

CENTURION

The Equipe Centurion Coaxes A Winner Out of Italy

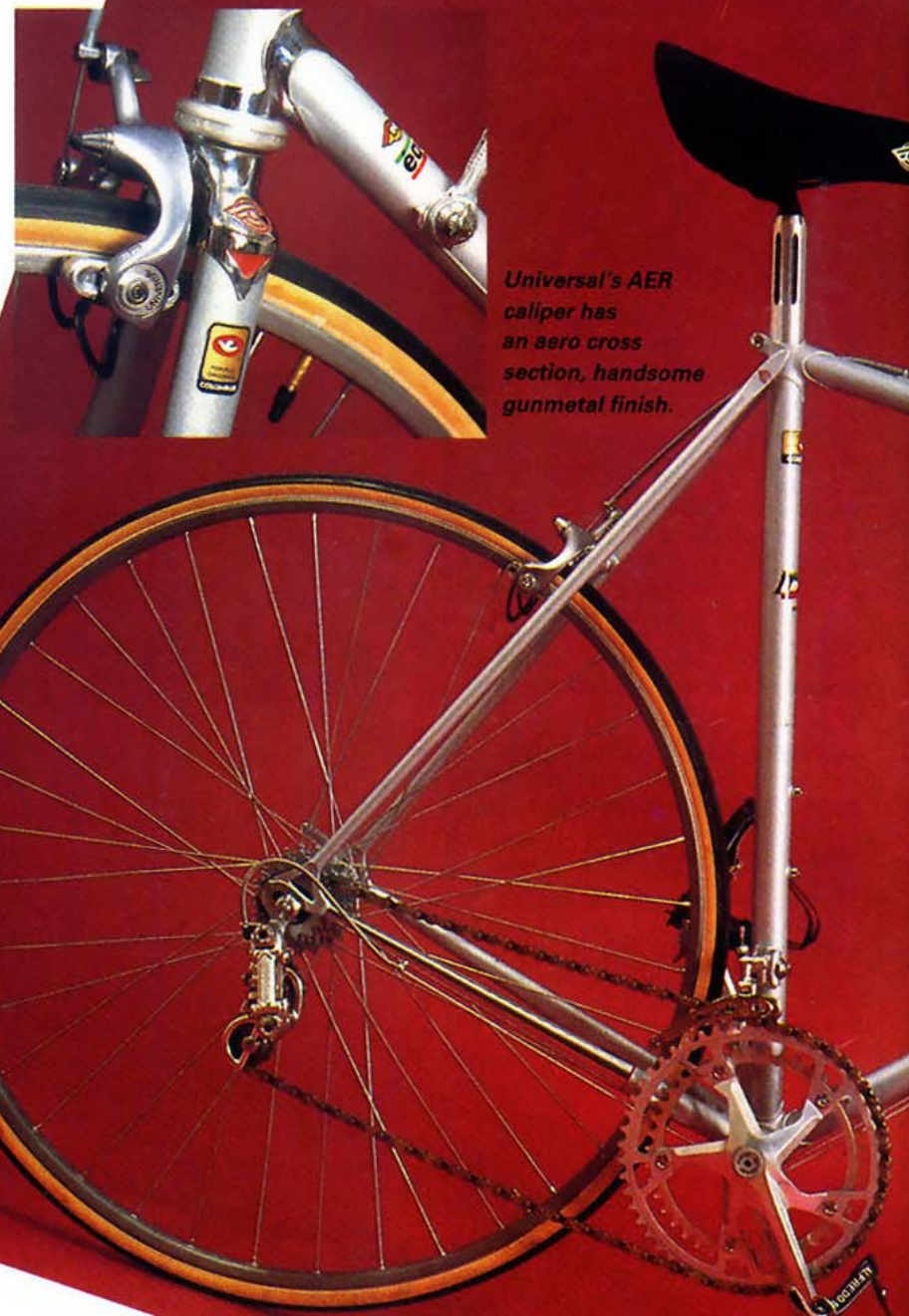
By Christopher Koch

There is a hard lesson to be learned when a cyclist makes that first memorable pilgrimage to the sport's mecca, Europe. During those few squirmy hours of sleep in coach class, our intermittent dreams are filled with visions of thousands of happy Italians and Frenchmen teeming over the narrow, picturesque roads of Europe on their fancy racing bikes.

