



# LENNARD'S LOOK AT CENTAUR

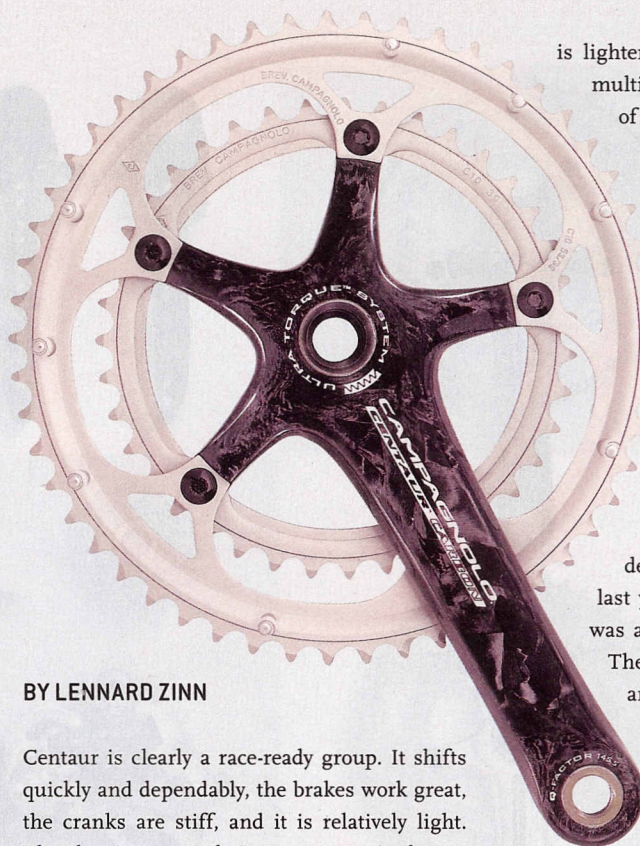
not allow a rider to dump a full cassette-worth of gears in one stroke, from the 25- to the 11-tooth cog, as both Record and Chorus do, when going over a climb onto a descent. There is also the issue of feel. The Escape mechanism has a noticeably lighter action than what's found in the upper two groups. It also requires a few more degrees of motion to complete a downshift. This is nice on the road, but the stiffer feel of the old mechanism on a bumpy cyclocross course is preferable. As for the shifter ergonomics, with the Centaur, as with Record, reaching the cable release lever is awkward, usually requiring an added hand movement. The only difference among the Centaur, Record and Chorus carbon brake levers are the names written on their faces. Finally, it must be noted that the Escape mechanism is not compatible with the direct-wired ErgoBrain computer.

When it comes to other items, including the derailleurs and brakes, the difference in performance between Record and Centaur is negligible, except with a scale. In fact, the Centaur front derailleur may be more durable than the Record version, which has a delicate carbon outer cage. The same is true for the cassette. Without question, Centaur's nickel-chromed steel sprockets will outlast Record's titanium version. At a weight penalty that's only about 80 grams, it's pretty exciting stuff for a Campy lover on a budget.

## CENTAUR'S BRAND NEW CARBON ULTRA-TORQUE CRANKSET

This isn't the first year Campy offered a Centaur Ultra-Torque crankset. It was introduced along with Record and Chorus, but it only came in aluminum. The carbon version cuts weight and adds to the group's aesthetic appeal. The Ultra-Torque design, introduced last year, served to completely erase the square taper stigma Campy carried in the age of more advanced designs. Ultra-Torque was past due but proved worth the wait. The Centaur carbon crank differs from Chorus and Record in construction. The Record crank is made from hollow-molded carbon, while Chorus uses a thermo-set polymer core, and Centaur's arms are molded entirely from a solid laminate of multi-directional carbon fiber. Of note, the alloy Centaur cranks have different, thicker alloy chainrings that resemble those found on Chorus and Record, but with a traditional polished finish. To make the carbon crank a bit more economical, it is fitted with sheared-drawn (stamping method) chainrings, which are then coated with the same anti-friction treatment as Chorus and Record chainrings.

Centaur is a very sexy group that obviates the need to spend more, even if you have the spare cash to shell out. It's the classiest group out there for those on a budget.



BY LENNARD ZINN

Centaur is clearly a race-ready group. It shifts quickly and dependably, the brakes work great, the cranks are stiff, and it is relatively light. The aluminum-crank Centaur group is about a pound heavier than Record or SRAM Red; the carbon-crank Centaur group is about three-quarters of a pound heavier. On the other hand, it costs less than half of those groups, which is a pretty worthwhile tradeoff.

It is a beautiful group, looking as stylish on a \$7,000 bicycle as it does on one costing \$2,000. The carbon Ultra-Torque external-bearing crank (and even the aluminum one) looks great, as do the carbon Ergopower levers and carbon rear derailleur. The anodized finish on all of the rest of the components is beautiful – one glance and it's easily recognizable as Campagnolo. It does not look like a conglomeration of parts; it has the look of a unified group.

The Escape mechanism in the Centaur lever

is lighter, but loses the ability to make multiple up-shifts with a single push of the thumb lever. This shift is very fast and positive on Centaur, but the ability to dump three cogs at a time, which you still can do with Chorus and Record, is a sorely missed feature. A click with the thumb lever is not as definitive as it is on Record or Chorus, but it is quick and certain. The large downshift paddle lever is a bit sluggish on the return, but it shifts well.

Campy beefed up its front derailleurs throughout its lines last year, adding five grams or so. It was a worthwhile addition of weight.

The new QS style front derailleurs are stiffer and quicker shifting, thanks to wider pivots and stiffer, re-shaped cages. The Centaur FD is no exception; it generates quick and positive shifts repeatedly.

Since the left lever has numerous small clicks in it, it's possible to trim the front derailleur on any chainring to eliminate chain rub. And switching to a triple crank is no problem; the same lever works perfectly.

Centaur is not compatible with ErgoBrain, which is a negative because it indicates what gear you are in without looking back.

Campagnolo has hit a home run with Centaur. It works great, looks fantastic, is light and stiff, and a lot less expensive than other groups offering a small upgrade in either looks or performance. Compared to similarly priced groups from other manufacturers, it works at least as well or better in every single part.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MANUFACTURERS

## CAMPAGNOLO CENTAUR: BY THE NUMBERS

COMPONENT	PRICE	WEIGHT (GRAMS)
Ergopower shifters	\$310	340
Rear Derailleur	\$174	225
Front Derailleur	\$66	110
Alloy Crankset	\$286	840 (34/50, 175mm)
Carbon Crankset	\$461	710 (39/53, 172.5mm)
Bottom Bracket Cups	\$29	50
Cassette	\$152	250 (11-25 w/locking)
Chain (Chorus)	\$64	275
Brakeset	\$221	335