

# THE RACING POST

for Cycling Enthusiasts

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# Product Review - 2009 Zipp 303

With apologies to Christopher Cross:

*The break is up, but I'm in the race.  
Just gotta attack. No time to rest.  
I've got to ride. Ride like the wind - to be free  
again.*

*And I got such a long way to go.  
To make it to that line painted on the road.  
So I'll ride like the wind. Ride like the wind*

I remember when that song came out (1980) and how it instantly made it to the indoor training sessions tape. Maybe the words were about cowboys and, perhaps, a yuppie response to Marty Robbins' El Paso, but the tune and tempo just seemed to evoke bicycle racing. Riding like the wind - our dream, our quest - why we train, why we upgrade our stuff. I worked out the lyric changes while riding with the boys on a sunny Saturday, sailing across the back roads of Tarrant County. It seemed to fit the mood and experience I was having on my Colnago's new wheels - the 2009 Zipp 303 tubulars with the new 23mm Tangente tires.

The UPS guy laughs when he hands me one of "the empty boxes" Zipp sends me from time to time. These new 2009 303s, like their predecessors, are incredibly light. 1182 grams complete. But Zipp's done light before. The rims actually look bigger and wider, because they are (see diagram on their website). Though the claim is that there is the same amount of carbon fiber in them, the rim body is both a bit deeper and much wider than their predecessor 303s. The new 23mm Tangente tires, however, fit very nicely in the new, wider rim bed and, thus, like their 19mm cousins, easy to install. The Hubs are new as well; providing oversize axles and bearings so smooth that they will seemingly turn forever when spun on a hanging bike.

Years ago, my first 303s seemed small, narrow and fragile. I remember riding gingerly around the neighborhood, before trusting them on the road. They sounded "light" and going over the first set of railroad tracks seemed to test my faith in their construction. Not so with the upgraded 2009 303s. They look, sound and ride tough. When observed from above the handlebar on the road, wheels and tires form a perfect aerodynamic shape. The impression you get is that you're riding two vertical wings, slicing into the wind. You feel propelled.

To prepare for this road test, I rode my Bontrager X-Lites for a couple of weeks. They are great wheels. They're light, responsive and have Continental Competitions mounted on them. I wanted to capture the feeling of upgrading to the Zipp's, but not from just any set of wheels, but good wheels - truly respected and appreciated.

I sorta remember going from the Fugi to the Ciocc (1978) and from the Ciocc to the Cinelli (1986). I do remember the first ride on the all carbon



*By TRP Staff*

C40 (1998) though, and the feeling of these Zipp's compares nicely to that sense of wonderment. I, and, hopefully, you will as well, got that sense that "all is right with the world," "the universe is in balance," and suddenly you're sailing down the road faster than the pressure on your knees and lungs tell you is proper. The 303s and 23mm Tangente tires disappear under you. Period. You're riding the wind.

I've never ridden 23s since the days when I rode Continental Sprinters. I was afraid the new wide tires would be soft and sluggish as many wide tires seem. Nope. I ride them at 130 / 135 lbs (as the documentation specifies) and the ride is not only smooth and responsive, but comfortable. Yes, I can still tell its chip seal, but my body seems to hate it less, now.

The simple truth is that these wheels are fast, smooth, silent and responsive. They are stiff enough to climb without flex, and seemingly accelerate simply through the power of whim.

As of this writing, I have about 500 miles on them and with all the hazards of Texas roads, including numerous sets of railroad tracks and jumping some bad road seams (wheel!), and as of yet there is no

sign of wear or wobble. I did, however, swap out the Record brake pads for the Zipp/Koolstop ones after the first ride as even the Campys seemed to wear the carbon breaking area noticeably. More, I, not the world's most adventurous corner maven, found myself consciously pushing cornering speed because it is fun - they're THAT stable. With the 2009 Zipp 303s you don't worry about the wheels, you enjoy the speed and focus on the race ahead. What more can you ask of wheels?

The website talks about the new hubs as being the finest hubs made. It also talks about the 303s being the all-around wheel. Now, that I own them, I believe both claims. They're pricey - +/- \$2,200 MSRP but, for the miles of riding like the wind - they seem worth the cost.

*And I got such a long way to go.  
To make it to that line painted on the road.  
So I'll ride like the wind. Ride like the wind*

Ridin' like the wind is what the 2009 Zipp 303s mounted with the Tangente tires are all about.

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