

# Formigli One

The One pushes the boundaries of taste as much as it does performance



Words JAMES SPENDER



## THE SPEC

**Model**  
Formigli The One  
**Groupset**  
Campagnolo Super Record  
**Deviations**  
None  
**Wheels**  
Vittoria Qurano 46 tubular  
**Finishing Kit**  
Deda 35 carbon bars/alloy stem, Formigli carbon seatpost, Fizik Airone CX carbon saddle  
**Weight**  
7.32kg (56cm)  
**Price**  
£4,400 frameset only in custom silver, approx £8,500 as tested  
**Contact**  
lebeauvelo.co.uk

According to my once lorry-driving uncle (who used to deliver everything from water purifiers to Romanian orphanages, to knickers to Ukrainian ladies) there's a saying among long-haul drivers: 'I'd rather be homeless than chromeless'. In other words, truckers would gladly forgo a roof over their heads if it meant having a sparkling, chromed truck cab. It's a phrase you'll hear in the motorbike world as well, and now one that I think is applicable in the land of bicycles thanks to the gleaming, horrendously expensive Formigli One.

Make no mistake, the One is made from carbon not metal, but the paint effect is mock-chrome with orange fluoro flashes that would put the 2012 McLaren MP4-27 F1 car to shame. But unlike that car, which Jenson Button described as the worst McLaren he'd ever driven, this beast from Formigli is every bit as formidable as it looks. Even if those looks are more polarising than an ice-skating walrus.

Renzo Formigli (pronounced *form-ee-lee*) has been building frames since the early 1990s, having been tutored by Cino Cinelli, he of the ground-breaking Cinelli Laser and perennially popular Mash track bike. Formigli produced his first steel frame at just 21, but now in his late forties he has fully embraced carbon fibre, albeit in a doggedly patriotic fashion as behoves any Italian master.

## Fully formed

'All my frames are custom fit and made by us in Italy,' Formigli says. 'In the early years of carbon fibre I would buy the tubes, but in recent years I have transitioned to designing our tubes with CAD, producing moulds and making our own tubes. I confess that makes me proud.'

Formigli and his four employees produce just 300 frames a year from their workshop in Florence. 'Less than many mass-manufacturers produce in a day,' he says. On the one hand this artisan approach is a familiar one, but to my knowledge there are not many Italian

## SEAT TUBE

Whatever you think about the One, you can't deny it won't turn a few heads, and the 'aero' scoop on the seat tube is the epitome of that flamboyance: huge, outlandishly curvy, signed by its maker, and not, perhaps, as necessary as you might think.

**SPACE SAVER**

The seat tube is so wide that Formigli has had to sculpt it back to accommodate the front mech. It's a neat enough solution, and probably the only time you'll see a Super Record front mech presented as though it's an exhibit in a tiny carbon museum.



► craftsmen who design and tool their own moulds to create carbon fibre tubing in-house. Cipollini, also operating out of Florence, is one, and so too Sarto, in Venice, but these companies are producing bikes in their thousands, not hundreds. Undoubtedly Formigli's low-output approach has higher overheads than an Asian factory producing hundreds of thousands of bikes per year. The cost of creating a mould for a single tube runs into thousands of pounds, with materials and labour on top of that, which helps to explain the cost of the One.

However, as a consumer there's little solace in knowing what you're buying is incredibly expensive just because of a chosen business model. How a bicycle rides – and looks – is surely the definition of value, so at £4,000 for a 'standard' painted frame (this chrome effect adds another £400), the One had better be good. And it is.

**Damn good**

A cursory glance over the One's frame will tell you it's stiff. The bottom bracket junction is oversized to the power of gargantuan, while Michelangelo could paint a fresco on the side of the head tube, which houses a 1.25in top bearing and 1.5in bottom (as opposed the more common 1.125in top and 1.25in bottom). Add to that the compact rear triangle, and the One is a veritable cathedral to stiffness. And that's even before you hear Formigli's philosophy: 'A racer drives a lot of power into the frame, so we know many racing frames are not light because they must possess qualities of torsional rigidity. Every frame I build was born to race.'