Upon arrival however, we find that most of the Ciöccs and Guerciott's of our dreams are either strapped to the back of Francesco Moser's team car, or back home in our dentist's basement. The bikes of Europe are functional and inexpensive. The occasional racing bike you see straining under the bulk of an overweight Italian is usually a mongrel. "You might find a basic racing frame with a Stronglight crank, Campagnolo derailleurs and an Omega headset — whatever they can get their hands on," says Alan Goldsmith, founder of the mail order house Bikeology and a design consultant for Centurion.

In this respect, Goldsmith's latest creation for Centurion, the Cinelli Equipe, is a true European racer. It is a fascinating melange of functional Italian componentry (with only three items from Campagnolo) attached to a luxurious but unpretentious frame of Columbus tubing.

The bike has, by industry standards, a royal lineage. Goldsmith, whose list of credits at Centurion includes the Comp T/A — an aesthetic and marketing triumph — made a pilgrimage to the old country two years ago that most of us can only dream about. He stayed two weeks with Cino Cinelli to talk bikes and learn how to make olive oil (Cinelli has left most bicycle business dealings to his son Andrea, and concentrates on experimental bicycle de-

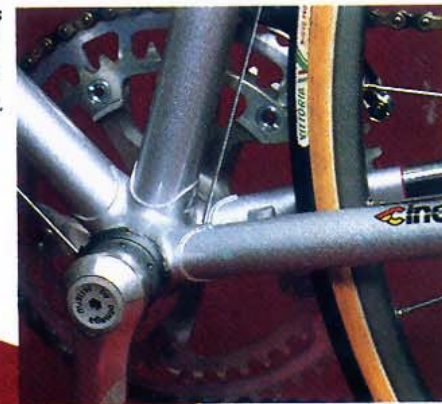


Universal's AER caliper has an aero cross section, handsome gunmetal finish.

Cinelli's stem and bars rest atop a chrome Cinelli head lug.



Fine brazing is obvious here; Cinelli decal is worth an extra tooth in every gear.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY IMRE BARSY, JR.



signs and his olive groves). Cinelli's firm is responsible for some of the more innovative designs in the bicycle world — he worked on Francesco Moser's hour record bike with a team of scientists — and his name is attached to what may be the world's most expensive production bicycle.

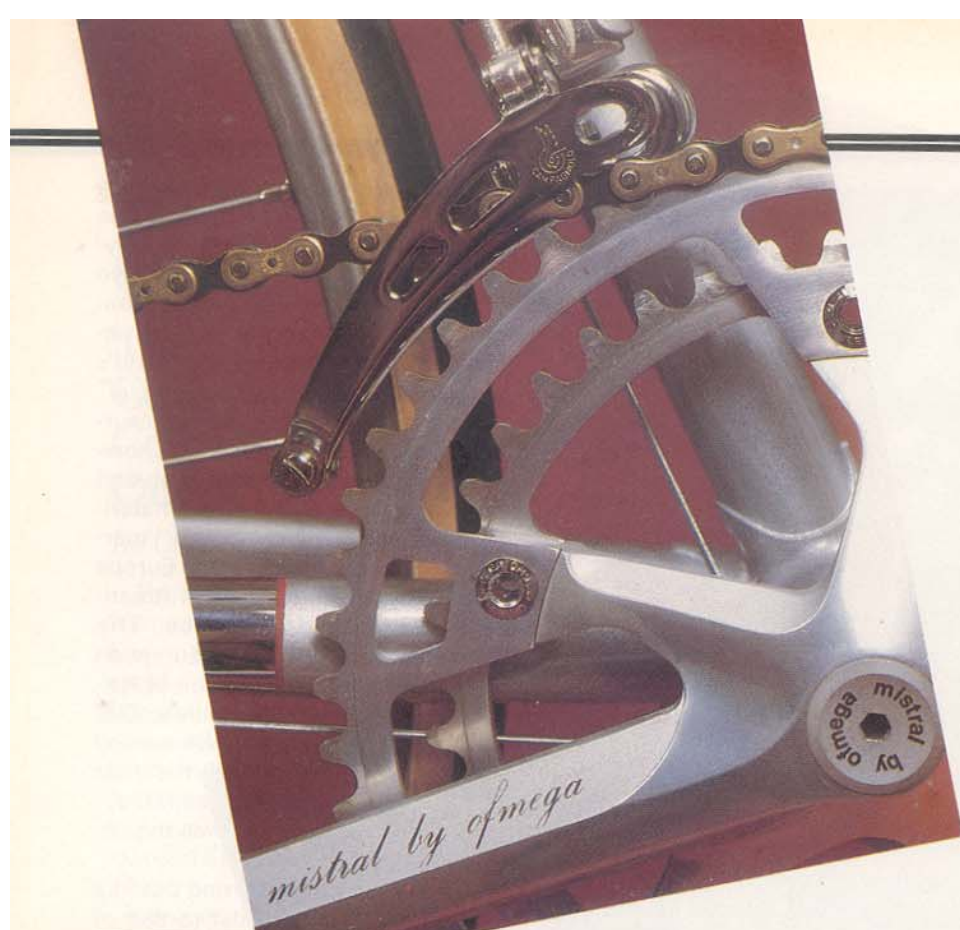
Goldsmith's visit, while pleasurable, was aimed at business, however. Centurion wanted a high-end bicycle to throw to the eager materialists of the so-called "yuppie" market, so Goldsmith was sent to Europe to find food for the trunks of America's BMWs and Porsches. The American appetite for fine European machinery and the mystique of Italian bicycles drew Goldsmith to Cinelli as if by divining rod. "We wanted to associate ourselves with the most prestigious company available," says Goldsmith. "Cinelli was the obvious choice."

