bike that epitomises why I do testing for your favourite magazine. It's what I imagined when I began doing this malarkey that I would or should be riding every month: something exotic, something exciting and something with some kind of pedigree. I expected the professional cyclist's steed, not something which gets thrown out to the superstore in batches of thousands. As good as some of those machines may be, they don't exactly inspire you to go out in the wet on a semi-dark winter's day for no other reason than you fancy a spin to cheer you up.

But this Tommasini is the kind of machine you ride not because you have to; not just to do some training because your schedule told you so or because you ate too much chocolate the night before and felt guilty; but simply because you fancy a bit of fun, and need to feel a little excitement. This bike provides all the sensations that make cycling so addictive. I found myself out riding on grey slimy days when, had anything else been hanging on the hook in the garage ready for the *pro*cycling test,

'This bike provides all the sensations that make cycling so addictive... you ride it when you fancy a bit of fun'





Bike Test

'This is the kind of machine you ride not because you have to; but simply because you fancy a bit of fun, and need to feel a little excitement'

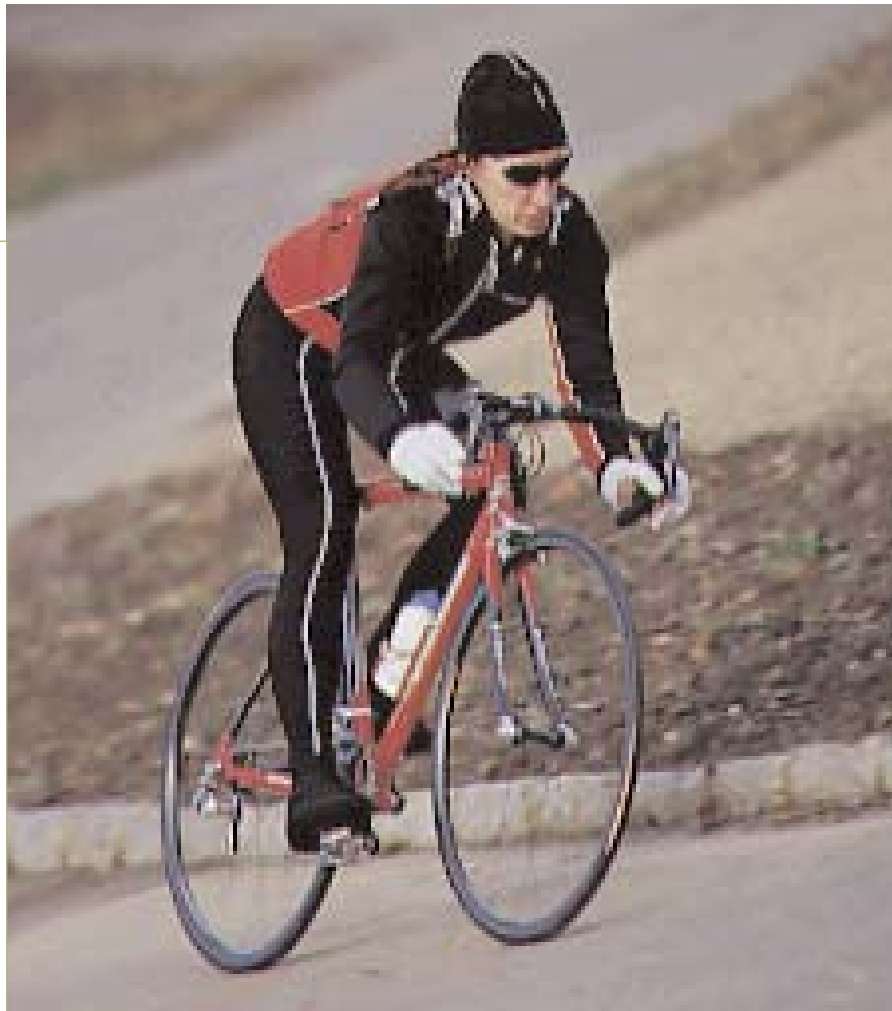
I would have been watching the afternoon soaps on daytime TV.

Built from Columbus Custom Bell Multishaped Airplane tubing designed by Tommasini, the frame combines some of the most bizarre shaped pieces you'll come across. Only the seat and head tubes are of the classical round form: everything else is a mix of bell shaped (hence the name) and curves in all directions. The *de rigueur* carbon monostay doesn't escape this treatment either. Normally just straight and round, here it gets grooves and scoops to match the wishbone shaped chainstays below. Everywhere on the frame there are deft little touches to add to the visual pleasure; cutout ends, little badges in the forks and immaculately applied welding mean you can see the quality before turning a pedal.

Judging by the number of times Tommasini gets a mention on the frame, you couldn't be anywhere else but on an Italian bike. The only fault in the whole presentation came down to the edges of the Columbus tubing decals turning up at the corners. Shame on them not being under the top lacquer but hey, it's two dabs of superglue or five minutes with the hairdryer taking them off altogether. The paint itself is shiny, shiny, shiny.

