

It's indestructible, flexible and lightweight yet it's fallen behind carbon in the pecking order. But is titanium now making a comeback? **Andy Blow** tests two models to see if you should go ti for tri...

# Lynskey T230



PHOTOS: JONNY GAWLER



With its hard carbon nose, the pricey Control Tech saddle (£219) doesn't sit well on a TT bike

**T**he only things that could make the Lynskey Performance T230 more 'All American' would be if President Obama personally endorsed the bike and it could be delivered in full Stars and Stripes livery (probably an option given the brand's custom paint scheme available on their website).

The Lynskey family, eight of them in all, were the founders of the more well-known 'Litespeed' brand of titanium bikes so popular in the 1990s (often their Blade TT bike was ridden re-branded by pros who wanted the fastest bike against the clock and preferred it to the wares of their sponsors). Having sold that business in 1999, Lynskey has recently returned to the industry with a range of road, MTB, cross and triathlon performance bikes.

### The build

The USPs Lynskey relies on are its 'Handmade in America' philosophy and subsequent attention to detail, its heritage via the Litespeed brand and its loyalty in using titanium as the principal material in its designs, despite the current significant swing in the market towards carbon fibre.

Lynskey is quick to highlight that it's primarily a frame manufacturer, with the Performance T230 frame coming in at £999.99. The componentry supplied



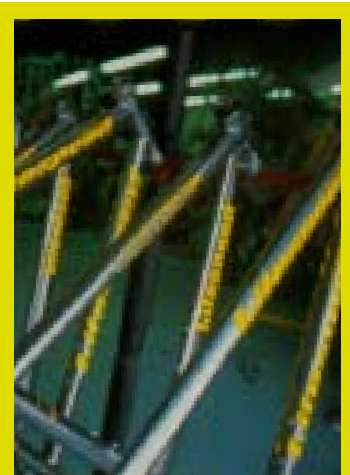
It may be smart looking but the Control Tech chainset was found to be less precise than with the Red equivalent



The CT Manta full carbon tri-bars proved highly adjustable but were let down by the lack of internal cable routing



The deep-rim 700c CT Carbon Comp wheels provide the aero advantage, while the Vredestein tubs offer comfort and speed



## Titanium frames

For a while in the 1990s (Lance Armstrong at the 1999 Tour de France) and early noughties (Tim DeBoom took the Kona title as recently as 2001 using a Litespeed ti bike), titanium was seen as the ultimate material for bike frames, despite its relatively high price.

It's lighter than aluminium and steel, yet shares steel's shock-absorbing properties that help to reduce vibrations felt by the rider in contrast to the rigidity of aluminium frames. Most ti frames are the 3Al/2.5V alloy (3% aluminium/2.5% vanadium), though a stronger alloy, 6Al/4V (6% aluminium/4% vanadium), is also used. It doesn't corrode, is nigh on indestructible (Van Nicholas offer lifetime guarantees on their frames), especially compared to carbon, and even boasts a smart metallic shine without the need for painting.

For a while a lot of manufacturers' top-of-the-range machines and components were ti but being expensive to work with (it's incredibly hard to cut and weld and, due to the meticulous, handcrafted nature, is impossible to mass produce), and with carbon fibre coming to the fore as being easier to make aerodynamic shapes out of, titanium has been somewhat sidelined with the major bike brands. That's created a niche for smaller manufacturers (hello, Van Nicholas!) to offer titanium bikes in smaller numbers for customers looking for something that might be a little different.

A titanium steed still seems to make sense if you want a very comfortable but competitive machine or one that will last for many years, the anti-corrosive properties being preferable to steel and it takes knocks and crashes better than carbon.

on this review model took the price tag up to a hefty £5,055, but costs can easily be shaved on the saddle, seatpost and wheels.

The finishing kit reflects the brand's heritage, with SRAM Red components and Control Tech accessories. The kit is certainly very, very light and the SRAM Red elements (brakes, block, mechs and shifters) do a great job in their respective departments.

Although wedded to a smart-looking Control Tech chainset, the shifting up front is a little less precise than with the Red version.

The Control Tech Manta full carbon tri-bars are super adjustable given their complex design and, as a result, can be set up very comfortably for just about anyone. But they're really

the sweeping carbon look we've become accustomed to.

### The ride

The T230 frameset is based on the old, but by no means out of date, geometry of the early Dan Empfield tri bikes (but using 700c rather than 650c wheels): notably a 78° seat tube angle to put the rider over the bottom bracket and at a comfortable position if you're tucked down onto the tri-bars for extended periods.

The titanium frame material makes for a compliant ride and the old school geometry isn't too low at the front, making this more long-distance than fast '10' time-trial.

The lightweight package as built is a real bonus on the hills and for a TT bike

**"The aesthetics will prove audience dividing, with the understated appearance consisting of narrow tubes and traditional design at odds with the sweeping carbon look we've become accustomed to"**

let down by the lack of internal cable routing, leaving the set-up looking messy and meaning you end up having to grip the bars around protruding cable outers.

The aesthetics will prove audience dividing too, with the understated appearance consisting of narrow tubes and a traditional design at odds with

it climbs nicely. The wheels roll smoothly on the excellent Vredestein tubs and add to the comfort factor. The expensive Control Tech saddle (£219) isn't great on a TT bike due to the hard carbon nose, and swapping it would be an easy way to reduce the cost and improve the relationship between your backside and the bike.

