

Merida Scultura Team

£7,750 | 7.25kg

Stefan Abram marvels at a pro-level climbing bike that's light and aero

Although the Scultura range started out as Merida's pure lightweight climbing platform, this fifth iteration has been subject to some pretty significant changes.

There's been no dilution to its racing pedigree, though – this is the exact same frame and build as used by WorldTour team Bahrain Victorious. It's just that these days there's more to making a climbing bike fast than just shaving off a few grams (which Merida has also done, for good measure). Aerodynamics and rider comfort are two more sources of speed which the new Scultura taps into. So while this is a bike designed expressly with WorldTour podiums in mind, it's also a wonderfully balanced machine that's a pleasure to ride.

Frame

To put some numbers on those weight savings, in a size medium this fifth iteration of the Scultura is claimed to

save 38g over the outgoing version's frame, bringing the weight down to a claimed 822g. Now, this isn't exactly pushing the boundaries of frame design: for comparison, the Specialized Aethos is claimed to weigh 699g in a size 56cm. But then again, even the previous Scultura with its extra 38g could still be built to the UCI weight limit of 6.8kg.

With that hard limit on just how light the pros can go, and with aerodynamics becoming the dominant force when you get above 16kph (for context, the fastest times up Mont Ventoux are over 20kph), it's easy to see why Merida has ported over so many features from its Reacto aero bike.

PROS & CONS



LOW WEIGHT
AND GOOD
AERODYNAMICS

GREAT VALUE FOR
WORLDTOUR BIKE



COMPONENT
SWAPPING
DIFFICULT

WHEELS ARE
TWITCHY IN
CROSSWINDS

The tubing is a little boxier than before, the seatstays have been dropped, and the cables are now routed through the headset rather than entering at the top of the down tube – which has the added benefit of a clean aesthetic, albeit with something of a sacrifice to the ease of the initial build and component swaps.

In total, Merida claims that these changes have resulted in a 10-watt saving at 45kph over the previous Scultura.

Regarding the ride quality, Merida has approached this from two ends. Firstly, the seat tube has been shortened by 40mm, and with the seatpost being clamped a little further down, there's more scope for it to flex. Tyre clearances have also been increased, with the new Scultura rated to take up to plump 30mm – although it looks like you could go even wider to maximise comfort.

The geometry has been designed to give an identical fit to the Reacto aero bike, to make it easier for the Bahrain Victorious riders to switch between the models. As such, the stack in my size large is 571mm, with the reach standing at 400mm. The head tube and seat tube angles are pretty close, with 73.5° for the former and 73° dead-on for the latter. With chainstays of 408mm and a BB drop of 66mm, it's all pretty in line with what you'd expect from a race-focused bike.



Integrated bar and stem saves weight but complicates the bike-fit process

SPECS

Frame Scultura CF5 V, carbon, 142x12mm axle standard, Pressfit 86.5, Flat Mount **Fork** Scultura CF5 disc, 100x12mm axle standard, flat mount **Groupset** Shimano Dura-Ace R9200 **Handlebar** Team SL 1P Integrated **Wheelset** Vision Metron 45 SL Clincher **Tyres** Continental GP 5000 28mm **Saddle** Prologo Scratch M5 **Seatpost** Merida Team SL 27.2mm, 15mm setback **Weight** 7.25kg

TRADITIONAL SEATPOST

Sticking with a standard 27.2mm seatpost is a win for compatibility, and moving the clamp lower down boosts the compliance

ONE-PIECE BAR AND STEM

Whether it's for aero gains or a sleek aesthetic, integrated cockpits are becoming increasingly common – even on climbing bikes



DURA-ACE POWER METER

More bikes are starting to be sold with power meters as standard, although it's still relatively rare

“It’s a wonderfully balanced machine that’s a pleasure to ride”



LOWERED SEATSTAYS

As with the Reacto aero bike, the seatstays have been lowered to help improve the aerodynamic efficiency

WIDER CLEARANCES

Although 25mm is still the racing width of choice for many, the 30mm clearances give scope for those seeking a more cushioned ride

45MM-DEEP WHEELS

They might not quite match the imagined profile of a climbing bike, but with a claimed weight of 1,372g, the Vision Metron 45 SL wheels don't feel their depth.

Sticking with hooked rims maximises tyre compatibility

MY RIDING



Stefan Abram,
tech writer

Fortunately for me, my time on the Scultura overlapped with a trip to Girona for Sea Otter

Europe, and I really made the most of it. Fun as the punchy climbs of Sussex

and the south of England are, there isn't much in the way of variety beyond that.

