

A few weeks ago, Williams Cycling asked me to test out their new System 19 wheelset.

In this day of super sexy deep-dish carbon hoopla ... the 19s look a bit old-school with their 20front/24rear bladed spokes and low-profile rim selection. Let me tell you, though - they are anything but retro.

The System 19 design is all about acceleration. In fact, tests at the UC Davis Physics lab showed that Williams 19s are one the best accelerating alloy clinchers in the world ... and at half the price of its intended competition.

So, that's what they tell me... now let me tell you how the wheelset has played underneath me in races.

I've been riding the same steel frame for the past 4 years now. To say I know every molecule of that frame wouldn't be too much hyperbole (... about my normal amount, actually). On my custom beauty, I've climbed over French Alps, bombed down the wet slickeries of the Norwest, carved it through the myriad crit corners in NorCal ... and, in short, put that poor bike through 'pert near every cycling situation possible.

I know how that thing rides.

And so, when I strapped on the Williams' System 19s ... I felt the difference. Disclaimer: I ride old, cheap stuff normally. My usual wheels are things like 8 year old Cosmics or 32 spoke chorus hubs on standard Mavic rims. But, I have raced on Lews, Zipps, HEDs, Ksyriums, etc.

I guess my point is ~ I know what a great wheelset will do for you, but I've never been one to complain if I wasn't riding anything but a 2100g set of dinosaurs at a race.

Now the Williams 19s measure in at a hair over 1400g on the scale. That's a good weight for wheels, in my opinion. Much lighter than that and I've come across durability issues and, often, handling concerns. Much heavier than that in weight and there is a cost to acceleration.

And acceleration is what the 19s do for you.

There is a difference in power transfer between wheelsets when you stomp on the pedals. You can feel it. It's more than just light weight ... it's whether that wheel is stiff enough to handle the whip of the rear end, the carve of the bike as it jumps from beneath you. I've got to say it ... I've never had a wheelset accelerate as quickly as these 19s.

And, they handle well. Being the criterium junky that I am ~ handling of the bike is paramount in concern to me. The 19s have been spot on perfect for diving through the roughed up corners that are omnipresent in our NorCal criteriums. Not only have they given me confidence to lay out the bike and keep as much speed as I need through all the various cornering conditions of races, but they've also held up to a punishing amount of jarring and slamming in the most rutted, cobbled corners. I've been impressed with the durability thus far, having raced them hard for 9 weeks straight and not having to touch them once with a spoke wrench.

But, related to cornering ~ descending with superlight wheels can often be a nightmare. How many of you have heard that horrific carbon screech or seen riders gapped off, again and again, while going downhill because they couldn't control their superlight rigs?

I can't stand that.

With the 19s, there's the benefit of a light, stiff climbing wheel ... but you don't have to think twice about pushing the bike as much as needed down descents. They are predictable, precise, and butter smooth.



Summary of the Williams' System 19 wheelset:

What you may like:

Price vs weight: Exceptional ~ probably one of the best bang-for-buck wheelsets out there.

Acceleration: These wheels climb and sprint very, very well.

Durability/repairable: straight as an arrow from the box and have withstood the punishments of hardcore crits and bone crushing descents like Copperopolis. Excellent durability thus far. But, key to me, is that you can easily repair these wheels in case of emergency. There are no non-standard tools or skills needed. If somebody puts a pedal in your spokes at a race ~ just take it to any bike shop and they should have a wrench who can get you going again in under an hour (especially important for those of us who travel hundreds of miles for bike races).

Handling: Superior ~ I have nothing but the highest praise for how well the 19s handle under the most demanding of conditions.

Independent Business Owner: In my experience, you get much better quality of customer service from independent shops. They live off word of mouth recommendations and work damn hard to keep their reputations top-notch.

What you may not like:

Sex-appeal: These wheels are not in the current mode of deep-dished black lightning. If you can be confident enough to ride something that looks like Indurain would have used in the early 90's ... you'll love these wheels.

But, if you're a follower of fashion ... the 19s may not be sexy enough for you. ... Williams does have the System 30 wheels you may want to look at, which offer a very slick looking high-profile rim and attractive color scheme. But, I haven't tested out that pair yet.

Williams is, however, coming out with a black-on-black version of the 19's in early May ... a good marketing decision in my mind.

Overall ~ if you're looking for an all-rounder, affordable, and dependable wheelset that will be suitable for high-speed criteriums or the harshest of road races ... the Williams System 19s are a good purchase.

Michael Hernandez

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Races tested and results for the Williams System 19s:

Cantua Creek Road Race (35+): 5th
Pine Flat Road Race (35+): 7th
Dinuba Criterium (35+): 1st
Dinuba Criterium (Pro1/2): 3rd
Snelling Road Race (35+): 1st
Central Valley Classic (GC 35+): 1st
CVC Road Race (35+): 1st
CVC Criterium (30+): 1st
CVC Criterium (35+): 2nd
Land Park Criterium (35+): 1st
Land Park Criterium (Pro1/2): 1st
Swanton Time Trail (Open): 1st
Hanford Criterium (35+): 1st
Hanford Criterium (Pro1/2): 8th
Orosi Road Race (35+): 1st
Garrett Lemire Memorial Grand Prix (35+): 2nd
Garrett Lemire Memorial Grand Prix (NRC): 26th
Copperopolis Road Race (35+): 1st



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