### THE SPEC

<b>Frame</b>	Lynskey T230 titanium
<b>Fork</b>	Control Tech Thunder
<b>Groupset</b>	SRAM Red
<b>Wheels</b>	Control Tech Carbon Comp
<b>Cockpit</b>	Control Tech carbon stem; Carbon Manta tri-bars
<b>Seating</b>	Control Tech aero seatpost; Control Tech Module saddle
<b>Weight</b>	8.6kg (18.85lbs) without pedals
<b>Sizes</b>	S, M, ML, L, XL
<b>Price</b>	£5,055 built; £999.99 frame only
<b>Contact</b>	Hotlines 0131 319 7444 www.hotlines-uk.com

### VERDICT

Handling .....	8
Spec .....	7
Value .....	6
Comfort .....	9

<b>220 Triathlon RATING</b>	<b>7</b>
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# Van Nicholas Mistral



Carbon forks coupled with the titanium frame provide all-day comfort in the saddle.

**U**p there with their healthy interest in growing tulips and producing temperamental footballers is the Dutch nation's association with cycling. Formed in the Netherlands in the late 1990s and springing recently into the UK, the family-run Van Nicholas brand specialises in high-quality, handcrafted but affordable titanium bikes built around varying levels of spec that you can customise to suit your budget.

The Mistral is its Sportive or 'trainer/racer' road bike and joins the Zephyr and the top-end Blaze in the brand's 2010 range. Available at a very tempting entry-level build price (£1,445), it's perhaps most appealing to triathletes as a top-quality training steed or 'go everywhere, do everything' machine for those limited to a one bike fleet. Given titanium's legendary corrosion resistance, the brand also offers a lifetime guarantee on their complete range of frames.

## The build

At the heart of the build is a nicely finished natural titanium frameset and Van Nicholas' own-brand carbon fork. The first impression of the frame is that it punches well above its weight at this price point, with the detail of CNC'd dropouts and the neat welds fooling



Van Nicholas' own-brand bars and stems: "neat enough but obviously where the budget has been trimmed"



Shimano 105 shifters/mechs mix with FSA headset: more budget cuts but a bespoke fitting service is available



The Easton Vista SL wheels are "pretty standard yet robust training hoops that could be upgraded for serious racing"

you into thinking that it would be quite a lot pricier.

The running gear is a sensible mixture of Shimano 105 (shifters/mechs) and FSA (headset) and Van Nicholas' own brand (handlebars, forks and seating), which are neat enough but also obviously where the budget has been trimmed on this model. The wheels are a set of Easton Vista SL – pretty standard yet robust training hoops that could be upgraded for serious racing.

The high quality of the frame makes it very suitable for upgrading components later on; in fact, Van Nicholas offers a bespoke fitting service where you can pick and choose your own components, so the bike would be a wise purchase from a long-term investment perspective.

**"It's perhaps most appealing to triathletes as a top-quality training steed or 'go everywhere, do everything' machine for those limited to a one bike fleet. The brand also offers a lifetime guarantee on their range of frames"**

### The ride

The Van Nicholas' geometry is designed to give all-day comfort for the Sportive market. This it delivers 100% with the compliant titanium frame and carbon forks making it very easy-going. That's not to say it can't do fast; the comfort factor gives it the potential to be very quick when covering long distances.

The handling is stable and fairly neutral, and the frame provides good power transfer when hitting it hard on a hill or sprinting, showing no signs of lateral movement or flex where it shouldn't. The addition of some lightweight wheels with top-quality tyres would enhance its ability on the hills, and even some expensive carbon rims wouldn't seem like overkill on the modestly priced Mistral.

In terms of suitability for time trialling, the relaxed seat angle is never really going to feel racy enough for tri bars. Although, if you aren't looking to set national records and are riding one bike for everything (training, commuting, racing), it isn't going to let you down in any area in particular. It could certainly make a sensible choice

for an Ironman if you're competing on a hilly course, rough road surfaces and looking to 'complete rather than compete' over the distance. Moreover, the few minutes potentially lost to a more aero set-up might well come back to you with interest on the run if you're fresh for a marathon rather than beaten up from the ride.

### THE SPEC

<b>Frame</b>	Van Nicholas Mistral
<b>Fork</b>	VNT carbon fork
<b>Groupset</b>	Shimano 105
<b>Wheels</b>	Easton Vista SL
<b>Cockpit</b>	FSA headset; VNT stem and bars
<b>Seating</b>	VNT
<b>Weight</b>	8.27kg (18.23lbs) without pedals
<b>Sizes</b>	50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60cm
<b>Price</b>	£1,445.00
<b>Contact</b>	Van Nicholas www.vannicholas.com

### VERDICT

Handling .....	9
Spec .....	8
Value .....	9
Comfort .....	10

**220 TRIATHLON RATING** **9**

### Overall verdict

The Lynskey is a solid bike to ride but, to be honest, fails when the cost of components is added to justify such a high price tag in the UK. It's relatively easy to see that by picking a more mid-range component set you could slash the build price down to half the £5,000 price touted here, which makes it far more attractive.

Whether the Lynskey's 'Handmade in America' appeal will translate to the UK market, however, is questionable. Coupled with the rather bland and dated appearance, this will doubtless – minimalist/retro fans aside – limit sales in the UK market.

In contrast, with the Van Nicholas you have to ask (appalling Dutch stereotype alert!), "Were they smoking something interesting when they priced the bike up?" It almost seems far too good to be true. The bike's fine performance in all of the key areas – handling, vibration dampening, versatility, to name but three – you'd expect, but the bike certainly wins points for being cheaper than you'd think. It's a really high-quality and versatile bike of which the team at Van Nicholas, and those of you buying it, should be proud. **220**