

BIKE Review

Aesthetics: ★★★★★ (4/5)
 (I loved it – but it's not for everyone)
 Components: ★★★★★ (4/5)
 Handling: ★★★★★ (5/5)
 Value: ★★★★★ (4/5)
 Performance: 17/20

Jonathan Hall reviews:
 2009/10 Kestrel Airfoil Pro SE



Kestrel Spreads its wings with design and performance

TEXT BY JONATHAN HALL | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDY CUMMING

There is nothing that we like more at *Australian Triathlete* than receiving products that have been born from 'out of the box' thinking, and that have been designed specifically with the triathlon market in mind. Kestrel is a brand that dates back to 1986 with the world's first all-carbon frame set. The Kestrel 4000 turned heads from the get-go way back then. In 1989, Kestrel introduced the EMS all-carbon fork to the world, and I remember vividly this being the fork of choice for retro fitting the trick road bikes of the time. The evolution continued in 1989 with the introduction of a triathlon and time trial specific frame – the 500 SCi – using the now famous design without the use of a seat tube.

There is a great deal of information available on the Kestrel's history as well as all of the current models and specifications, but in this article I will deal primarily with the ride. All the technical information can be found at www.kestrelbicycles.com

For this issue, we have had the 2009/2010 Kestrel Airfoil Pro SE at our disposal and, in keeping with the Kestrel tradition, it certainly turned heads around the office and at the coffee shop. So how did it ride?

The first challenge with any bike review, or in purchasing a new bike, is to set up one position. As part of the process I supplied Kestrel distributors Oceania Bicycles with my position and I received a 52cm Kestrel Airfoil Pro SE – the first obvious standout of the Airfoil frame is that it is constructed without the traditional seat tube.

My first challenge was to set the seat height and, to do this, I actually had to trim a few centimetres from the carbon seat post as the frame allows for only a 100mm entry. With this done, I found myself with a great deal of flexibility in attaining my position of choice. While 52cm sounds quite small, I had chosen this size because I planned to get as slippery (Aero) as possible using the ZIPP Vuka carbon bars that come standard with this bike. One of the real strengths in the design and subsequent geometry of the Airfoil Pro SE is the short head tube, and this short head tube allowed me to play with my handlebar height whilst maintaining a position of balance. I was able to set the position up in what I would call an elongated style, with the focus on being as long and slippery as possible.

So with my position set, and the bike all dialed into my own personal settings, I hit the road. My first outing was along the famous stretch of Beach Road in Melbourne because it allowed me to put the Airfoil Pro SE through its paces on longer straight stretches. The Kestrel comes equipped with custom Zipp 404 wheels and utilises SRAM Red components, and once I got to speed and selected my gears I found that the Kestrel rode extremely comfortably along this stretch of road. I have spoken about feeling fast before, and the relationship between feeling fast and riding fast and the Kestrel did just this. I felt as though I was needing to put out very little force and effort to get a great return along the road. Not only was the Kestrel great when hitting out hard in time trial mode but, due to its lightness and stiffness, I found it accelerating nicely underneath me when pulling away from lights or jumping back up to cruising speed out of corners.

When I was testing the Airfoil Pro SE, the only thing that I did notice from not having a seat tube (other than the sly comments relating to my weight and how the frame managed to carry it without a seat tube) was that there is a small carbon wing that the front derailleur sits on so that shifting from large to small chain wheel can continue. There was no difference in feel, nothing in the way of sound and the main observation was that I did not notice it – and I see this as a very good thing.

Did I mention that the Airfoil SE was light? For a fully equipped triathlon machine this is a great bonus as I knew immediately that, not only would the bike

perform on the flat coastal roads of Australia, but would also be ideal for the hillier challenges of Europe. To test my Europe theory, I hit out on one of my favorite rides in Melbourne along Kew Boulevard. While not being mountainous, the boulevard is also far from flat with constant rises and falls along the road. This is where I was surprised to see the Kestrel really come into its element. The bike rides and feels like a great road bike whilst comprising all the great time trial elements of aerodynamic tube designs and set-up. One of the key things I look for in a time trial bike is that, beyond all the aerodynamic cheats, the bike must still feel comfortable and allow the rider to ride as fast as physically and safely possible. If I had desired to equip the Airfoil with standard drop bars, I could easily have ridden it as a road bike; with the time trial set-up it easily met all my expectations in this area.

After a week of riding, I put the Airfoil Pro SE to a real test when I stepped out with some noted riders and tested myself against them. Being the realist that I am, I was aware that my physical conditioning was

not where it needed to be, but that I was on a bike that would potentially make this less relevant. On this day I actually kept up with athletes who should have been able to dispatch of me easily, and I put it down to the bike I was on. Yes, it was a combination of things that allowed me to do this with my position, and comfort being paramount, but I achieved this very easily on the Airfoil Pro SE which allowed me to get much more out of my capabilities than I thought.

The ultimate test may have been to get off and run after the hard session, but in reality I did not need to as I knew that the amount of effort it took me to ride with my peers was significantly less than on my traditional road bike – and that this must be a good thing for getting off to run afterwards.

Kestrel have always been at the cutting edge in design for triathlon. They have also been one of the most ridden frames at the Hawaii Ironman. The current incarnation of the Kestrel design – the Airfoil Pro SE – has continued with this passion. The Kestrel Airfoil Pro SE was not only fast in a time trial but it

cornered well, accelerated well, was very light and responsive, offered great variance in attaining my position, was great looking and turned heads, very comfortable and, most importantly, was the type of bike that I would get great pleasure to train and race on.

If you are in the market for something new, an upgrade, or something a little different, then I highly recommend that you at least consider the Kestrel brand and the Airfoil Pro SE. The Kestrel Airfoil Pro SE comes in at AUD\$9,999 for all the bells and whistles, but there is also the Airfoil Pro that, at AUD\$5,999, offers the same outstanding performance in the Kestrel frame design but with a different component build.

Jonathan Hall is the head triathlon coach at the Victorian Institute of Sport. He was World Duathlon Champion in 1997 and, in a long career as a professional cyclist, earned four national road race championships, a national time trial title and finished eighth at the World Time Trial Championships.



PROFILE: A great bike with a great position = performance



THE SHORT HEAD TUBE: For great variability in position



LOOK ODD?: No seat tube – the Kestrel approach

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