To go with the classy tubing you get Campagnolo's latest carbonfest groupset which makes the Record collection *the* equipment to have. Lighter than ever and slicker than before, the improvements make you wonder if there is any way forward from this level of excellence. I was briefly disappointed – for about five seconds – not to see the 2002 Record carbon crankset. But the full-speed-ahead carbon jobbies in their place hardly merit a squeak (never mind a moan) and they are colour coordinated with the frame colours too. Such is their beauty, it seems a shame to rub thick winter overshoes against them. I wouldn't mind a set of these to pose with.

Another thing going onto the Santa Claus wanted list are the Hyperon wheels. Exclusively for tubulars due to the carbon rim, the carbon



hubbed, black alloy spoked hoops are wonderfully lively and responsive. Who said in last month's *pro cycling* that they don't seem much for the money? They are beautiful to look at, beautiful to use and I wouldn't be surprised to see them replace the Mavic Kysirium as the wheel of choice for those who can run tubulars in the competitive situation. Twenty-two spokes at the front, twenty-four at the rear, offset rear rim to balance the spoke tension. They need special soft brake blocks like the red Corimas used on the test bike, but the hassle of glueing tyres on is more than compensated for by the quality of the ride and the rigidity provided.

I rode the Tommasini on more wet than dry days and the braking surfaces remained





immaculate and score-free, but I wasn't once frightened by that no-brakes feeling you sometimes get near the bottom of a wet descent. In the dry you get a cool whistling from the rims when you pull on the levers, like when a turbine slows down. I didn't try smacking the Hyperons down a few holes to test the impact strength of the little carbon rims, like I usually do with test stuff: these aren't everyday every-bump-in-the-surface wheels. They are proper race wheels; and the demand for respect oozes from them.

You might be getting the feeling by now that I liked this bike and you wouldn't be wrong. As

perky as a young puppy, the Tommasini is a joy to be on board. It responds directly to your commands, steers with confidence and manages to encourage you to try just a little bit harder, which is always the sign of a nice bike. The integral headtube and carbon fork assembly at the front of the bike does everything you need to remain comfortable and in control. It takes just enough bite out of the shocks whilst remaining sharp enough to let you take liberties going into corners. A nice level of feedback from the tyres lets you know when to back off or fall off, but the confidence it gives to you as a rider quickly has you pushing the envelope just a little bit more. The rear triangle gets on

with keeping the rough surfaces tingling under reasonable levels and stays composed enough when it has to deal with out of the saddle or sprinting. It's not as comfortable as a full carbon frame but it is better than oversized aluminium tubing. The main frame feels capable of absorbing more power than you'll need to get the top gear spinning nicely.

It's not a chunky bike in nature – it only weighs 7.0kg – but it always feels stiff and responsive and everything remains composed under pressure. The 42mm downtube is apparently installed to deal with the demands of riders over 75kg, so my puny weight isn't going to stress it at all. **D**

TOMMASINI CARBO PLUS



'As perky as a young puppy, the Tommasini is a joy to be on board, it responds directly to your commands steers with confidence and manages to encourage you to try just a little bit harder'

SPECIFICATION:

FRAME: Columbus Custom Bell Multishaped Airplane
FORK: Tommasini FKT5S integral
GROUPSET: Campagnolo Record
BAR: 3TTT Zepp 440mm
STEM: 3TTT Zepp XL 120mm
SADDLE: Selle Italia Flite titanium
SEATPIN: Campag Record carbon
WHEELS: Campag Hyperon carbon
TYRES: Vittoria Corsa CX tubulars
VARIATIONS: FSA carbon crankset 175mm, FSA chainrings 53-39, Corima cork brake blocks, Campag 12-25 titanium cassette, Tommasini bottlecage.

DIMENSIONS:

SEAT TUBE: 525mm
TOP TUBE: 550mm
WHEELBASE: 985mm
FRONT CENTRES: 585mm
REAR CHAINSTAYS: 406mm
FORK RAKE: 42mm
WEIGHT: 7.0kg

Seat angle: 73.3
Head tube: 74

PRICE:

FRAME + FORK: \$1,799/£1,199

CONTACT:

UK: 01323 811499
US: 512 847 5797
Website: www.tommasini.it

CONCLUSION

Tommasini was a name I'd heard of but I wasn't quite sure where, when or why. Just sounding Italian and being rare isn't always a formula for making good bikes so the Carbo Plus comes as a nice surprise. This is a seriously nice bike to use. It's everything you'll want from a race bike and serves up every reason why I cycle. Lively, encouraging, direct and responsive it made me look forward to riding on days and in conditions when even the best in red tinted eyewear couldn't persuade most people to leave the warmth of the sofa. I wouldn't mind trying the lighter all-alloy under 7.5kg version now – and I don't normally have desires like that.

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