Adding in some long, steep climbs, hairpin descents and the gently undulating foothills helped build up a much more complete sense of the bike, even though that's not the kind of riding most of us will do most of the time.

11-30t is 12-speed and race ready



Specification

The Scultura Team comes complete with the new Dura-Ace R9200 groupset, while the 160mm XTR brake rotors, with their superior heat resistance, are from Shimano's mountain bike line. These, in conjunction with the redesigned calipers and Merida's own cooling fins, mean overheating of the brakes is unlikely.

With the racing credentials of this bike, the gearing is on the more aggressive side. The 11-30t cassette might sound quite wide, but with the additional 12th sprocket, the jumps are a little tighter than on the ubiquitous 11-speed 11-28t cassette. Although Shimano is offering a 54/40t crankset for the pros, the Scultura Team comes with a 52/36 semi-compact – with an integrated power meter.

The Vision Metron 45 SL wheels might seem a little deep for climbing but the claimed weight is impressively low at 1,372g – and that's despite sticking with a hooked rim profile, which is often blamed by other brands for adding extra weight. With the downside minimised, the positives of hooked rims can be fully enjoyed, namely, much greater compatibility with different tyres, such as the specced Continental GP 5000, which are a firm favourite at CW. A blunt U-shaped profile provides greater crosswind stability and a very wide external rim width of 31.1mm creates an optimal interface with 28mm tyres. Internally, the rims are also quite modern, with a 21mm width to provide better sidewall support at lower pressures.

The move to an integrated bar and stem has saved a few watts, but it does make getting a spot-on bike-fit trickier and more expensive. On the other hand, it is good to see that Merida has stuck with a traditional round 27.2mm seatpost.

The ride

The new Scultura's blend of aerodynamic efficiency and a relatively low weight may be aimed at racing success, but it's also simply great fun to ride.

The heavier weight of aero bikes often dampens the feeling of immediate responsiveness and playful liveliness, but the Scultura has this in spades.

At the same time, pure, ultra-lightweight bikes have their own drawbacks. Accelerations and hills might

be dispatched with ease, but on the flat it can feel like a constant fight to not lose speed. Although the Scultura doesn't quite have that knife-through-butter sensation of a full-on aero bike, to give another gastronomic analogy, you don't feel like you're riding through treacle.

Of course, the flipside to a jack of all trades is being a master of none – I wouldn't choose this bike for a hill-climb or a road bike TT, for instance. But equally I never got the sense that one element was compromising the other.

For example, while in Girona, Spain, I took the bike up the Rocacorba climb, which is 10km long with an average gradient of 7.4% and averaged 15.1kph. Very likely I would have been a bit faster on an even lighter bike, but the Scultura was still plenty feathery enough that I didn't feel held back – and I then got to fully enjoy the fast and gently rolling route back into the city.

Naturally the new Dura-Ace will get its own review but briefly, the braking has stepped up another level. The first part of the lever pull feels a bit less grabby, making fine adjustments to your speed a little easier – before progressively ramping up to give easily as much power as the tyres could handle.

While the Vision Metron 45 SL wheels are a great match for the bike, with their combination of aerodynamic performance and relatively low weight, they did feel a little more twitchy in the crosswinds than other wheels of a comparable depth. If you generally ride wheels that are deeper, you likely wouldn't even notice, but it's worth being aware of it if you prefer shallower rims.

Verdict

The Merida Scultura epitomises the new breed of aero climbing bikes, offering a lively ride with immediate accelerations, while still being able to tick along at pace on the flat. With WorldTour-level builds now commonly reaching £10,000, the £7,750 asking price of the Scultura is even comparatively cheap. Comparatively.

RATING



ALTERNATIVELY...



ONE UP

Merida Scultura 10K £9,000



Even Bahrain Victorious's team bike isn't the most exclusive. The very top model swaps the Vision Metron 45 SL wheels for a set of Zipp 353 NSW shod with the tubeless version of Continental's GP 5000 tyres. Naturally, the new Dura-Ace is still present, as is the integrated power meter.



ONE DOWN

Merida Scultura 9000 £5,700



Taking a step down, Dura-Ace is swapped for Ultegra – still 12-speed and electronic, although missing the power meter. The Vision wheels are also gone, replaced with Reynolds Black Label Aero 46 Carbon hoops, although these are paired with tubeless Continental GP 5000 tyres like the Scultura 10K.