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Inside Chrissie Wellington's Mind.

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Bike: Trek Speed Concept 9.9.

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ZIPP 808 Firecrest

[Carbon Clincher]

Words | Ben Edwards
Photos | Zipp

The 404 is Zipp's bread and butter, the winningest wheel in cycling. It makes perfect sense that this was the first depth to get the Firecrest treatment. But the shape was poised to make even more impact in the 808's 81mm depth. Its advertised ease of handling in blustery conditions means not only will current 808 riders potentially get a faster, more stable ride, but smaller riders used to running 404's, or even 303's, could possibly run the 808 and really pick up free time.

Thus, it was the 808's that we truly wanted to test, and when they arrived at *3/GO* headquarters we tore into the box with real fervor. The rim's width is truly monstrous (27mm), and runs almost the entire depth of the rim's 81mm. The Firecrest shape in the 404 is robust; in the 808, it seems otherworldly.

With a unidirectional carbon used for the sidewalls and a weave in the spoke bed and outer rim wall for integrity, the wheels are unmistakably Zipp. The finish, as always, is matte with a subtle sheen inherent to the carbon. And like the rest of Zipp's line up, the 808's are built around the light, stiff, and smooth 88 and 188 hubs with Sapim CX-Ray spokes and oversized 17mm axles—some of the best hubs ever made.

We had three bikes set aside for the testing, a Trek Speed Concept, a Specialized Shiv, and for apples-to-apples comparisons, a BMC Team Machine SLR01 road bike, and this presented our first challenge with the 808 Firecrest wheels. The wide brake track, tight tolerances and integrated nature of the brakes gave us some serious pre-ride headaches.

On the Shiv, the rear 808 Firecrest fit without any issues, but the front wheel would not fit without excessive brake pad rubbing. Even opened to their maximum width, the brakes rubbed. The solution was to take a belt sander to the brake pads themselves. After removing 2 or 3 millimeters from each pad, the front wheel fit and spun smoothly. On the Trek we needed to give the brake pads the same treatment, both front and back. The BMC Team Machine SLR01 presented no compatibility issues with its standard RED brakes.

While having to sand our brake pads was a bit time consuming and clearly cuts down on the longevity of the pads, the reality is we had to change out to the Zipp Tangente Cork pads anyway, so it just became part of that process.

One of the major payoffs to the wheel's wider width is the ability to run wider tires, 23mm or even 25mm with no aerodynamic disadvantage, as the brake track itself is just under 25mm wide. This means you get improved rolling resistance and the better ride quality of running lower tire pressures to keep your legs fresh for the run. This is a very good thing as the 808's are quite stiff vertically and the option to run

lower pressures was a welcome one, especially on the very stiff Specialized Shiv. This stiffness delivers amazing in-the-saddle responsiveness as you dig for a couple extra miles per hour to keep an opponent in sight.

Out of the saddle during big efforts, larger riders will notice some lateral deflection. It is very minimal, deflecting two or three millimeters, then refusing to budge anymore—no matter how hard we stamped on the pedals. Without the tight brake fit we may not have noticed this slight deflection at all.

That deflection is incidental to the wheels true performance, and that performance is stunning. When a company like Zipp tells you they have created the best handling, most aerodynamic wheel they have ever produced, the expectation created is insanely large.

These wheels do the incredible job of simply living up to that expectation. When you begin to wind the pace up the thrumming sound from the cavernous space within the rim is a wholly new experience. They sound fast. As you drop into your aero bars and really get down to business, you realize just how fast they are.

Zipp provides the usual X seconds savings over Y kilometers at 300 watts and 30mph versus a standard aluminum clincher. For the record, those numbers are 96 seconds faster, saving 32 watts. That's faster than the 1080 Tubular. As impressive as they are I think they do Zipp a disservice. I don't ride that fast over 40 kilometers. I wish I did, but it's not happening in this lifetime. The reality is the wheels will actually save most normal humans more time. We'll be on the course longer, and consequently get more savings out of them. Over an Ironman distance, the wheels could potentially give an average age grouper seven or eight minutes. That could easily be the difference between racing at Kona and watching it on TV. That is game-changing fast.

All of this speed assumes a fairly still course with a run-of-the mill ten degrees of yaw—very pedestrian stuff. When the wind begins to really whip up is when the wheel's magic comes alive. All of this speed is amplified by the fact that the wheels do indeed seem to be immune to steering input from crosswinds. It's quite a strange feeling to be riding such deep wheels, and feeling all of the side force we are used to, but have it some how removed from the handling equation. Yes, we needed to lean into the wind when it really gusted, but it did not create any wobbles or nervous moments swerving into traffic. This means more time in the aero bars and more time taking advantage of the incredible straight-line speed and in-the-saddle responsiveness.

We have always been skeptical of claims that a certain new wheel technology would allow someone to ride a deeper wheel with more confidence. While the Zipp toroidal rims of past have been among the best at handling crosswinds, they never inspired me to go deeper than what I was used to. All the dimples in the world didn't change the handling

profoundly enough for me to roll the dice on that extra 23mm of depth. The new 808 Firecrest has done that. A course that would scream 404 could easily be handled on the new 808 Firecrest. Smaller riders that ride the 303 could legitimately campaign the 81mm deep 808 Firecrest. Yes, they will have to get used to more side component, but they will find the influence that it has on their handling to be greatly reduced.

These smaller riders will find the weight penalty paid for the extra depth quite negligible. A set weighs 1,759 grams, 202 grams more than the 404 Firecrest, but almost 200 grams lighter than the previous generation of 808 clinchers. While it is not a climbing wheel by any stretch, I cannot think of one bike course I would rather attack on a lighter wheel and give up the benefits of handling and aerodynamics the 808 Firecrest provides.

One of our concerns going into this test was the brake feel of this new resin. Some resins that create a great feel at speed are awful around town or when you hit a hairpin at turn around. And likewise, good slow-speed braking typically means an unresponsive feel at speed. The Firecrest resin feels much like the previous generations of Zipp carbon tubulars with strong, easily modulated, fade-free stopping power at any speed. However, while those rims offered that brake feel with just about any brake pad, the new Firecrest wheels really do need Zipp's Tangente Cork Pads to deliver their full stopping potential.

An almost incidental benefit to all this is the ease with which a flat can be changed on the 808 Firecrest. The wider rim and non-parallel brake track allow a clincher tire to be easily removed with one lever, and re-installed without any levers at all, by even the smallest hands. On the side of the road while training this is a real convenience, during a race it is much more. Repairs are completed faster, with less stress, and a lower heart rate.

Again, the X seconds at Y kilometers equation does not do the 808 Firecrest justice. There is no variable in the equation for the gusting of wind and the fear of riding a wheel too deep to handle. There is no variable for the peace of mind a quick tire change provides. There is no variable for the confidence in knowing you are at the start line with every advantage driving you to the finish line. If the equation could represent this, the time savings computed would have been even more impressive for the Firecrest 808. **3/GO**

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Zipp 808 Firecrest

INCLUDED: Quick releases, rim tape, valve extenders and brake pads. US PRICE: $2,950 [pair] WEIGHT: 1,759 grams [without quick releases] CLICK: zipp.com