In other words, light weight is secondary to stiffness in the One, which explains why a frame will weigh around 1.1kg depending on size, and why this build is 7.32kg despite featuring a Super Record groupset, which is the second lightest in class after Sram Red, and Vittoria Qurano 46 tubular wheels, weighing a claimed 1,298g.

For those who expect an £8,500 bike to at least hit the UCI limit of 6.8kg, that will be half a kilo too much, but I couldn't have cared less. The One flew. And it did so in an exceptionally comfortable fashion.

According to Formigli, the physics is simple: more carbon fibre means more 'stuff' to disperse road vibrations, dissipating shocks before they reach the rider. Put that extra carbon fibre in areas where it's needed for rigidity and you end up with not only a stiffer frame but

a more comfortable one, too. Whether or not this holds up in theory, in practice the One was bewitching.

Owing to its cavernous tubes the One produces a deep-throated rumble along all but the smoothest of roads, a sound that creates the sensation of speed and performance. This meant that even before I wound it up I was expecting big things, and I was royally satisfied. It required minimal effort to chuck the One from side-to-side during accelerations, and the time it took to turn those accelerations into all-out sprints was short, testament to how stiff the frame is. But it's not *too* stiff.

An excess of stiffness in a frame can result in a skittish feel and nervy cornering. The reason being, as I was recently told by an eminent framebuilder from Seven Cycles, is that you need some flex, both vertically and torsionally, to help keep wheels in contact with the road. Vertical give means that not only will a bike be more ►



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**BOTTOM BRACKET**  
 The tubing on the One is sized to the maximum, making even the oversized PF86.5mm bottom bracket and chunky Super Record crank look diminutive. But it turns this to its favour – the One is stiff, yet also surprisingly comfortable.

comfortable but it will roll quicker, as the flex helps prevent energy loss through deflection (the bike going up and down as well as forwards). Likewise, some flex in the diagonal plane allows the wheels to make minute up and down movements to track the road when the bike is leant over in corners, making for more stable, accurate handling. The One, then, dealt a perfect hand in this department, stiff enough to channel watts efficiently, compliant enough to keep the bike smooth.

**Hey, good lookin'**

If the One has a chink in its armour, it's how it looks. Despite that big scoop in the seat tube shielding the rear wheel, 'it is not correct to attribute aerodynamic qualities to a frame,' Formigli says. 'Almost all drag is caused by the rider and the wheels and tyres. The many so-called aero tests are for marketing purposes.' Which is interesting, because I think the back end of the bike gives the One its divisive aesthetic quality, and yet Formigli suggests it doesn't need to be like that.

Then there are the logos, which one colleague on *Cyclist* delightedly points out come in *four* different typefaces. However, I still find something alluring about the One's appearance. I could never call it beautiful, but its ostentatious nature makes it enjoyable to look at.

Maybe that says more about my lack of taste but, just like a Pagani Zonda versus an Aston Martin DB10, the One's looks mark it out from the crowd in a way that certain well-heeled customers desire. But they may only be a select few, which is why, besides the money, the One is not going to be the bike for everyone. And that's a shame, because if you could only ride it, not see it, I'd bet there's not a cyclist alive that wouldn't give their back cassette teeth to own one. 🍆

**The detail**



'Every Formigli frame is built from the fork first,' says Renzo Formigli. 'By building the frame starting from the fork, I give my frames ideal stability and correct weight distribution.'

Now, that might sound a bit woolly, but what Formigli is getting at is how much a fork and its angle and rake, which leads to trail, affects handling. Less trail creates snappier handling and a shorter wheelbase, ideal for crits but less so for long days in the saddle or descending. A longer trail does the opposite, providing less responsive handling that becomes more predictable at speed, together with a longer, more stable wheelbase. Formigli has built the One to be a racer's bike, and in doing so has erred towards quick but not snappy handling paired with all-round stability, particularly in corners. A very happy blend indeed.