



# Bike test

## AIRNIMAL Chameleon Ultra

This, 007, is your bicycle



Steve Calland

**F**OLDING bikes are often viewed as gimmicky, something you would expect to see the eccentric among us pedalling around on, and as a racing cyclist it's the kind of bike I would normally not be interested in riding for any length of time. That is until I began to travel more frequently with my work and I found that to take my bike with me was turning into a kind of military exercise.

Most of us only travel with our bikes once or twice a year, to training camps or maybe even to a race or challenge ride abroad. When we do pack our beloved up for a flight, it can take more than an hour before we're happy to say goodbye to it as the bag slides off down the baggage belt into the abyss of the baggage handler's domain. Even before those anxious looks, you most likely would have paid some sort of excess charge for the privilege of taking it away and may just be thankful that the bike bag is travelling with you at all.

If I was going to maintain any kind of race fitness I would need

to find some alternative solution as I am now away from home on average 15 days a month and even though I work for an airline, no special privileges are afforded me — the baggage limit still applies and the baggage handling process is no different.

This is where the chance to test the Airmimal Chameleon Ultra became a little more attractive. The Airmimal arrived in a standard-sized Delsey suitcase and I couldn't believe that the bike would actually fit inside. Ten minutes later and it was built and ready to ride; the most time-consuming part of the process was replacing both skewers into the 24in wheels. It was even quicker to put back in the case, at an average of around eight minutes.

At first glance the bike looks a little, well, odd. The smaller wheels and the long steerer column give the impression that this bike may well be a challenge to ride at all, never mind ride fast. A closer look and the quality components grab the eye as it has a 10-speed Shimano Ultegra groupset attached and the wheels even look sporty.

My first real ride of the bike (not including the spin around the car park to ensure I would be able to stay upright) was on a crisp, bright and cold Saturday morning



Elastomer shock is replaceable

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in Philadelphia. I'd done some internet surfing and discovered that a local racing team met each Saturday for a 50-mile chain gang just a few miles from my hotel, so along I went to give the bike a real first test.

Once the other 30 or so riders had satisfied their curiosity — and checked that I had a spare and a pump as they thought I would never last — the ride began. Immediately the bike brought a grin from ear to ear. With the smaller wheels it accelerated wonderfully and cornered fantastically with its low centre of gravity.

The bike has an elastomer shock to soften the ride, as otherwise the smaller diameter wheels would make the ride far too harsh. This would sometimes be a little too soft for my liking but a harder version (or softer) is available for £10. Once the real riding began and the group began to work together it struck me that I was riding much closer to the rider in front than I was used to as the 24-inchers allow you to get that bit closer, making the drafting that little bit more effective. Also I was beginning to run out of gears as the 53x12 gearing with the 24in wheels

gives 106 inches — about equivalent to 50x12 with standard 700c wheels. On this basis an 11 tooth might be more use.

But the bike felt great and as my confidence grew I was jumping around alongside the strongest in the group. Only on the steeper climbs did I feel any disadvantage due to the extra weight and at times it felt less reluctant to roll at high speeds, which was possibly due to the lower inertia of the smaller wheels. On our return to the city I felt that a little respect for the Englishman and his crazy bike had been won and we wound down through the increasing traffic to a well earned cake stop. (Nice to know our friends across the pond appreciate the same aspects of the sport!)

The only minor criticisms I have are that the frame is difficult to clean and the supplied seatpost and saddle contribute to the flex felt through the saddle. This was reduced by replacing them with a Thomson

post and Specialized saddle. The front mech also needed raising as it struck the caliper, but thanks to Shimano's precision the shift quality was unaffected.

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## TAKING THE BIKE ABROAD

## Packing the Airmimal

THE bike fits in the case very comfortably, leaving a little extra space for shoes and kit. The weight of the case was around 15kg. The first few times I travelled the wheels came out slightly buckled as these sit at the top.

To resolve this I bought a metre of plastic waste tubing of 1in diameter and six 1.5in end caps to construct struts for the case.

It took some time to measure the struts and cut them but once the hard work had been done and the case closed you could stand on top of the case without any load on the bike. I haven't had any issues with damage to the bike since.

## Home-made struts shield wheels



## CHAMELEON ULTRA

MANUFACTURER	Airmimal
DISTRIBUTOR	Airmimal 01223 523973
PRICE	£1,699
FRAME	7005 series aluminium
FORK	Carbon cro-mo steerer
SIZE RANGE	Small/Large
WEIGHT	20lb (9.1kg)
GROUPSET	Shimano Ultegra
DEVIATIONS	None
ALTERATIONS	Specialized Alias saddle, Thomson Elite setback seatpost
GEAR RATIOS	53/39 with 12-25
WHEELS	Shimano Ultegra hubs with Velocity Aerohead 24 inch
TYRES	Panaracer Technova
BARS	Dedacciai 215
STEM	BBB alloy
SEATPOST	BBB Woodman
SADDLE	Selle Italia SLR
SIZE TESTED	Large

OVERALL RATING

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