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 **Below** Merida claims the addition of disc fins cools things down quicker **Bottom** Fulcrum's wide rims hold speed well



A frame dipping below 900g is a fine achievement for a machine with disc brakes

MERIDA SCULTURA TEAM DISC CF4

£6500 > Feel like a pro on a bike raced pre-ban by Lampre-Merida

 erida redesigned the standard Scultura last year, producing a super-light variant of the CF4 frame that weighed less than 700g. For 2016 the company has turned its attention to making a disc-braked version, which is never going to be quite as light, but a frame dipping below 900g is a fine achievement for a machine with disc brakes.

Perhaps this bike's most obvious feature is the series of machined aluminium 'disc-cooler' fins that make up the rear calliper's flat mount, which Merida claims increases the pace of cooling. We

haven't experienced overheating with discs brakes, but we do appreciate the belt-and-braces approach. Merida's also done its homework on the axles, plumping for 12mm thru-axles at the front and back, both of them the RAT (Rapid Axle Technology) design licensed from Focus. These fast-to-release axles require just a quarter turn to lock or unlock and are by far the best thru-axles we've tried. Merida says it has revised the frame's carbon layup to cope with the forces created by disc brakes while maintaining the compliance built into the revised CF4. It's increased the length of the seatstays

SPECIFICATION

Weight 7.69kg (59cm)

Frame Carbon

Fork Carbon

Gears Shimano

Dura-Ace Di2, 52/36, 11-28

Brakes Shimano

BR-RS805, 160mm rotors

Wheels Fulcrum

Racing Quattro carbon DB, RAT thru-axles

Finishing kit FSA

carbon stem and bar, Prologo saddle, 28mm Continental Grand Prix 4000s II tyres

to maintain a perfect chainline, but from 400mm to 408mm, rather than the 415mm recommended by Shimano and SRAM.

On the road the Merida is a beast of a bike and a blast, with a taut ride that's indistinguishable from the rim-braked Scultura. The 52/36 chainset and 11-28 cassette give enough range to really push hard on descents and rollers with the bigger sprockets low enough to help you when the tarmac turns upwards. We thought the 28mm tyres might be an issue, and were initially sceptical about a pro-level bike shipping with such wide rubber, but it never felt as if we were riding anything other →

The Scultura is full of zing through twists and turns, rewarding 'enthusiastic' riding



HIGHS

Lively, likable handling bike, that's smoothly fast with it

LOWS

It's a pricey proposition

BUY IF

You want one of the most accomplished disc-equipped, true race bikes around

than a seriously rapid race machine. On our regular test route's poorly maintained sections the Merida ate up rougher, broken surfaces. Fulcrum's new all-carbon disc wheels combine the smooth-running Campagnolo-derived hubs with a taut build and stiff, aerodynamic rims. They're not that light for a bike at this price, but they're top quality and their up-to-date wide rims hold their speed well.

The Scultura is full of zing through twists and turns, rewarding 'enthusiastic' riding with the sort of sharpness only found on the best race-derived bike. The extra confidence engendered from the large-diameter tyres meant we were prepared to take ever-faster lines, cranking the bike over knowing that the rubber would hold. During days of riding in the wet and dry the Scultura never put a foot wrong. On climbs its semi-aggressive riding

position encourages you to get out of the saddle and attack, but it still feels a smooth and efficient climber.

Despite slightly heavy wheels there isn't anything we'd change. Shimano's hydraulic braking and the Di2 electronic shifting are faultless, and the contact points are very good. There's a stiff yet vibration-damping all-carbon cockpit from FSA, and Prologo's saddle is excellent, the CPC (Connect Performance Control) surface providing a limpet-like grip, so there's no slipping around in your Lycra. About the only thing we would like to alter is the price.

THE VERDICT

A fantastic disc machine - a rival to our Focus's Izalco Max disc bike of the year

★★★★★

Also consider



FOR A LITTLE LESS MERIDA SCULTURA 7000E DISC £3850

The same frame, but Ultegra Di2, an aluminium cockpit and DT Swiss R23 wheels. The 7000 looks every inch as capable as the Team for less money.



FOR A LOT LESS MERIDA SCULTURA 5000 DISC £2100

A drop to the lower-grade CF2 carbon adds weight, but with Ultegra and RS805 brakes and Merida Expert SL wheelset, this is a bargain of the range.