

Bike Reviews + Trends + Technology

Gear Guide



Van Nicholas Mistral

HAND-BUILT TITANIUM IS BACK,
AND AT AN AFFORDABLE PRICE.

BY CHRIS HILL

There was a brief time in the late nineties and early noughties when titanium frames such as Litespeed and Dean started to catch the eye of the cycling public. Then carbon started to take the ascendancy when the world's professional cycling teams made the step from aluminium to carbon.

Since then, titanium seems to have been lost in all the carbon hype. Carbon is seen to be lighter, cheaper and more accessible. Well, the Dutch-based Van Nicholas company is out to bring back a bit of titanium frame allure.

Every Van Nicholas is hand-built from aerospace-grade titanium, with a price tag designed to give carbon a run for its money. Their road range comprises five models. We tested the bottom-of-the-range Mistral, which retails for \$2750 but is reduced to \$2500 until the end of July.

Using the term bottom-of-the-range sends signals of lesser quality. However, the Mistral's titanium frame rode so well that it disguised its Shimano 105 componentry. That's quite a statement.

On the test ride, the bike's 'inferior' group was the last thing on my mind. That's because there was so much to enjoy in the frame alone. It's not often you hop on a bike for the first time and have the confidence to push it hard through the first corner – but that was the case with the Mistral.

The frame felt tight and absorbent, and also excellently energetic. It was tough, too, so tough that the company offers a lifetime warranty on the frame, which comprises


3AL/2.5V double-butted tubing. This is because of titanium's excellent corrosion resistance and the material's ability to take a few bumps and bruises.

The bike looks great, too. Each frame is hand-brushed to bring out its true lustre. The dark grey is complemented well by the SRAM-produced Truvativ Elita Compact GXP 50-34T chain rings and cranks in black, and the black Van Nicholas tape on the VNT classic bend shallow-drop handlebars.

While we're on the chain rings, though, I thought it peculiar that the bike is fitted with 50 and 34 tooth rings. With a 12-27 cassette on the back, it really leaves the bike feeling under-g geared. On the flat with a bit of a tailwind, I was well into the bottom of the stack and it didn't take much of a downhill to fully max out the gearing system.

The bike's seat and seat post combination are adequate. The Van Nicholas VNT Elements 31.8mm OS stem is strong and light, an aesthetically pleasing addition to the bike's overall livery in black and silver, and it integrates well with the FSA headset.

The bike's rolling package, Easton Aero wheel set with black Vredestein Fortezza TriComp rubber in 700x23C, contributed to this rock-solid feeling as well. So did the Easton EC70 integrated carbon fork with 1 1/8" alloy steerer.

If you want a bike that has all the attributes of carbon, and is a little different and classy, then check out the Van Nicholas range and in particular their entry-level Mistral. 

\$2500

SIZES 50cm, 52cm, 54cm, 56cm, 58cm, 60cm

FRAME 3AL/2.5V titanium road frame

FORK Easton EC70 Integrated Carbon Fork 1 1/8" alloy steerer, 43mm Rake

SHIFTERS Shimano 2011 105 ST-5700

BRAKES Shimano 105

WHEELS Eastern Aero

SADDLE Leather cover, titanium rails

TYRES Vredestein Fortezza Tri Comp 700x23c Black

HEAD STEM Van Nicholas VNT 31.8mm OS 110mmx85 rise

OTHER FACTS
 ■ Handlebar: Van Nicholas VNT Classic Bend Shallow Drop CTC, 31.8mm OS
 ■ Seatpost: Forged/butted alloy

INFO www.vannicholas.com



BUY IT IF: You want a refined bike that breaks the carbon mould.



FORGET IT IF: You'll easily get over the top of the 50-34 tooth chain rings.