Negotiations were carried out in a style frighteningly similar to that of the Paris Peace Talks. The principals spent two years at a vast oak round table struggling over the size of the Cinelli name on the bicycle, among other things. (Judging from the rather small size of the Cinelli decals on the downtube and chainstay, it would appear that Centurion has a more skilled stable of diplomats.)

At long last however, Cino agreed to set up a factory for manufacture of the bike frames. According to one source, space in "another bike company allied with Cinelli" (he would not specify which manufacturer) was leased, and Cinelli personnel were installed to supervise production. Goldsmith claims that the Equipe is on the same level as Cinelli's own esoteric masterpiece because it incorporates Cinelli's famed investment cast lugs and bottom bracket. Goldsmith also attests to "state of the art" computerized jigs that hold the Equipe frames in place during construction.

Judging from the results, Goldsmith's claims seem justified. The frame is a jewel. The lug work is absolutely flawless, and the transition between seat stay and rear dropout — a small but telling sign of the amount of care put into construction — is as smooth as any production frame, Italian or otherwise, that we've seen. The dropouts have been carefully chromed so that quick releases won't

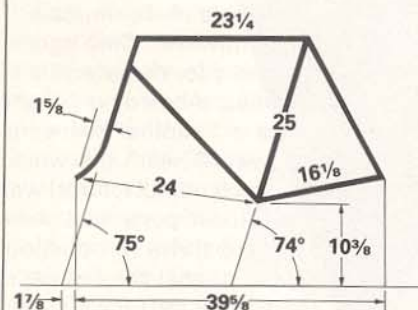
CENTURION



Centurion Cinelli Equipe

\$995 (price may vary)

Sizes available: 50 to 64 cm in 2 cm increments
Sizes tested: 62 cm



Total weight: 21 lbs, 2 1/2 oz
Frame without fork: 5 lbs, 1 oz
Fork only: 1 lb, 10 1/2 oz
Front wheel only: 2 lbs, 6 1/2 oz
Rear wheel only: 3 lbs, 6 oz

Frame: Columbus SL throughout; Campagnolo dropouts. Brazed-on bosses for two water bottles, top tube cable guides, shift levers, derailleur cable stops and guides, pump and chain hanger. Ofmega headset.

Rims: Fiamme Hard Silver, 700c
Spokes: 36 spokes, 14 gauge, laced cross-four
Hubs: Miche Competition, small flange, quick-release
Tires: Vittoria Nuovo Pro tubular, 100 psi

Crank: Mistral/Ofmega, 170 mm arms
Derailleurs: Campagnolo Nuovo Record with downtube-mounted friction-type levers
Freewheel: Regina CX
Chain: Regina Record Oro

GEARING in inches:

