

Out of the Blue

In another exclusive test for 220, **Andy Blow** parks his behind on the new Blue Triad and heads south to the New Forest to test both race route and ride

The phone line was crackling, so I double-checked what 220 editor James was asking. "You want me to do a blue photo shoot? Where I sand my balls?"

"No, no! Can you do a photo shoot on the new Blue Triad at Sandy Balls? It's a holiday park in the New Forest, home of OneLastTri, the half-Ironman distance race in October."

Thank God! I was about to up my fee. So a few days later I'm happily trundling past the concrete cows of Milton Keynes to pick up a very exciting new tri bike from the tidy new HQ of Multisport Distribution.

You'd be forgiven for not knowing much about Blue Competition Cycles. New to the UK since August, they're a manufacturer of high-end bikes – road, tri, mountain and cyclo-cross – from the U S of A. And they're fast gaining a reputation for being, well, fast, with pros like Brent McMahon smashing up the competition in 70.3 races Stateside, and Andreas Ralaert scaring some of the bigger boys at Ironman Germany by riding a Triad to the second fastest split of the day.

Something Blue

But before I can concur or disagree with these speed claims, I have to get measured up, as the Triad comes with an integrated seat post

that needs cutting to size. John Dennis, a physio with British Triathlon and custodian of a hi-tech Retul digital bike-fit system, sizes me up and then gets busy with a lo-tech hacksaw to set the saddle height. He wheels the beautiful machine out of sight to perform the necessary surgery, but even so I swear I can hear the poor thing squealing as five inches of carbon monocoque are hacked off.

While this is going on I raise my concern about this type of frame with the guys from Multisport. Namely that if you a) screw up the initial cutting or b) want to sell it, it becomes a problem. Fortunately, they assure me that there's an elegant solution to convert to a more standard aero seatpin arrangement for a sensible price, should that be necessary. Mightily relieved, I tuck the amputee neatly into the back of my van and hit the road, bound for Sandy Balls.

The New Forest Triathlon series has grown from strength to strength over the last few years. Race director Richard Iles is a man from the old school of triathlon. He organises the type of friendly events that many of us remember from the good old days, and it's great to see the races selling out as a result.

In addition to their other mid-season middle-distance race, OneLastTri is a

half-Ironman on 4 October (www.raceneuforest.co.uk), with the swim in the River Avon and a stunning bike and run course around the forest. My remit is to take a spin around the course and rate the Triad in the process. It's a hard life!

The build

The Triad frame is wind tunnel developed and built to high standards with high modulus carbon fibre. The fork is also carbon and an Aerus-branded product from Blue's off-shoot composite department. Both are neatly finished with a thick gloss lacquer over the predictably blue detailing and graphics. The shortened rear triangle is a feature designed to be aerodynamic and increase stiffness for optimal power transfer from the rider to the rear wheel. Due to this design, the rear Tektro brake calliper is tucked under the bottom-bracket area rather than above the wheel, giving a very clean look to the back end of the bike.

The groupset is the magnificent SRAM Red, including lovely carbon bar-end shifters →





and brake levers. I've ridden Red a few times now and reckon it has the aesthetic advantage over Dura Ace and Record, as well as matching or exceeding the performance of the other top-end kit. The only departures from Red are the Tektro rear brake (due to where it's mounted) and, on the test bike, an FSA BB 30 crankset.

The wheels are the outstanding Zipp 606/808 clinchers with aluminium braking surfaces and a SRAM 11-23 cassette. The bars come from the Blue Aerus composite range and the saddle is a tri-specific model complete with padded nose.

All told, the build is hard to fault on paper – top-end proven components, nothing too flashy, but no corners cut anywhere either. So far, so good.

The ride

Straight off, the course drops away on a fairly twisty and rough descent. Despite being a mere 800 yards into the ride, I feel totally at home flicking through the bends on the tri-bars at 30-odd miles per hour.

Grabbing the brakes for the first left-hander at the bottom, they are smooth, progressive and powerful, the internal cable routing not compromising performance in the slightest. If I'm being ultra-picky, then the Tektro rear perhaps lacks the bite of the Red calliper up front, but both provide more than adequate feel and inspire confidence – a very important characteristic on this course as there are a few hills to contend with later on.

Having lost altitude so quickly in the first couple of miles, it's thoughtful of the course designers to offer some up for the next few. This refund of vertical metres is delivered via a long drag up through Frogham that will really test racers in the first few minutes come October. I know this because I'm having trouble trying to breathe as I ascend, and I've not just got out of the river!

I stay in the big chain ring for the first bit until my cadence drops to unacceptable levels. Under load the shift from the 53 to the 39 ring is seamless, and I get out of the

“The Triad feels willing and quick, egging me on to push harder until I start to realise that my quads are stinging with lactic acid. The bike is certainly outperforming the rider today”

saddle to make the push for the summit. The wider than average Aerus bars offer great leverage, and the lightness and stiffness of the whole package make this one of the best climbing TT bikes I've ridden.

