

Ride like a World Champ on a BMC or Bianchi

Australia's most recent cycling world champions have ridden these brands. What might a bike of this pedigree do for you? **Jon Miller** puts them to the test.

BMC bikes have been available in Australia for 8 years now and they have provided bikes for some of the ProTour teams in the past. But since the formation of the BMC Racing team in 2007, the signing of Australia's Cadel Evans and the team's subsequent invitation to participate in the 2010 Tour de France, interest in BMC bikes has really taken off.

On the other hand, Bianchi have been making bicycles and sponsoring riders and teams for well over 100 years. They have a reputation for building quality and stylish machines and have had aficionados drooling over their bikes for many years. And Michael Matthews has added to their appeal by riding a Bianchi to win the Under 23 World Championship this year in Geelong.

I tested a bike from the 2011 range of each of these manufacturers: the BMC SL02 Roadracer and the Bianchi Sempre Veloce. These are both mid-range carbon fibre road bikes that retail for a little under \$4,000. Looking at the specifications of each, it's difficult to spot any major differences. Sure, the BMC has a Shimano 105 groupset compared to the Campagnolo Veloce on the Bianchi but these are both quality set-ups.

A notable innovation on the BMC is the proprietary AngleLock clamp used for adjusting the saddle height. The Bianchi uses the traditional method of a collar which must be tightened carefully using a torque wrench to avoid the risk of crushing the carbon seat post. With the BMC system there is an expansion bolt at the bottom of the seat post similar to the older style quill stems used in threaded headsets. Just below the saddle, there

is a two-position mechanism to release and tighten the expansion bolt. The mechanism is moved with an Allen key. It is all pre-tensioned at the factory so there is no risk of over tightening. This is very quick and easy to use.

The BMC sports a compact rear triangle, with square-ish chain and seat stays making for a stiff frame. There is an extra tube, like a reinforcing strut, which runs between the top tube and the seat tube like an extension to the chain stay. This adds rigidity and strength to the bike without increasing weight. The Bianchi has a conventional rear triangle but with what it calls UTSS – Ultra Thin Seat Stays. These are designed to provide stiffness to the frame without adding undue harshness to the ride.

On the road, I found the Bianchi to be a lot more comfortable to ride. I can't say that I noticed the frame to be particularly whippy though. However, the BMC was noticeably stiffer, which resulted in the bike being very responsive and quick to accelerate. This all gave me an extra edge when standing on the pedals to power up a hill and also when racing with my mates.

The gear changes provided by the Shimano 105 groupset on the BMC are fast, solid and reliable (though I did manage to 'do a Schleckie' and drop the chain). The Campagnolo Veloce setup on the Bianchi is maybe a touch better – the changes were quieter and smoother. The levers on the Bianchi didn't seem as strong as those on the BMC; not flimsy by any means, just not as robust as they could have been.

Both machines have 50 and 34 tooth chainrings but the BMC has an 11–28 tooth cassette compared to the Bianchi's

12–25. This doesn't seem much of a difference but I was surprised by the amount of extra speed I got out of the 11-tooth cog. And when grinding up hills, every extra tooth at the back helps.

The brakes on both are more than adequate providing plenty of stopping power. The Maddux rims on the Bianchi have a groove in the centre of the braking surface to indicate wear, which is a useful addition.

The brake and gear cables on the BMC are all routed internally through the frame. This probably reduces drag but it could only be a marginal reduction at best. It does make the bike look a lot cleaner and tidier though. Thinking it would be difficult, I tried replacing the cables. I found it a little fiddly but surprisingly easy. There are cable guides inside the frame as well to facilitate this.

I'm not sure about the Continental Ultra Race tyres on the BMC. They supposedly have an embedded puncture resistant layer but I got 2 punctures in the short time I had the bike on test. Maybe I was just unlucky but I would prefer to see something a bit more robust like the Vittoria Zaffiro Pro Slicks on the Bianchi.

The Bianchi Sempre is a beautiful machine and a delight to ride. It is very well designed and has a certain class about it. Not only that, it performs very well. For me though, the BMC beats it in almost every category. It doesn't have the grace or the comfort of the Bianchi but it looks cleaner and more modern, accelerates quicker, rides faster and climbs hills easier. If only I had Cadel's legs, maybe I could use it to take a stage or two of the Tour. ☺

Bianchi Sempre Veloce

Sizes:	50, 53, 55, 57, 59, 61cm
Colour:	Celeste and black, Red and white
Frame:	Sempre carbon, BB30 system, UTSS Ultra Thin Seat Stay
Fork:	Bianchi FN11 Alu/Carbon B4P 1.1/8"
Shifters:	Campagnolo Veloce Black 10sp
Brakes:	FSA Gossamer custom with logo reparto corse
Front derailleur:	Campagnolo Veloce Black
Rear derailleur:	Campagnolo Veloce Black 10sp
Crankset:	FSA Gossamer Compact 50 and 34 tooth
Cassette:	Campagnolo Veloce UD 10sp 12–25 tooth
Chain:	KMC DX10SC 10sp
Bottom bracket:	BB30
Headset:	FSA Orbit CE Plus
Stem:	Reparto Corse DA-42
Handlebars:	Reparto Corse
Seat:	Selle San Marco Ponza Power Arrowhead
Seat post:	Reparto Corse carbon
Wheels:	Maddux RX 5.1 Lite
Tyres:	Vittoria Zaffiro Pro Slick 700x23
RRP:	\$3,699



Function	5
Materials & Components	4
Construction	4
Appearance	4
Value for money	4.5

VERDICT: Classy look and performance that's a delight to ride.

BMC SL02 Roadracer

Sizes:	48, 51, 54, 57, 60cm
Colour:	Naked Carbon or Regular Passion Red, Gloss
Frame:	iSC carbon
Fork:	BMC Straightedge SE48 SL TP
Shifters:	Shimano 105
Brakes:	Shimano 105
Front derailleur:	Shimano 105
Rear derailleur:	Shimano 105
Crankset:	Shimano 105, 50 and 34 tooth
Cassette:	Shimano 105, 11–28 tooth
Chain:	Shimano 105
Bottom bracket:	Shimano 105 BSA
Headset:	FSA 44E (45/45*)
Stem:	Scor MKII
Handlebars:	Scor MKII
Seat:	Scor
Seat post:	BMC Streampost 73.5, Carbon
Wheels:	DT Swiss R1800
Tyres:	Continental Ultra Race
RRP:	\$3,450



Function	5
Materials & Components	4.5
Construction	5
Appearance	4
Value for money	5

VERDICT: Modern and innovative, this bike delivers the edge in performance.