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The Synapse handles confidently even on unsurfaced tracks like towpaths
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Tech Spec CANNONDALE SYNAPSE SORA (2022)

Price: £1,000.

Sizes: 48, 51, 54, 56, 58, 61cm.

Weight: 10.36kg (54cm, no pedals).

Frame & fork:

SmartForm C2 alloy frame with fittings for flat-mount disc brake, rack and mudguard, and two bottle cages. Full-carbon SAVE fork with tapered steerer, 12x100mm thru-axle, and fittings for flat-mount disc brake and mudguard.

Wheels: 28-622

Vittoria Zaffiro tyres, RD 28h rims, stainless steel 14g spokes, Formula CRX-512 12x100 thru-axle front, alloy quick-release rear.

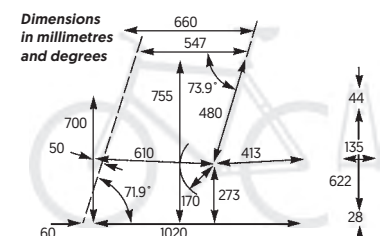
Transmission: no pedals, FSA Vero

alloy 50-34 chainset, FSA cartridge BB30 bottom bracket, KMC Z9 9-speed chain, Shimano HG400 11-34 cassette. Shimano Sora shifters, Shimano Sora front and rear mech. 18 ratios, 27-121in.

Brakes: Promax Decoder R cable disc, 160mm rotors.

Steering & seating: Cannondale Grip bar tape w/gel 3.5mm, Cannondale 6061 compact alloy bar, Cannondale 4 6061 alloy stem (31.8mm, 7°), threadless headset. Cannondale Stage Ergo saddle, 25.4x350mm Cannondale seatpost.

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and lighter loads. In many ways, including the colour, it reminds me of my first 'serious' road bike: a 1984 Raleigh Clubman. The Spa's components and ride are superior, however. Not everything was better back in the day!

Cannondale was a pioneer in aluminium frame building so it's no surprise to see a neatly welded, oversize aluminium frame at the heart of the Synapse. It features a chainstay bridge drilled for a mudguard and single eyelets at the rear dropouts for a mudguard and rack to share. The rear dropouts are quick release rather than a thru-axle, presumably as a cost saving. There's clearance front and rear for 35mm rubber.

The frame is accompanied by a full-carbon fork that uses Cannondale's 'SAVE technology' – which is to say, the design and carbon layup are intended to improve comfort. The fork has a 12mm thru-axle, to make the most of the disc brake, and mudguard mounts on the inner faces of the fork blades. The steerer is tapered to maximise front-end stiffness.



Top: Internal cabling keeps things tidy. Replacement is more fiddly, of course

Bottom: The Sora front mech doesn't shift as smoothly as 105 but an 11-34 cassette gives a slightly lower bottom gear

Components

The price difference between the two bikes is evident to some degree in the components, though if I'd tested the next model up in the Synapse range – the £1,200 Tiagra – the disparity wouldn't have been as striking.

Spa's Steel Audax 105 is equipped, as you'd expect, with Shimano's 11-speed 105 groupset. A 50-34 double chainset is paired with an 11-32 cassette, though Spa can fit a bigger cassette to give a lower bottom gear if you prefer. (It's also available with a triple chainset.)

Shifting is light, smooth and accurate, and the brakes are easy to set up and easily good enough for the steep descents around Bath, where I live. With 11 sprockets, the gaps between gears are less obvious than on the nine-speed Cannondale.

Spa doesn't use Shimano 105 for the brake callipers. Instead they're Tektro R737; the deeper-drop design allows the use of 28mm tyres and mudguards. Those full-length SKS mudguards are very effective at reducing the spread of