A further fast descent and twisty section follows before the course flattens for a short while. Luckily the Triad is a fairly neutral-handling bike, and it takes the intricacies of the course in its stride. Set up with the multi-position seat mount in 78° mode (a

THE SPEC

Frame	Blue Triad
Forks	Aerus Composite
Groupset	SRAM Red (FSA crankset tested, but will come with RED) except Tektro rear brake calliper
Wheels	Zipp 404 front carbon clincher, 808 rear; Michelin Pro3 race tyres
Cockpit	Aerus Composites carbon tri-bar; Aerus alloy stem; SRAM carbon brake levers
Seating	Blue saddle; integrated aero seat post
Weight	17.2lb (7.8kg) without pedals
Sizes	S, M, ML, L
Price	£4,999.99 (including wind-tunnel session with Drag2Zero worth £490)
Contact	Multisport Distribution 01908 686860 www.rideblue.com



The Tektro rear brake calliper is hidden away discreetly below the bottom bracket



Should you cut too short, you can convert to a standard seatpin arrangement



The Triad comes with base and tri-bars from Blue off-shoot Aerus

more relaxed 76° and a super-aggressive 80° are also possible), I find it responsive but far from unstable.

One of the main characteristics of the course is just how much it undulates and rolls through the forest terrain without mercy. Eventually it pops out of the trees onto Ocknell Plain where the ground opens up, leaving the rider exposed to the vagaries of the weather. So far I've not noticed any real

wind, such is the shelter of the tree-lined sections, but up here a headwind makes its presence felt straightaway.

I tuck my chin low and inch forward on the saddle to cheat the breeze as much as I possibly can, finding the position surprisingly comfortable and relaxed. The Aerus tri-bars are sensibly wide and ergonomically brilliant. Maybe they don't have the sexy good looks of some more radical after-market products out there, but sod the aesthetics – if you're

spending 56-plus miles on them, then it's comfort that counts!

The headwind reminds me that there's something pretty special about the purchase price of the Triad – it includes a wind-tunnel fitting session with Drag2Zero, where they help you optimise your position on the bike aerodynamically. Seeing as about 85% of the drag in cycling is due to the rider this makes sense, and gives the Triad a real competitive advantage over other top-end bikes.

Blue velvet

Near the aptly-named Nomansland section of the course, I make a right-hand turn to roll round the upper loop. Only ridden in the first lap, this is a section that's just as undulating as the rest and doesn't let you off the hook technically, with twists, turns and narrow roads requiring plenty of concentration.

I have to repeatedly test the stiffness and responsiveness of the Triad now, getting out of the saddle for the numerous short climbs and accelerating hard out of bends. It feels willing and quick, egging me on to push harder until I start to realise that my quads

Heading into Nomansland to start the technically demanding upper loop of the New Forest course



are stinging with lactic acid build-up and I have to throttle back. The bike is certainly outperforming the rider today.

Despite some agricultural road surfaces in this section, the Triad doesn't give an overly harsh ride and the Michelin Pro race tyres do a fine job, feeling supple yet fast having been whacked up to about 120psi for this trip.

Rounding a very tight right-hander to join the main road back towards Sandy Balls, I rejoin a section of the course that will be repeated on lap two. By now I don't need an invitation to crank it up and I'm soon flying along, tucked down low and pushing the 53 x 11 for all I'm worth... which is probably not £4,999.99, but it's fun nonetheless. It's here that many athletes will be subtly easing back and stretching calves and lower backs for the impending run. But not me, I'm still going all out as I get back to the entrance... and consequently overshoot the turning.

Overall verdict

If asked to write some persuasive marketing blurb on the OneLastTri bike course, then I'd have to concentrate on the beautiful scenery,

the lack of time spent on main-drag strips and the tremendous challenge offered by the undulations, twists and turns of the forest roads. It's an enjoyable course to ride, but don't be fooled by the ponies and picture-postcard views, because this is a course that will punish those who aren't in good biking shape. The relentless power-on, power-off nature of the hills and the need to stay alert 100% of the time will catch out anyone whose training has drifted into off-season mode by October. You have been warned!

Far more important with regards to our main purpose today, though, the OneLastTri route was a real baptism of fire for the Triad, placing an emphasis on handling, climbing, descending and high-speed time trialling all at the same time. A bike that can do all of these things well is a rare beast indeed but, on first impressions, the Blue is just such a machine. It feels quick but is also supremely comfortable to ride. This is perhaps due in part to it being professionally fitted, but it's also down to the well-designed ergonomics of details such as the excellent saddle and handlebar set-up. This would make it a great

choice for long-distance racers in particular, and this is perhaps where the core of its target market lies.

The spec can't really be faulted, with tried-and-tested high-end components in every area working in harmony to deliver a high level of mechanical precision throughout. Okay, so some won't like the non-standard BB 30 bottom-bracket shell but that's a relatively minor point in the bigger picture. Compared with other bikes at this price point it more than holds its own on paper. Factor in the two hours of wind-tunnel time as part of the deal and it blows most of the competition away for value.

For the price of a similarly specced Cervélo P4, for example, you could get a Triad, plus the wind-tunnel set-up, and still have enough cash left over for a trip

to Kona in October where, if you're lucky enough to be racing, the Blue would be a mighty fine machine to whisk you along Queen K. **E20**

VERDICT	
Handling	10
Spec	9
Value	9
Comfort	10
220 TRIATHLON RATING	9