



Merida Scultura 6000 £2,300

Tested by: Oliver Bridgewood | Miles ridden: 303 | Size tested: 56cm | Weight: 7.82kg

Launched just ahead of the Giro d'Italia, the ultra-light 2016 Merida Scultura has already claimed Grand Tour stage wins. The previous model dates back to 2012 and the new version takes huge steps forward in several key areas. But why have we selected this as our lightweight climbing bike of the year?

Frame

The frame is made from 400 individual pieces of carbon, taking roughly 14 hours to put together, going through 30 different pairs of hands. The dropouts are carbon too, resulting in the Team Edition frame weighing 800g for a size 56.

As a result of the collaboration with Lampre, the geometry has been refined to make the new Scultura more aggressive, with a lower front end and longer top tube — previously riders had been employing

ridiculously long stems and choosing smaller frame sizes to get the fit they were after. The reshaping of the frame brings it in line with the Reacto, Merida's aero bike.

Specification

Components are predominantly Shimano Ultegra, with own-brand brakes, an FSA Gossamer chainset and Fulcrum Racing 7 wheels. The entry-level wheels meet the demands of training but certainly don't live up to the full potential of this premium quality frame.

Riding

Hop on the Scultura and you will instantly want to take to the hills. Get out of the saddle and it darts like an Alpine Ibex up sharp gradients, but is equally proficient tearing down them. The superb handling results

SCORE & SPECIFICATION

Frame 10 | Spec 8 | Ride 9 | Value 10
Overall score 9

Frame Scultura CF4

Fork Scultura Mid Superlite

Size range 44-59cm

Groupset Shimano Ultegra with FSA chainset

Wheels Fulcrum Racing 7

Bar FSA Gossamer

Stem Merida Pro Carbon

Seatpost Merida carbon

Saddle Prologo Kappa 3

Bianchi Specialissima £7,900

Tested by: Chris Hovenden | Miles ridden: 276 | Size tested: 55cm | Weight: 6.5kg

The Italian brand's bikes, with their distinctive celeste paintjobs, have been ridden by some of cycling's most iconic riders, including Fausto Coppi and Marco Pantani, to name just two. And although the Specialissima on test may not have the classic Bianchi colour scheme, celeste is one of many colours available through the custom frame builder option.

For close to £8,000 you get a bike that weighs an incredibly low 6.5kg, 0.3kg below the UCI limit. The components are high-class too, with Campagnolo's top mechanical groupset Super Record, which performs brilliantly and ticks another box for purists. Fulcrum's Racing Zero Nite wheels are light and stiff without being too harsh on British roads, and no expense has been spared with the FSA K-Force Light finishing kit.

The bike handles well, is stiff and amazingly responsive — you really feel the forward propulsion as you

stamp on the pedals. However, you do also feel a fair degree of road buzz.

The Specialissima is a beautiful bike that oozes panache but it comes with a hefty price tag and there are more comfortable, and far cheaper, alternatives.
www.cycleurope.com

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SCORE & SPECIFICATION

Frame 10 | Spec 10 | Ride 9 | Value 7 |
Overall score 9

Frame Bianchi Specialissima Super Light Carbon with Countervail

Groupset Campagnolo Super Record

Wheels Fulcrum Racing Zero Nite



Alternatives

Giant TCR Advanced 2 £1,199

Giant's TCR has been redesigned for 2016, and claims to have a stiffness-to-weight ratio that's best in class. www.giant-bicycles.com



Canyon Ultimate CF SLX 8.0 Di2 £3,199

The Ultimate has had an aero makeover.

This option, with Ultegra Di2 and Mavic Ksyrium wheels, is great value for money. www.canyon.com

