



# NORCO VALENCE CARBON 1

Canadian company serves up more comfort

➔ Although more closely associated with the off-road world, Norco has fast become a well-rounded bicycle company with a catalog filled with everything from cyclocross bikes to BMX race bikes and city cruisers. Indeed, Norco has something for every bike lover, except those looking for the Canadian company's entry into the ever-popular endurance road category—that is, until now, with the introduction of their new line of Valence bikes, available in both carbon and aluminum versions.

## THE FRAME

Looking at the Valence's monocoque carbon frame and Norco's CRR race bike side by side reveals a bit of shared DNA. But don't be fooled, because while some bike companies simply modify bits and pieces of existing frames to produce a new model, Norco engineers have done their homework, and the Valence reflects this with a myriad of unique shapes. When considering frame geometry across Norco's road range, the Valence features a longer wheelbase and lower bottom bracket height than the CRR, designed for additional stability, and a taller head tube for a more upright handlebar position. But it's the Valence's unique combination of tube shapes that truly gives it some compliance credentials.

Whereas the seatstays on the racier

CRR are nearly straight lines from the rear dropouts to the seat tube, those on the Valence curve outward in a dramatic S-shape design. They are also noticeably flattened throughout their length, allowing for more deflection when traveling over rough roads. The chainstays are quite tall and robust for any bike that's labeled an "endurance" or "comfort" bike, but they do thin out as they meet the rear dropouts. Likewise, the Valence's fork narrows out quite dramatically toward the dropouts, similar to what we've seen on many of the latest crop of comfort-oriented road bikes. Covering all the comfort bases, Norco also uses a 27.2mm seatpost, that, with added deflection, helps smooth out pesky road chatter. Giving the Valence added versatility for commuting or touring are the full set of front and rear eyelets.

## THE PARTS

Our test model Valence Carbon 1 is the second priciest of Norco's Valence Carbon line, and it features a plethora of Shimano Ultegra parts, including shifters, derailleurs, wheels and brakes. The crankset is an FSA SL-K model, with compact gearing and custom-colored details. Cockpit components are from Ritchey in the form of a Pro Evo Curve handlebar and Pro 4-Axis stem, as well as a Pro seatpost that's topped

with a Fizik Antares saddle. Kenda handles tire duties with a set of clinchers in size 25c.

The top-of-the-line Valence Carbon Di2 includes a Shimano Ultegra Di2 drivetrain and retails for \$5399. For \$2499, you can pick up a Valence Carbon 2 with a mixed Ultegra and FSA gruppo and lower-spec Shimano RS20 wheels. And rounding out the line is the Valence Carbon 3 with Shimano 105 parts. The Valence is also available with an aluminum frame in three build options.

## THE RIDE

When we tested a Norco CRR 2 last year (*RBA*, July 2011), we were pleased to find a capable, race-worthy bike that didn't beat us up with a harsh ride. So with Norco's proclamation that the all-new Valence line would center around rider comfort, we had some high expectations that have been satisfyingly met. The Valence excels at both front- and rear-end vertical compliance, with the relatively thin fork and flattened seatstays deflecting the bulk of road chatter and even taking some heavy pothole hits in stride. And because the chainstays are reasonably tall at the bottom bracket juncture, the Valence offers adequate power transfer as well.

But make no mistake, this is a road bike designed for comfort. While Norco contends that the Valence is "high



The Valence Carbon 1's best attribute is its compliant ride, but stout tubes help give it some credentials in the power transfer department as well.

performance but still comfortable," we would argue that a more accurate tag line would be "highly comfortable but still performance-oriented." Power transfer is on par with equivalent carbon offerings from Norco's competitors, but we were left wanting for a bit more front-end stiffness. The Valence capably performed during many a fast group ride, but was out of its element during the proverbial final sprint to the finish line. Compact gearing should be de facto on any endurance road bike, and the Valence offers an ideal gear spread for most any rider interested in all-day excursions.

## THE VERDICT

Norco markets the Valence as a comfort-oriented, endurance road bike that offers performance benefits for the more aggressive bike handler. So with that being said, don't expect the Valence Carbon 1 to perform like a purpose-built race bike, like the CRR. Your near-\$4000 investment is in comfort, first and foremost, and you'll be getting a hefty return. And with a terrific parts list and a comfortable ride that will benefit most any rider, the Valence Carbon 1 is indeed a great value. Those on tighter budgets can get the same ride-quality benefits with any one of the Valence Carbon build options, while others with extra spending cash and a penchant for electronics would do well to look at the Valence Carbon Di2. ■



The only non-Shimano Ultegra drivetrain part is the FSA SL-K carbon compact crankset, but it does sport some custom, frame-matching graphics.

## PUNCH LINES

- Comfortable and compliant
- Capable handling, not exemplary
- Great parts list adds value
- Clean aesthetics and smooth lines



Built for comfort, the Valence Carbon 1 features flattened seatstays, as well as a 27.2mm-diameter Ritchey seatpost. Shimano's Ultegra brakes are also on tap.

## STATS

Price: \$3849  
 Weight: 17.0 pounds  
 Sizes: 45, 48, 51 (tested), 54, 57, 60cm  
[www.norco.com](http://www.norco.com)