



THE SPEC
 Model Van Nicholas Skeiron
 Disc Groupset Shimano Dura-
 Ace Di2 9170 Deviations
 None Wheels FFWD F3D
 FCC DT240 CL Finishing
 kit Fizik Cyrano 00 bars,
 Fizik Cyrano R1 stem, Van
 Nicholas titanium seatpost,
 Fizik Aliante R3 saddle,
 Vredestein Fortezza Senso
 Superiore 25mm tyres
 Weight 8.2kg Price £8,144
 Contact vannicholas.com



Van Nicholas Skeiron Disc

Dutch brand Van Nicholas specialises in titanium frames where tech trumps tradition

Words PETER STUART



To look at the gleaming metal tubes and the ornate logo, it would be easy to assume that Dutch brand Van Nicholas has a long and rich history of framebuilding. In fact, it's about a decade old and only really came to prominence in 2012 when it was bought by Koga bikes. The fact that the titanium specialist has built such a reputation in that time says a lot about its bikes, and the Skeiron is its first frame built for hydraulic disc brakes.

Skeiron was the Greek god of the north-west wind, a name that might better lend itself to an aerodynamic carbon frame, but it does indicate that the purpose of this bike is to race.

'We optimised the frame for rigidity at the key stress points by incorporating a pressfit bottom bracket, ovalised down tube and hydroformed, tapered chainstays, and a tapered head tube and top tube,' says Ralph Moorman, general manager of Van Nicholas. 'That's all further helped by the 12mm thru-axles for the wheels.'

In terms of material, Van Nicholas has mainly sided for butted tubes with a 3Al/2.5V titanium mixture, commonly called grade 9. A stiffer grade 5 (6Al/4V) mixture is used for the parts of the frame where higher rigidity will improve the ride.

'The head tube, bottom bracket and dropouts are made of grade 5 material,' says Moorman. For the most part, the softer grade 9 is used not for

CABLING
 The Skeiron's internal cabling is an impressive feature. Many titanium bikes opt for external cable routing, which can prohibit the use of electronic gear setups.





Discs are the perfect partner for this material, creating a durable all-weather bike for life

◀ economy, but for the challenges of producing a titanium bike. 'The choice for 3Al/2.5V is down to good mechanical properties and good weldability,' says Moorman. 'That's why we are able to offer a lifetime guarantee.'

The bike is far techier than one might assume. For instance, it was designed with Finite Element Analysis techniques in its construction. This is possible partly because Van Nicholas is not actually an independent brand – as the name and look might suggest – but part of the Accell group, which also includes Lapierre, Koga and Haibike. 'That gives us more knowledge, extensive test facilities, quality standards and high assembly standards,' says Moorman.

The frame has been constructed to take electronic and hydraulic components with internal cable routing and a clever 3D-casted dropout.

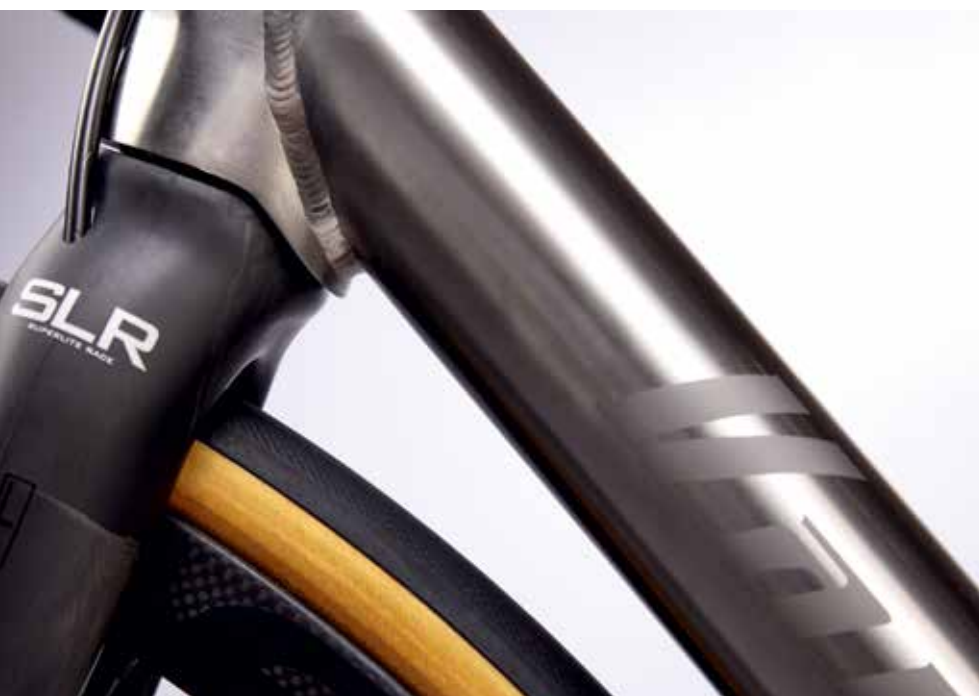
'We have taken advantage of that casting technique to put the more technical features in the dropout rather than the tubing,' explains Moorman. 'For example, the flat mount, cable stopper and Di2 junction are all based in the dropout. This makes it possible to offer 1x, 2x mechanical and electronic shifting in one modular frame, without sacrificing the look of the frame with unused holes.'