	42	52
13	87	108
14	81	100
15	76	94
17	67	83
19	60	74
21	54	67

Saddle: Cinelli Volare, nylon base with suede cover and foam padding
Seatpost: Gipiemme, single bolt micro-adjust, 180 mm long, 27.2 mm dia.
Brakes: Universal AER sidepull with hooded levers
Pedals: Ofmega Sintesi platform with adjustable aluminum toe clips and Alfredo Binda leather straps
Handlebars: Cinelli 64-42 Maes bend, 42 cm wide; Cinelli Record stem, 105 mm extension

Importer: **Western States Imports** 1837 DeHavilland, Newbury Park, CA 91320
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chew up the surface, and the head and downtube lugs are also tastefully shiny. One of the BG test riders' favorite features of the frame is the panoply of useful braze-ons. There are two water bottle bosses *and* a pump peg — a combination crucial to long rides on hot summer days. It's hard to understand why this combination hasn't caught on, while that useless, ubiquitous front derailleur braze-on (unfortunately present on the Equipe) is turning up on \$300 club racers.

Despite its steep angles, the bike does not feel overly stiff, and it tracks as if running in a slot. Steering is conservative — responsive without being twitchy and skittish — thus making this a good candidate for the beginning racer, triathlete or sport rider.

And that's the market that Goldsmith and Centurion are looking at. But in order to sell the bike to the triathlete crowd, its price tag had to be below \$1000. To bring costs down, Goldsmith decided to chuck the tried and true Campy gruppo strategy. "We evaluated the components on cost and value per part," he says, "and we believe we have the best combination, a far better value than could be achieved with a specific gruppo in that price range." The choices may also have had something to do with the fact that Cinelli is a member of the Primo group, an Italian cooperative of bike parts manufacturers who look out for each other. The members of the group come as no surprise when looking at the bike: Ofmega, Columbus, Vittoria, Universal and Regina.

Goldsmith's knowledge of what makes a bicycle work is evident in the choices he has made for the Equipe. Spend your money where it counts, and save where it doesn't. The drivetrain is solid — Campy Nuovo Record derailleurs, the quiet, smooth running Regina CX freewheel, and the solid, well-finished Ofmega Mistral cranks. The only complaints we have in this area are with the chain and pedals. Centurion has provided a Regina Oro Record chain instead of the CX chain, and the Record model does not mesh particularly well with the freewheel. Ofmega's pedals, which are made of a hard nylon compound, are not very rugged — the bearings worked loose on the first ride.

The wheels are functional and attractive, yet do not cost much to build.

The Miche (pronounced Mee-kee, according to Goldsmith) hubs can pass for Campy if you don't look closely; the residual roughness in the races should disappear in a few hundred miles. The Fiamme Hard Silver rims are attractive and have that chic grey anodization that everyone wants these days.

In fact, the only telling cost cutter here is the Gipiemme seat post, which is ridiculously short at 195 mm. The meaty Universal ARX brakes are serviceable, although not as smooth as their Campy cousins. The Vittoria Nuovo Pro tires are beautifully made and durable. And of course, Cino's bars, stem (the top of the line 1/R) and seat are state of the art.

Since Centurion has lowered the price of the Equipe from \$995 to \$785 (due to the plummeting value of the Italian lire, according to Goldsmith) we find the bike hard to resist. It's not the flashiest Italian bike around — it's offered only in industrial grey with a purple Centurion sticker — but look closely and you'll see one of the best crafted and finished Italian frames now on the market. With a few inexpensive component modifications, this bike can ride like one of those \$1500 Italian specials. *Prego, Cino!* □

COUNTERPOINT

Italian designs are wonderful, in part because they please the eye so, and in part because of the way they make you feel. Ferrari's seats, Olivetti's typewriters, Ducati's big twins — each makes you feel as if it were custom tailored.

Italian bicycles carry this legacy well. As usual, Koch summed it up neatly in the midst of a long test ride. "On most bikes, I feel like I'm sitting on top," he said, "but on an Italian bike I feel like I'm sitting down inside it." Exactly! Centurion's collaboration with Cinelli has created a form-fitting bicycle which retains that elusive quality only the Italians seem to be able to summon so effortlessly. Here is a bike that is immediately comfortable and urges you to ride it long and hard.

Complaints? I don't like the pedals much, and the brakes need a lot of fiddling and lubrication to bring them into shouting distance of the Italian standard. And this bike is so restrained, so formal. I'm enough of a traditionalist to think that all Italian bikes should be painted Ferrari red. But that's my problem, not Centurion's.

—Ted Costantino