

MATERIAL CONCERNS

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE BETWEEN CARBON AND ALUMINUM? BY JOE LINDSEY

The saddle and post are upgrades not possible at the Allez's price; carbon fiber added at the bottom bracket increases stiffness, not weight.



Specialized Tarmac Elite Compact

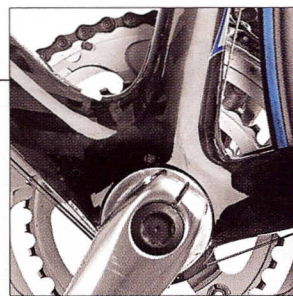
PAY \$2,000 FOR A BIKE, AND YOU'VE STEPPED OVER A LINE: IT MARKS THE START of a serious devotion to the sport, and that deserves a serious bike. The Tarmac Elite Compact is exactly that. Like the Allez, it's part of Specialized's competitive road line, but features a tighter wheelbase and neutral yet quick handling. The \$650 leap from the Allez to the Tarmac is significant, but for a performance-minded rider looking to grow in the sport, there's a compelling argument to spend more.

Although fitted with almost identical parts, the Tarmac is more than a pound lighter than the Allez, and thanks to its full carbon-fiber frame and Zertz-equipped seatpost, has better ride quality than the Allez. But it's about 40 percent more expensive. That's the divider between a carbon frame and an aluminum one, according to Jon Swanson, Specialized's competitive road product manager. "People are looking for value," he says. But with more technology, "cost becomes a detractor—you've just got to pay to play."

For the extra money, a carbon frame offers a product manager like Swanson the opportunity to explore different carbon-layup sequences to tune the frame's ride quality to a degree that metal simply can't match. Not all of the price spread is due to the frame—the Tarmac also gets a vibration-damping seatpost and a lighter Body Geometry Toupe seat.

On the road, the primary differences between the Tarmac and Allez are ride quality and handling. The Tarmac has an eagerness that the Allez doesn't match. It responds quickly under a sudden, hard effort, and although it's no weight watcher, I clearly felt the pound of difference between it and the Allez on climbs. The handling is identical to the S-Works Tarmac models, with a tight wheelbase and a responsive, quick-turning front end compared with the more stable and slightly slower-turning Allez.

If you crave value, it's hard to spend \$650 more for what's basically an identical bike. But if you wonder where this sport might lead you—could you race?—then the Tarmac speaks to you.



\$2,200

WEIGHT	19.0 lb. (54cm)
SIZES	49, 52, 54 (tested), 56, 58 and 61cm
FRAME	Specialized FACT 6r carbon fiber
FORK	Specialized FACT carbon fiber w/ aluminum steerer
COMPONENT HIGHLIGHTS	Shimano 105 STI shifters and derailleurs, compact crankset (50/34); aluminum dual-pivot brake calipers; Specialized Pavé II seatpost w/ Zertz insert, BG Toupe saddle, Mondo Pro 23c tires; Mavic CXP-22 rims
INFO	specialized.com

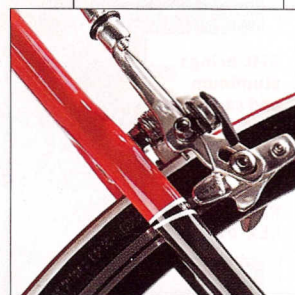
! More at BICYCLING.com . . .

For a side-by-side video comparison of these two bikes, go to BICYCLING.com/video.

CARBON FIBER RULES THE ROAD-BIKE WORLD THESE DAYS, BUT ITS DOMINION IS NOT YET COMPLETE. AT PRICES BELOW \$2,000, there are still a number of compelling aluminum-framed bikes available. How should you choose? We tested two bikes from Specialized to find out which is best. Both the Tarmac Elite Compact and the Allez Elite Compact are from Specialized's competitive road family. With small variations, they share geometry and parts, so frame material and design intent are the primary differences. Our tests show that who you are as a rider determines what's right for you.



Carbon touches include the wishbone seatstays; the real difference is the slightly slacker head angle for stable steering.



Specialized Allez Elite Compact

THE ALLEZ ELITE IS A COLLISION OF WORLDS. IT COMES FROM SPECIALIZED'S competitive road line but, as product manager Jon Swanson points out, that's an attitude, not a directive. "It doesn't mean the buyer has a racing license," he says, "but it's a mind-set in terms of what they want out of a bike—how it fits, how it handles, even how it looks."

It's also a fine example of value: Four years ago, Specialized made an S-Works series road bike in E5 aluminum. Today, you can get a complete, 20-speed bike built from the same tubing—with carbon seatstays—for less than that frame alone cost back then.

The racy-looking Allez Elite has identical geometry to the top-end Tarmac with two exceptions: The head tube is 10mm taller and the head angle is half a degree slacker, but our test bike still had the short, 40.5cm chainstays and a rangy, 54.8cm top tube. "A lot of people don't see themselves as Roubaix riders," Swanson says of the company's endurance road line, "but may not fit the Tarmac geometry. The Allez is a bridge bike."

On the road, the steering is a touch slower than the Tarmac's, but not sluggish. Specialized negates most of the fit options of a taller head tube because the Allez has a 5mm shorter headset stack than the Tarmac; at most, the Allez's bar can be set 5mm higher.

The Allez feels solid beneath you, due in part to its steady steering and in part to its weight, more than a pound heavier than the all-carbon Tarmac, thanks to the frame material. Drivetrain stiffness is good, a testament to aluminum's capabilities and Specialized's know-how. The compact gearing helps on climbs, and the unbranded dual-pivot brakes (same as the Tarmac's) proved smooth and powerful on descents. The Allez has a sharper edge to its ride than the Tarmac, a function of its dominant frame material.

One of the few parts differences between the bikes is the seatpost—the Allez has a standard model and the Tarmac has a carbon post with Zertz vibration-damping inserts. If that seems backward, blame economics. Putting that post on the Allez would price the bike out of its range, says Swanson, and at this level price is everything.

For the rider who wants a stiff, powerful bike with stable handling and a low price tag, the Allez is a solid choice. If you're into value, that deal is hard to beat.



\$1,550

WEIGHT	20.32 lb. [54cm]
SIZES	49, 52, 54 (tested), 56, 58 and 61cm
FRAME	Specialized E5 aluminum w/ FACT carbon-fiber seatstays
FORK	Specialized FACT carbon fiber w/ aluminum steerer
COMPONENT HIGHLIGHTS	Shimano 105 STI shifters and derailleurs, compact crankset (50/34); aluminum dual-pivot brake calipers; Mavic CXP-22 rims; Specialized Mondo Pro 700x23c tires
INFO	specialized.com