

Campagnolo Athena 11

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WHEN Campagnolo announced in May that it was to add a lower-priced groupset to its range, there was considerable excitement. It was less than a year since it had unveiled the Super Record, Record and Chorus groupsets. Perhaps it was the timing of the launch of super-expensive Super-Record — at the start of the recession — that led the Italian firm to launch 'the 11-speed for everyone'.

One of the most striking and attractive things about the

Athena is that it uses more polished aluminium and a lot less carbon than its more expensive cousins, although it shares the same engineering. With the retro revival, this makes it perfect for an old school-looking build.

Athena looked great on the De Rosa Neo Primato, especially the very pretty chainset with its wide, flat cranks. We have the polished alloy version, but it is also available in carbon with gun-metal rings (113g lighter), and there's a choice of 53/39 or compact. The Ultra-Shift chainrings have two dedicated sectors for upshifting and two for downshifting, and it works quietly and efficiently.

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TECH First ride

The cassette is steel with nickel-chrome treated surfaces, giving it a matt titanium-like look. Ultra-Shift tooth profile and sprocket synchronisation ensure the chain leaves one sprocket and engages the next at the same point each time. The rear mech, which is all polished alloy, has rubber jockey wheels to absorb vibration. We found shifting to be fast and accurate, but the feel is not particularly plush. Changing down feels a bit plasticky and needs a very definite jab to the lever. The thumb button, spring-loaded in the other direction, provides a fast, mousetrap-like shift to a smaller sprocket. Once you stop expecting a Dura-Ace smoothness, Athena's spartan feel is acceptable.

The hand position on the new Ergopower levers makes up for the unluxurious shifting. The Vari-Cushion hoods use a softer rubber compound for the palm of the hand and the new 'hook' is a comfortable shape to grip.

The brakes are a highlight — performance is excellent. The pivot point for the levers has been repositioned and just a very light pressure means a powerful grip on the rims from the Skeleton calipers. The only problem with the levers is an aesthetic one — there is no polished aluminium option; they are carbon wrapped and they don't look right next to the other polished components.

Vulgar carbon levers aside, we give Athena a big thumbs-up. Having 11 sprockets is a luxury, but with Athena it becomes an affordable luxury, so Campagnolo has achieved its aim.

CAMPAGNOLO ATHENA	
Contact	www.campagnolo.com
Price	£833.32
Weight	2,352g (alloy chainset)
Groupset	Campagnolo Athena

OUR FIRST IMPRESSION **9**