



By improving existing technologies, SRAM made its Red group for race-minded riders.

SRAM Red

THE ONLY AMERICAN DRIVETRAIN MAKER'S PREMIER ROAD GROUP ROCKS THE OLD GUARD—AND OUR TESTERS.

WHEN SRAM LAUNCHED ITS ROAD GROUPS IN 2006, THE CHICAGO-based parts maker stated clearly that another, even higher-end group would eventually slot above the top-end Force. After bagging 29 ProTour wins with Force, SRAM's designers were convinced they were on the right track. The new top group, Red, isn't a redesign or rethink; it's more of a hot-rodding operation, taking the technologies from its existing groups and refining them for lower weight, greater efficiency and enhanced rider interface. We've covered the technology and details behind Red in depth in the magazine (April), and here's the review.

RED REACHES HIGHER

At 1,956 grams, our test group—shifters, brakes, derailleurs, crank, bottom bracket, cassette and chain—weighs about 180 grams less than Force (reviewed August 2007).

That makes Red 30 grams lighter than 2008 Campagnolo Record and about 250 grams lighter than Shimano's 7800 series Dura-Ace (for a preview of 7900-series Dura-Ace go to BICYCLING.com/duraace7900) on our scale. Red is the first group to come standard with

ceramic bearings for the bottom bracket and derailleur pulleys. Another first is adjustable reach: Brake- and shift-lever position adjust independently for a personalized setup.

RIDING RED

SHIFTERS AND SHIFTING Red has the "best ergonomics by far," said one tester. "The hood/brake lever feel is easily the best of the big three makers," said another. This opinion was nearly universal among testers and enhanced by the adjustable reach of the controls. As for shift quality, the speed and response of Red is immediate, visceral. Shifts crack off with incredible speed and precision. Testers felt Red's rear shifting has the shortest throws and the fastest changes in the business. In addition, there is significant feedback, both in the "weight" of the shifts from the powerful derailleur

springs and in the hefty clicks from the system.

At its best, Red's front shifting can achieve nearly the same speed and precision benchmarks as the rear, but it was a bit more temperamental. Finding the sweet spot proved a bit elusive in some cases. Many testers commented that the trim function is a bit clunky compared with competing systems.

SRAM's Sprint Shift feature, also on Force and Rival, is a buried treasure. In the drops, pull the rear shifter paddle to the bar and wrap your pointer finger around it; with a slight twitch of the knuckle, you can drop into higher gears without breaking your grip. Originally dis-

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covered by accident by one of SRAM's test riders, Sprint Shift offers more confident shifts with less power drop-off when you're digging for the finish line.

While "speed" and "precision" come up often in testers' notes, "smooth" does not. Some of this is because Red doesn't wait for the ramps, pins or gates carved into the cassette and rings to align when you ask it to shift—it goes immediately, which is fitting for a race group. Mostly, though, Red is loud. Even when the group is perfectly dialed and hitting every shift, gear changes are accompanied by very audible feedback, and

some gear combos had significant running noise. The running noise abates somewhat after break-in, and heavier lubes help, but don't expect silence from Red.

CRANKS AND CASSETTE The eight largest cogs of the Red cassette are made of a single piece of hollow steel. SRAM's steel cogs are not only lighter than Shimano's or Campy's multimaterial cassettes, but also should outlast the other manufacturers' ti cogs, too. Despite Red's overall lowest weight, the crank is the heaviest of the top-end groups (20 grams heavier than Dura-Ace, 110 grams heavier than Record).

RED LIGHT

Though lighter and prettier than SRAM's other road brakes, Red's brakes perform very similarly. They work well, stopping with predictability and confidence. Power doesn't hit hard, but builds in a very linear fashion. Thanks to centering and spring tension microadjustment screws, which Force and Rival brakes lack, Red's brakes are much easier to set up and fine-tune than SRAM's other road calipers.

RED EQUALS GO?

Like many things in cycling, there is a degree of personal preference that bars blanket statements such as "Red is the best road group." For whom and what? Objectively, Red stands apart for its weight, reach adjustments and ceramic bearings. Subjectively, we think Red has the best hood, shift and brake ergonomics on the market, as

well as the fastest shifts. Do we think it's perfect? Not yet, but when installed on a race-oriented bike under a performance-minded rider, Red feels top-notch.

To see SRAM Red in action, go to BICYCLING.com/sramredvideo.

SRAM RED	WEIGHT (g)	PRICE
CRANK 172.5 AND BOTTOM BRACKET	756	\$550
CASSETTE (11-26)	169	\$230
FRONT BRAKE	139	\$145
REAR BRAKE	134	\$145
FRONT DERAILLEUR*	78	\$105
REAR DERAILLEUR	146	\$304
CHAIN	245	\$80
SHIFT/BRAKE LEVERS**	289	\$540
TOTAL	1,956	\$2,099

*With 31.6mm clamp; **no cables and housing

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