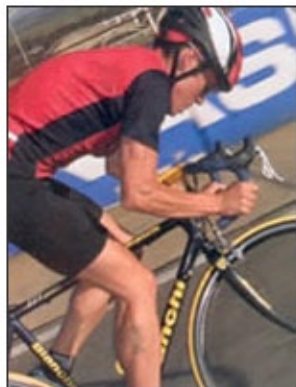


Bianchi M-Alloy Pro

Ratings	
Bike	
Frame	7.0
Fork	7.75
Wheels	9.25
Groupset	7.75
Components	8.25
Looks	6.75
Weight	6.5
Value	8.5
Performance	
Climbing	7.5
Descending	8.25
Cornering	7.75
Sprinting	7.75
TOTAL AVE 7.75	



Weighing in at an even 10Kg, the Bianchi was the heaviest bike on test. However, it was also the cheapest, actually coming in at under R18 000. Made from 7005 aluminium, this was the only bike on test with a sloping top tube. The 3cm slope is hardly noticeable at a glance but adds bite to aggressive racing angles. The Bianchi proved a touch sluggish on the climbs (compared to its test rivals), which we suspect was weight related. For another R1 500 you can upgrade to the lighter SL model frame that the HSBC team has been perched on for the past two years.

Thoughts of a slightly retarded response time were soon erased by the Bianchi's stability which was most noticeable in the corners where it felt like it was on rails - the Vittoria Kevlar tyres no doubt played a role in this.

Fitted with a Campagnolo Centaur groupset and specced with Bianchi Elevation 16-spoke wheels the Bianchi was unanimously voted as the best value-for-money machine on test. Riders over 100kg can get the 24-spoke version of the rear wheel for added strength. In recent years, Bianchi has branched out from its classic celeste blue/green colour frame that has been ridden to success by famous names like Marco Pantani, Gianni Bugno, Moreno Argentin, Felice Gimondi and Fausto Coppi. Our test stallion was a very deep blue (almost black) single-tone colour with mustard yellow decals, complemented by a similar yellow-colour bottle cage, stem and tyres.

There are two Bianchi catalogues at Bianchi headquarters in Italy. One offers cheaper bikes, mass produced in the East - mostly low-end mountain bikes and BMX bikes. The other catalogue offers 'thoroughbred', high-end road and mountain bikes manufactured at the Bianchi factory in Treviso, Italy.



Only high-end Bianchi frames, manufactured in Italy, have been imported to South Africa in the past six years. Edaardo Bianchi became involved in bicycle manufacture in 1885 establishing Bianchi one of the oldest bicycle brands and one which played a role in the development of the bicycle as we know it today. According to the official Bianchi website (www.bianchi.com) Bianchi introduced small wheels to the big wooden framed bikes in 1885 and as the 20th century rolled around, he added the chain-transmission, the front brake and the frame designed for the soldiers of the 1st World War, a bike regarded as the ancestor of the modern mountain bike.



Verdict:

Best value for money bike on test. Although not the lightest, the Bianchi boasted the best wheelset. The next frame up, the SL, would have compared better to the other bikes on test and would have still had the Bianchi in our specified price range.