

## FLITE WIDE-RIMMED CARBON WHEELS PRICE: FROM \$2550 • DISTRIBUTED BY: WHEELWORKS.CO.NZ



We all want the latest and greatest piece of kit to strap to our bikes, which often means we have to take a leap of faith on durability. Rather than “*what colour is it?*” what should really be asking is “*will it break?*” A long term review is the gold standard – especially one where the product has been pushed hard in a range of situations by several riders. Luckily, we’ve had the chance to test these Flite carbon wheels over the last two years and have a good grip (!) on how they have performed.

I received these wheels brand new back in July 2014 from Wellington-based boutique wheel builders Wheelworks. I rode them hard and nearly every day for a couple of months. After that they were ridden pretty much non-stop as a test wheelset for potential buyers, as well as Wheelworks sponsored athlete and EWS competitor Carl Jones (hence the rim-stickers). I gave the back one what I thought was a terminal collision with an embedded rock on my first ride and Carl tells me he hit both the front and the back rims hard one after the other on the same object (BANG!BANG!) at the recent Toa Enduro. Now I have them back to see how they’ve held up after being pounded pretty solidly for two years. But before I look at how they’ve fared after two years of hard use (or on the off chance you missed the original review back in issue 66 and didn’t commit to memory every word of my polished prose back then), I’ll summarise the wheel details now: English made Hope Pro 2 hubs, laced with bladed DT butted spokes to Flite 34mm (internal) wide carbon rims. The rims feature a hookless bead and a good tubeless lip. I can tell you they weigh 1685 grams; if you think you need wheels lighter than this then I wish you all the best at the XC race at the Olympics this year.

So, how are they now? They’re still as

tight as a tiger for one thing (which is of course an imperial measurement of spoke tension, with loose as a goose at the other end of the scale. Anyway, spoke tension is still tight is the point I’m getting at). And Wheelworks tell me they haven’t touched them with a spoke-key since new. That’s frankly impressive given the harsh upbringing they’ve had. They still give incredible support to tyres to allow low pressures without squirming. Tyres are still mounted easily, blow up easily and have never burped.

After changing tyres a few times I did find though that some tyres come up pretty square (flat-topped) and lose their cornering edge – a common characteristic of such wide rims. This is not a good thing when it comes to leaning the bike over, as the cornering knobs can suddenly disappear, and so can your front wheel. So, make sure you mount a big tyre, with a nice crowned (round) shape to it, especially on the front. I’ve been running a Maxxis Minion DHF lately and before that a Schwalbe Magic Mary. Both of these mate very well with the wide carbon rim and can be run at low pressures (20 psi up front) and so provide unbeatable grip but with zero squirm – which is what the whole wide-rim thing is all about. And stiffness too – especially for big guys on 29ers – you’re more likely than anyone to feel how much less ‘twanging’ and weird handling moments are produced with stiff carbon rims like these.

The bearings in the rear hub are a bit rough and due for replacement, but you can’t really complain about that after two years of solid use. They’re easy enough to replace too. Still, I should point out that the freehub bearings were rough some time ago and early wear on these has been an issue with Hope Pro 2 bearings and the standard 10

speed freehub since moving to the 12mm thru axle a few years back. It’s not such an issue with the XD driver for some reason. In any case, I’m told it’s an issue that has been addressed with a bigger bearing in the new Hope Pro 4 hubs, which essentially replace the Pro 2s and are available on all new Wheelworks wheels.

To be honest, while I’m not a carbon-hater, I would have been nervous about using carbon rims in some situations (like far away from help) before seeing how well these wheels have stood up over time. But seeing how they’ve handled the last 2 years, I’d run this carbon wheelset happily in any situation. Each of the big hits they took with me and then Carl Jones at the helm may well have been curtains for a lesser wheelset, but these came through entirely unscathed. Nope, not a scratch on them (actually, there are plenty of little superficial scratches on the outside of the rim, from all the miles they’ve done, but nothing more). In contrast, I’ve still got a lot of time for alloy frames over carbon frames in some situations (mainly because of frames I’ve seen with crushed in carbon tubes after pretty minor tumbles).

So, they’ll stand up to abuse. In fact, since my first review, Wheelworks have added a lifetime guarantee to the wheels – which covers rim damage from impacts and spoke breakage. You what? Yes, a lifetime guarantee on wheels. No other wheel offers this guarantee as far as I’m aware.

As you can probably tell, I’m very impressed with these wheels. While they’re not cheap, they’re also not the most expensive wheelset out there either, but with the performance they offer and the apparent longevity, they have to be one of the best, if not the best, option out there at the moment.

**Carl Patton**