Precious metal

Unusually, my test of the Van Nicholas began not on the road, but at my computer. Van Nicholas has a neat customisation tool that means the customer can design the bike from top to bottom in terms

SEATSTAYS

One of the benefits of disc brakes, is that there is no need for a brake bridge. This means seatstays can be made thinner and more flexible to protect the rider from some of the harshest jolts of the road.



of build kit and finish. It's a smooth and visually impressive system that had me wanting to up the spec at a financially perilous rate – and even offers custom painting options.

In terms of the bike's final look, I think the disc brakes do jar slightly with the traditional lines and appeal of titanium. But I also accept that discs are the perfect partner for this material, creating a durable all-weather bike for life.

When it comes to the ride feel of titanium, I'm often a little conflicted. When done well, titanium can offer a sturdy yet comfortable ride. But trying to introduce a stiff, racy quality to the bike can sometimes spoil the balance.

Setting off on the Skeiron, that was my fear. I had just come off the back of a long stint on the S-Works Diverge, a gravel bike with 38mm tyres and front suspension, so switching to 25mm tyres was initially a bit of a shock. The bike certainly pinged over the rougher patches of the road ▶



DISC BRAKES

Van Nicholas offers the option of 160mm or 140mm disc rotors, front and back. This build has the smaller 140mm rotors and neat flat mounts that help to minimise the aesthetic impact of disc brakes.

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and vibrations jolted a little through the frame.

Dropping the tyre pressure to just below 80psi helped to smooth things out. On better maintained roads I found the Skeiron did a good job of filtering out the low-level buzz of the tarmac. On quiet days I could hear the titanium hum as it absorbed the surface beneath. That natural compliance in the frame also meant it tracked the road tightly, helped in part by the supple Vredestein Fortezza tyres.

In terms of power delivery, I was glad the Skeiron falls near the stiffer end of the titanium spectrum. It felt sprightly and responsive, although it wasn't quite up to top-end carbon standards – the sensation of sprinting was a little sluggish.

When it came to descending, I found the Skeiron didn't goad me into aggressive cornering, but instead offered a reassuring level of handling. I felt confident that the disc brakes and tyres would always see me stop comfortably, even on rough and wet surfaces, while the frame always felt well connected to the road.

On the money

For all its modern tech, the Skeiron is actually a very reasonably priced titanium frameset at €2,099 (approx £1,850). However, the version

I tested, was a considerably more wallet-draining £8,144 once it was fully built. For that sort of money, I might instead consider going with a slightly less dramatic spec and opting for something with custom geometry.

To the committed bike snob, the Skeiron may not sit up there with the big titanium brands such as Passoni, Moots or Seven, but really it shouldn't be judged by the same standards.

With electronic gears, hydraulic brakes and FEA-designed tubes, the Skeiron feels more like a future-proofed carbon endurance racer from one of the big brands, but with the considerable added charm and durability of titanium. For many, that will be well worth the premium price. 🌟

