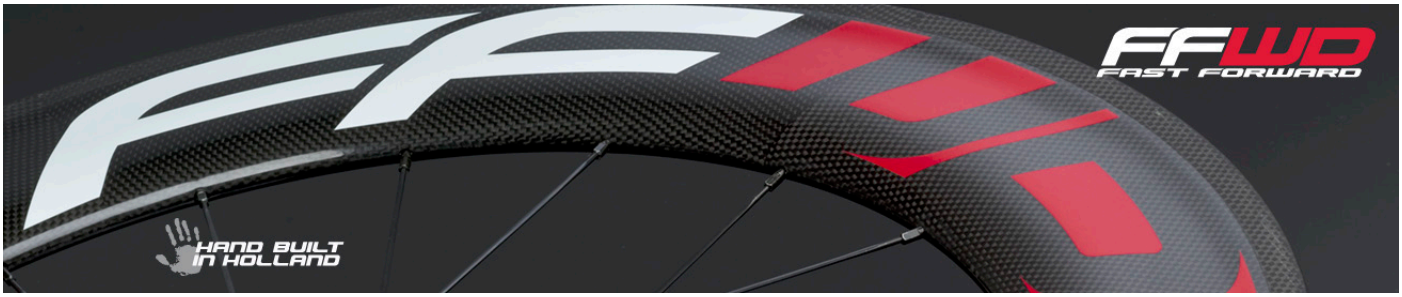


F9R wheel set reviewed by road.cc!

See complete story at: http://road.cc/content/review/13680-ffwd-f9r-wheelset

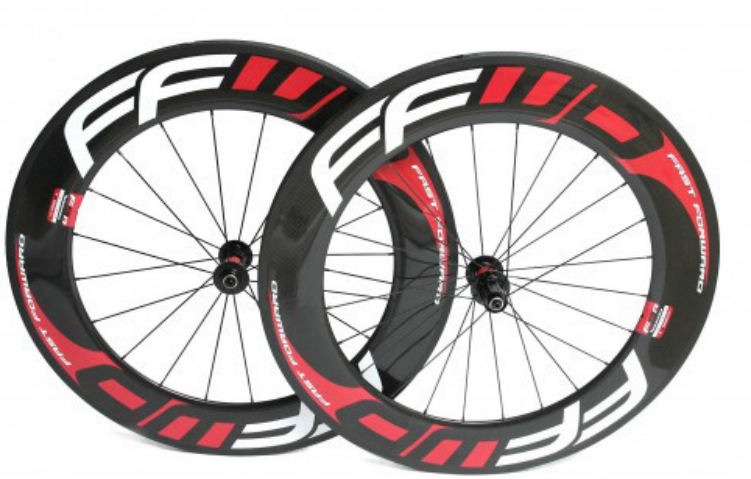
FFWD F9R wheelset £1320.00

True aero contenders, not cheap, but not as expensive as some rivals

Weight: 1705g Contact: www.paligapltd.co.uk

By Jon Burrage - Posted on 01 February 2010

These Fast Forward F9R wheels are a very deep, superfast, efficient offering designed to challenge the mantle of the Zipp 808 as the benchmark for deep aero wheelsets.



The Dutch manufacturer has recently signed a deal with Quickstep to supply wheels for the coming season with the ProTour team likely to use a combination of F9R and F6R models for stage racing and time trials. It will be interesting to see how they perform in the hands of top class riders against the best in the world.

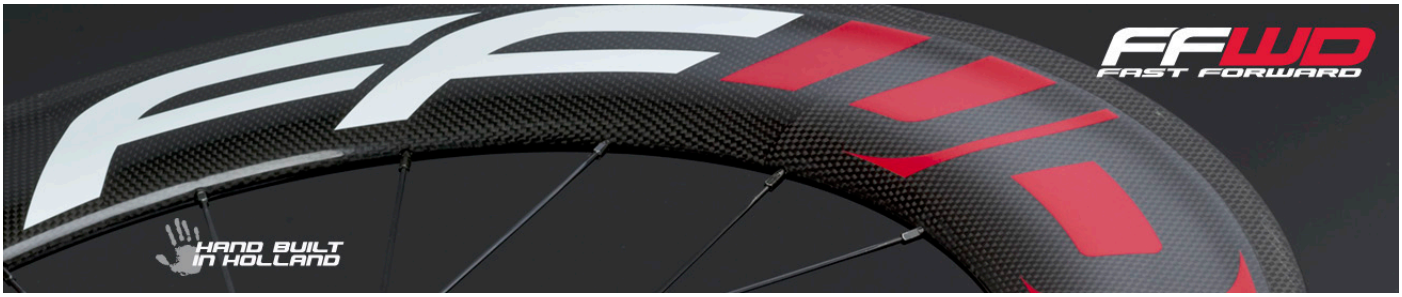
With a few dry and clear days behind us without any ice and snow I have managed to rack up some miles in the tuck position with the FFWDs fitted to my pride and joy Orbea TT bike, with promising results. During the summer I take part in the occasional sanctioned time trial near Clevedon, north Somerset and my 10mile target time of 23minutes on that course is normally a challenge. I went down there after a 150km-ish training ride and clocked an unofficial 22:27 which I was extremely pleased with. Not much in the way of wind so no real handling issues to contend with but all in all a very pleasant ride.

Compared to my usual Mavic Cosmic Carbone aero wheels the FFWD F9Rs were surprisingly quiet and very smooth. The braking response when used with the supplied cork brake pads was impressive too, no sign of the 'jumping' tendencies of my old set of Zipp 440s. When at speeds of over 40kph on the flat these wheels push the bike on, no sign of being a sluggish wheelset, make no mistake, when the speed increases these wheels feel more and more at home. They aren't designed to go up hills necessarily but out of the saddle, on the aero wings, sprinting up rises they really pull well.

