



A surprisingly capable newcomer

As with any newcomer to the South African market, the announcement of Cabal's different way of tackling the super-picky road bike market was met with quiet scepticism in the *Ride* office.

Gradually, though, as we dealt with the company founder Jon Colledge a little more, we got an inkling we might like what the company is up to.

Jon comes from a racing background, battling the roads of the Western Cape as a younger man before the real world caught up and he got a proper job. Having extricated himself from that after a decade and a half of success, he decided to channel his business savvy into something a little closer to his heart than oversize vehicle tyres: road bikes. An interesting move: the South African market is not short of these, at any price point. So how would Cabal be different?

As a rider, Jon understands that a poor-fitting bike is a handicap, no matter how much money you have thrown at it. You are far better off on a cheapie that has been set up for your particular needs. Secondly, price is really important, and Cabal was not going to be a boutique brand in the flash-your-cash sense. An affordable bike, personalised with first-class service and attention to detail. Unashamedly imported from a reputable, 'open mould' Chinese manufacturer in Cabal livery, with no middle-men to pay as the bikes are only available direct from Cabal itself. The open source nature of this (a better description than open mould) lets Cabal, and others, determine the grades of carbon fibre, resin and manufacturing protocols in a non-proprietary mould. So you don't pay for hundreds of thousand of rand in development costs, but quality is assured with regular inspections at the reputable supplier Cabal uses.

Interesting. But how would it all work out? The first thing Jon does is send you to a bike fitter (as part of the cost of the bike) so that he can spec frame size, bar width, stem length and crank length with absolute certainty. Once all of that is together and built up, it is back to the fitter (we went to Debbie Stopforth at the Constantia Uitsig bike park) for the full hour-long fitting session that factors in age, cycling history, ailments and injuries, as well as what you intend to do on the bike, to arrive at the most comfortable, powerful position for you.

We wheeled the bike out for its first pedal strokes in anger on a five-day road bike tour with Daytrippers, from Jeffrey's Bay to Gordon's Bay; 500km in total, in pouring rain and 45-degree heat as the weather gods got seriously confused. Our route took in the magnificent Bloukrans and Grootbos Passes near Nature's Valley, both ways over the Outeniqua Pass outside George and a whole lot of rolling stuff in between (www.daytrippers.com, look for the Cape Buildup – it is a wonderful adventure with great people). A perfect test, even though you should ease into a new bike...

THE LOOK

What a good looking machine the Ascent is. The cream paint is highlighted with teal-to-yellow pinstriping and subtle decals. Nothing garish, just class. Even the bike snobs in our circle have commented on how genteel it looks. The thin seat stays play off against the oversize BB and chainstays, with the square downtube reminiscent of early Cervelos. The hidden seat post bolt allows for a clean look around the junction with the seat tube. Internal cabling, which is all ready for electronic shifting if that is your desire, keeps things neat and tidy. It does, however, look much better when spotlessly clean, a challenge in the water-restricted Cape. This is definitely a bike for the neat freaks. We loved, too, the older school almost-horizontal top tube. This

really does look the part, this race bike.

THE SPEC

Our test model came with a full SRAM Force 22 groupset, but you can spec it with SRAM Rival for five grand less, or with Shimano Ultegra for four grand more. We were more than happy with the Force; it came with a 50/36 chainset and an 11-26 on the back, which was more than sufficient a range for tired legs up and down both sides of the 10km Outeniqua Pass. The Zipp Service Course bars and stem are firm favourites – we do love a light aluminium set up, which you can just fit and forget. The seatpost is a proprietary one, and this is the only thing we struggled with, as the integrated bit in the frame that holds the post in position gave us some grief, slipping regularly until we took it all apart, cleaned it and refitted. This is not a criticism of anything on the Cabal side, sometimes stuff comes from the factory not quite right. It was easily sorted,

once we had ridden 15km to the next Allen key, at the end of a 156km day... no squats needed that night.

Cabal slotted in a set of its house-brand 40mm carbon wheels for the review bike, with the appropriate brake pads. We loved them, although the braking was not what we had come to expect after so long on road discs.

The first day of the tour took us down into Nature's Valley, on two descents that are written into the pantheons of South African cycling history, Bloukrans and Grootrivier. The Rapport Toer used to come this way, for its fearsome climbs, but this day we were heading down, in a thunderstorm and pouring rain. Not the ideal situation to remember how to use rim brakes. To the Cabal's credit, we still live and the brakes worked much, much better once things had dried out. Wet-weather braking isn't something we need to consider in the Cape. Not now.





▲ Zipp's aluminium Service Course bars and stem are fast becoming a favourite; light and stiff, without the carbon scare factor.



▲ 1-4: The Fabric saddle sits atop a slinky carbon seatpost, both offering decent comfort; skinny seat stays don't compromise stiffness, but we did wish we had discs in the rain; what's not to love about a fast set of wheels?; subtle branding is refreshing in the era of the silly sock.

The firm also does a 50mm wheelset and a 50mm/80mm set for tri bikes – all carbon clinchers with 27mm outside widths, perfect for the fatter-tyre revolution. Our 25mm Schwalbes behaved beautifully, up and down hill. All the wheels come with bladed J-bend spokes and sealed cartridge-bearing hubs. The 40mm setup we rode retails at just R12 950 and weighs in at just 1 560g. It rides better than that.

THE RIDE

This is the lightweight climbing frame from Cabal, weighing in at a claimed 870g, it is built with Toray T1000 EPS moulded carbon, as are the other two bikes in the Cabal stable, the speedy Aero 1 and the uber-speedy Timetrial 1.

The ride is suitably racy, and racy. We had great fun on the dry descents – point-and-shoot once you had worked out the braking, with plenty of room for recovery if you go over ambitious. We did find

the front a little interesting at high speed, especially if there was some wind, but that may well have been us needing to get used to the deep-section wheels – something in the system was more flexy (it felt) than desired. Eventually, we decided it must be the wind on the wheel, because the fork and the frame are as stiff as anything. Ride comfort is great, even with the oversize seat stays and down tube, and there is little top-tube flex when hammering for flat KOMs (three and counting on the Cabal. It must be fast...) and sprinting for coffee. Road buzz is negligible, but it does chuck you about a bit on uneven surfaces, as do most silly-light frames.

VERDICT

Lekker, man. A local firm doing good things, what is not to like? We would choose a slightly more manageable front wheel for windy Cape Town, but for most the 40mm is perfect. Fast and fun, climbs like a dream.