



J.Guillem Orient

Iain Treloar finds perfection in the imperfection of this titanium road bike.

SOME BIKES are coldly logical perfection, a flawless frame married to a faultless spec. On these bikes, you don't have to work to appreciate them – they lay their cards on the table and communicate their intentions clearly, leaving you in no doubt of their methodical, mechanical brilliance.

The J.Guillem Orient is not such a bike. It is imperfect, flawed, and at times a little frustrating. It's also one of the best bikes I've ridden all year. This does, as you may appreciate, leave me in a bit of a quandary, but at a certain point, logic goes out the window. That point is when you come across a bike that seems to sing when you ride it, feels 'right' instantly and causes your heart to swell.

J.Guillem's a reasonably new name but they've got form behind them. The brand is the new venture of Jan-Willem Sintnicolaas, the founder and designer of Dutch titanium specialists Van Nicholas, who sold the brand to a major industry group and moved to Mallorca to enjoy some well-earned time in the sun. After a couple of years' toil, J.Guillem launched with a small range – three road bikes and two hardtail mountain bikes – all based around 3Al/2.5V titanium frames.

The Orient is the most interesting and practical of the road range, announcing itself as an "all-road, all-conditions" machine. It is, in its purest essence, an endurance-geometry disc-brake road bike. It's also an absolute head-turner, with a hand-brushed titanium

Frame only - \$2,600
 Frameset - \$3,400
 Complete bike - \$6,500
 All prices include free delivery.

FRAME: J.Guillem 3Al/2.5V Titanium Road Frame, Orient

FORK: J.Guillem 11/8-11/2" Tapered UD Carbon Road Disc Fork

GEARING: Shimano Ultegra, 50/34t crankset x 11/28t cassette

BRAKING: Shimano R805 calipers, R685 levers

WHEELSET: DT Swiss Spline R23 Disc wheelset

TYRES: Vredestein Fortezza Senso Xtrm Weather Tire, 700x28c

WEIGHT: 8.9kg (56cm)



finish adorned with discreet branding, detailed in a mix of embossing, sandblasting and decals. The welding is clean, and there are some very neat touches, such as the internal routing of the gear cables on the side of the head-tube. The cast rear dropouts are also particularly gorgeous.

Technologically, the Orient splits the difference between the past and the future – sometimes with hit and miss results. For instance, I'd have preferred a threaded bottom bracket instead of press-fit; whilst there might be a small weight penalty, the serviceability, reliability and silence of a threaded BB still has a place, especially on a bike like this which is designed to last a long time (which this is – when did you last see a 100 year frame warranty?).

Disc brakes are well on their way to being the new standard for road bikes, and they make particular sense on a machine like this, which is designed to be ridden hard in all weather. On the Orient, they're flat-mount Shimano R805 hydraulics; bang up to trend in a rapidly evolving space. It was a little surprising, then, to see the bike equipped with quick release skewers at both ends rather than the technically superior thru-axles. As a result, the metallic 'snick' of front rotor rub was a slightly frustrating accompaniment to hard efforts uphill.

I also found the Orient lacking a little in tyre clearance. At the fork you're limited to about a 700x28c – reasonably generous for a road bike, but narrow for 'all-road'. The rear has a little more space, but not much. Things would be tighter with fenders, but there's no easy way to fit them on the front, solving one problem but presenting another.

If you're long of leg, you might also run into some issues with the supplied 300mm seatpost. I don't have a sky-scrapingly high saddle (75cm), but I was almost at the limit marker on our 56cm sample. If your saddle height is at the

upper-end of average or beyond, there's a longer 400mm post available, but this doesn't come standard and is only available in zero-setback; J.Guillem would do well to extend the standard post to 350mm. I also encountered some minor seatpost slippage over the course of testing, so it's worth being attentive with your anti-slip compounds in preparation.

All is forgiven once you're actually riding the Orient, though – Sintnicolaas really knows what he's doing when it comes to geometry. To ride this bike is something almost transcendental. It gives back exactly as much as you're willing to put in, then fades into the background and disappears. I've rarely felt so immediately at home on a bike; the Orient fits like a tailored suit.

The genius of this bike is in its synergy of ride styles. It's comfortable and reasonably relaxed, but has none of the negative connotations you might associate with bikes of its category – it's snappy rather than lumbering. In the Orient, you get both a reasonably compact wheelbase and a low bottom bracket, hitting a corner-carving, responsive sweet-spot. The Orient's handling is sharp and accurate, perhaps because of the bulky 1 1/8" – 1 1/2" taper on the fork. While the head-tube length is fairly forgiving (18.5cm in the 56cm size), you can still get into a reasonably low position with a slammed stem, with heaps of room to move upwards if your flexibility isn't all that flash.

The Orient is available in three configurations – frame only, frameset (basically everything except groupset and wheels) and a complete build (as seen here). The spec is solid for the complete bike; Shimano's hydraulic brakes and the R685 levers are superb, and Ultegra gearing is reliably smooth. Personally I'd throw an 11-32t cassette on the back instead of the 11-28t supplied, but that's nitpicky. I also enjoyed the DT Swiss Spline R23 Disc wheelset, which is a great match for the bike both in performance and visually. The polished alloy hubs are beautiful, and the rear has an amazing, satisfyingly angry buzz when freewheeling. The wheels are shod in an all-weather puncture-resistant 28c clincher tyre from Vredestein.

It's a testament to the quality of J.Guillem's manufacturing and geometry choices that I felt more fondly for the Orient the longer I rode it. There's a William Faulkner quote that comes to mind – "you don't love because: you love despite; not for the virtues, but despite the faults". J.Guillem's Orient is not perfect, and I can list half a dozen things I'd change, but its essence is everything you could want in a road bike. It is brilliant, flawed perfection.

For more info, jguillem.com or info@blueglobe.com.au ✱

85%

Function	34/40
Quality	34/40
Price	8/10
Appearance	9/10