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## **BUILT FOR ETERNITY**

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**In times when carbon fiber frames have long become the equipment of choice for road racing applications the Litespeed's T1SL is an exquisite and perfectly crafted alternative for the deep-pocketed.**

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Every once in a few years I'll receive a bike for testing not made from carbon but from a different material. This year that exception from the all-carbon-rule is a Litespeed and fitting to the tradition of this company its frame is made from titanium.

The last time I rode a Litespeed for ProCycling dates back to 2009. That review was then published in the English version of the magazine. My first contact with this brand dates back even much longer though: In 1991 when I was racing in the Superweek series in the USA Team LA Sheriffs rode Litespeed bikes which were already titanium. Which created a lot of envy on our side who were still riding steel frames.

That's why I was quite curious to find out how my T1SL would ride. And can you seriously ask for a better testing ground than the Tannheimer Tal. Superb, extremely varying roads featuring everything a road cyclist dreams of.

When Stefan, our photographer showed up with the bike he first asked me whether I brought a pump. He hadn't found a way to release the cable tension on the brake calipers since they don't feature a release mechanism. So he deflated the tire in order to dismount the front wheel when stuffing the bike into his car. I also find this to be a strange design failure by TRP but this isn't a review of the brakes but of the complete bike. **(We still can't believe they could not find out how to release the brakes by moving the barrel adjust along the slot it sits in. But they don't seem to be the only ones too stupid to comprehend this because in the meantime TRP has equipped the 979 calipers with a release eccentric.)** So I inflated the tires, installed my pedals and was ready to go.

As usually I started rolling on a flat road, then doing some sprints in rather big and not so big gears and finally the mountain road test up to the Zugspitzblick. The frame road very comfortably as expected. It felt as if someone had operated the comfort switch. The Litespeed supremely soaked up the few imperfections the road featured. Sure the 25 mm wide Schwalbe tubeless tires certainly contributed to this impression but the T1SL confirmed once again that it's hard to find more comfortable frames than those made from titanium.

All the more impressive was how stable that bike rode considering that at least in the past many titanium frames were definitely lacking in this regard. I remember a titanium frame we should ride at Team Festina in 1998. It was branded as a Peugeot which was our sponsor then but it was made by Litespeed. I only rode this frame for 15 kilometers before I ended this experiment. One descent from an Italian mountain pass when training for the upcoming Giro was enough to understand that this frame not only had a weird geometry, not suitable to negotiate turns at high speed. It also was dangerously lacking in stiffness.

Fortunately the T1 SL turned out to be a completely different character. The frame superbly supported the sprints at the beginning of my test ride while the bike impressively accelerated surely helped by the lightweight componentry. Even the

rather slim head tube proved to be respectably stiff although the frame supposedly doesn't reach the super high values in torsional stiffness current carbon frames have. But that doesn't mean the T1SL is not suitable as a racer. In fact it is a real racing thoroughbred without any restrictions. Extremely powerful sprinters like Marcel Kittel or André Greipel though would probably prefer stiffer frames but that's certainly also true for the majority of current carbon frames you might give to them.

I would have liked the very beautifully made titanium stem to be a little stiffer but that thought only came up during my all-out sprints in the beginning. When putting out more than 1,000 Watts onto the pedals you pull the handlebars with corresponding force and that's when I found the front end to be a little soft. There was no brand name on the stem, so I suppose it's also made by Litespeed. The Litespeed test bike I rode for ProCycling in 2009 also featured Ritchey carbon fiber handlebars but those were clamped by a Ritchey carbon fiber stem. That combo felt stiffer and would be my recommendation for heavier or sprinter type riders.

The Ritchey Superlogic Carbon handlebars were perfectly comfortable and if I had had the time to ride the T1SL longer than just for one day I would have certainly experimented with a lower position of the handlebars. But testing time was scarce and precious so I wanted to get the most out of the hours I had to ride that dream bike.

During my first ride up to the Zugspitzblick I was staying well in my comfort zone. Some riding out of the saddle checking how well the Di2 drivetrain changes gears in both directions even under a high pedal load. I also did some short but intense accelerations to test the response of the bike and the bottom bracket stiffness when applying high pedal forces starting from a low cadence. The frame passed also that test with aplomb and I also enjoyed the super light Tune wheels very much. They combine their impressively low weight with a level of stiffness and stability that - to be honest - somewhat surprised me. No discernible side to side movement even when excessively pulling on the handlebars while stomping onto the pedals. Due to their bladed spokes they are certainly also properly aerodynamic. Some high spoke tension and interior nipples complete the feature list of that really great wheel set.

I suppose that a titanium frame that stiff is considerably heavier than a current carbon frame (*unfortunately they did not send our spec list to Marcel and he also did not find it necessary to ask us for the frame's weight, so it doesn't appear in the review neither does the weight of the complete bike*), but the lightweight componentry nearly completely compensated for that. I have to admit that before starting the descent back into the valley I was skeptical with regards to the performance of the brake which I found somewhat unsuitable for daily use because of the lacking release mechanism. But then the performance of the brakes proved me utterly wrong.

One should know that the road to the Zugspitzblick is narrow, curvy and steep. Riding down that road fast *and* safely is not a simple task and the time it takes you to descend that road strictly relates to the performance of the brakes the bike comes with. The combination of the TRP brakes and the Tune carbon fiber rims proved to be phenomenal. Modulation was really great, providing a clearly defined point of engagement, and decelerating capacities which were absolutely on par with the best brakes I have ever used.

Due to this positive surprise I decided to climb up once again in order to come down that great descent on this capable machine for a second time. This time I was climbing much faster slightly above my threshold and found the impressions confirmed I had gained in the first ascent. But admittedly my main interest was to feel

the thrill of the descent again. For the geometry and predictability of the bike was simply great certainly because of the gorgeous frame.

Although titanium seems to be a material which is mainly used by long distance cyclists the T1SL's geometry turned out to be really racy. When reading the spec sheet the top tube and head tube lengths, but also the short wheel base were already pointing to a very agile bike and the T1SL confirmed that assumption 100%. I zoomed down some switchback turns weighting the outer pedal and leaning the bike over as much as the Schwalbe tires permitted. And it was the combination of braking very late and then steering hard into the turns that was big, big fun. The bike also handled fast turns superbly always making me feel controlled and safe. Even back in the valley after my second descent the Litespeed did not stop charming me with its outstanding comfort and decent directional stability when riding hands-free.

Overall this Litespeed is not only way superior, lighter, and stiffer than all its predecessors but it is also really perfectly crafted. Very precise and filigree welding beads cuddle up as if they were cloned and also the well placed ports for the Di2-wires complete the perfect overall impression. Some might wonder why the rear brake cable is run externally but I find it fitting on this frame and it obviously facilitates the service.

I wonder why the seat tube located bottle cage is placed so relatively low but maybe Litespeed's designer wants to lower the center of gravity. The chain stays which' cross-section flattens towards the drop outs, the slightly bent seat stays and the stiffness increasing chain stay brace all complement the impression of a supremely well thought-out frame design which not only rides like cream but also looks very nice. Red anodized hubs, quick releases, head set cups and spacers are the icing on the cake.

If you want to treat yourself to a really special road bike which is a) very exclusive and b) built for eternity don't need to look any further. Enjoy!