With a retail price of 1500 Euros (which, with today's exchange rates comes in at around £1300) this 240s model undercuts Zipp's 808 wheelset by some £300 and is at the top end of the three versions of the F9R wheelset. However competition at this price point is fierce and leaving aside the Zipps it's got some stiff competition from the likes of the Hed Jet V90 and the shallower Mavic Cosmic Carbone SLR and Shimano Dura Ace 7850.

FFWD would seeem to have put a lot of 'tech' into their new range of wheels and the F9R is no exception. Our test pair are the 240s model. The "240s" refers to the DT Swiss hubs that provide the foundation for the wheelset - this is a real high quality, low weight hub which sells for around £130 (front) and £240 (rear) and when laced to the super stiff DARC 90mm carbon fibre rim with DT aerolite spokes you can see why the complete wheelset costs as much as it does.

With 20 spokes at the front and 24 at the rear FFWD has sacrificed a little bit in the way of lightweight showiness in order to provide a stiffer, more compliant, more responsive wheel. The rear wheel uses 24 spokes instead of the 20 favoured by other brands. The thinking behind this increase in spoke count is that because the power put in to the wheel is spread over more spokes it leads to a smoother delivery and less shock and stress to each individual spoke thus leading to an increased lifespan. This power transfer doesn't go through the front wheel so its spoke count can be optimised for aerodynamic gains



where they count most. That's the theory and only time will tell with regard to increasing the lifespan of the wheel, but it certainly sounds logical.

The DARC profile, says FFWD, employs a negative arc section which will compress the air, thus increasing the pressure, similar to the way the air pressure works on the topside of an aerofoil. Hmm… with so many companies vying for your cash it is difficult to navigate your way through the minefield that is technological advances and their claimed performance improvements. If everything fitted to my bike delivered the claimed performance benefit then I would have shaved 20% off my 10mile TT time (that hasn't happened!) so I take each with a pinch of salt until it proves that it makes the ride faster.

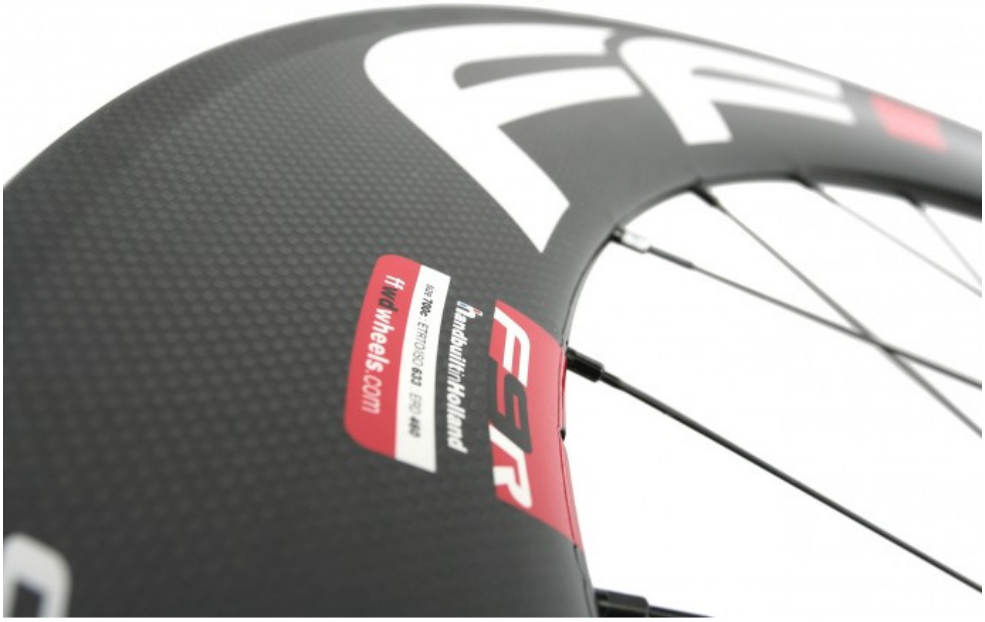
The carbon rim is made from a few types of carbon, only the top layer is the 'pretty' 3k weave that is a common sight on top end bikes and wheels. Beneath this skin are layers of UDF (uni directional carbon fibre) in sheet form that when layed up correctly creates an extremely strong structure. The negative section on the DARC rim is visible and does make sense but how much difference would it make for the 'normal' TT'er or triathlete was the question I asked myself before testing. It has to be said that my 10-mile TT test certainly looked positive for the FFWDs on that score.

An attractive wheelset at a tempting price. Some online retailers stock them, or you could visit the paligap website to find your lbs stockist and see what they can do. Zipp rims seem to be the weapon of choice for many but if your bank account cant stretch that far then these really do look an able option.

As with many expensive cycling purchases, the bling factor is also part of the equation. These rims, with their carbon weave on show and ffwd decals under the lacquer coat certainly look the bizz and for you certainly get a lot of bang for your buck. The F9R wheelset comes with its own double FFWD wheelbag, matching FFWD skewers, carbon specific brake pads (though how they compare to Swiss Stops is up for discussion) and some über long valve extensions so you do get all you need to get up and rolling (quickly).

Verdict:

A winning combination when paired with a top notch tubular. ***Yes, they are fantastic to ride on, lightweight, fast, smooth, comfortable and undeniably good looking.*** *These sure are a crowd puller, just got to make sure the speed of the rider matches the look of the bike. I am in the market for some 80-90mm deep rims and I will be seriously considering these to replace my Mavics.*



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