

**BIKE**TEST

# CALFEE DRAGONFLY

One of the most beautiful bikes we've ever ridden—but dangerous too?

➔ Every once in a while a bike comes along that makes even the jaded pool of RBA regulars stand back in awe. The Calfee Dragonfly is one such bike. Just how much did we enjoy the bike? Are you ready? Are you sitting down? As much as it pains us to say it, if you've got the dough, the Dragonfly is a bike that can make you forget about Italy.

Calfee bikes are the namesake brand of longtime NorCal carbon builder Craig Calfee. The life story behind Calfee runs so deep that there aren't enough pages here to cover it all. The Cliff Notes version is this: He started business in 1987. He met a guy named Greg LeMond, and the next thing you know, he made history in 1991 when his bikes (branded as LeMond Bikes) became the first carbon bikes to compete in the Tour de France. And he kept on making bikes. In 2001, he designed the Dragonfly as a lighter weight, performance-oriented version of his, by now, tried-and-true carbon Tetra. In the years since, he has pioneered the concept of bamboo frames. Not content to just build bikes in America, he started a new brand of bamboo bikes made in Africa.

In short, there is likely no other name in the bicycle industry that has attached to it as broad and significant an arc of accomplishments as Craig Calfee. Now, about that bike.



## THE FRAME

Each Calfee frame is handmade in his small shop in the California coastal town of La Selva Beach. As just one indication of the breadth of their manufacturing prowess, stock frames are available in 46-66cm sizes. After you

pick a size, everything from geometry, S&S couplers, paint, stiffness and head tube length are part of a custom options list.

The proprietary, high-modulus, boron-infused tubes are sourced from America's preeminent carbon source,

Enve Composites. The webbed lugs are things of pure beauty, and each one goes through a visual QC process before they're allowed to touch a tube. Another tasteful touch are the water-cut 6/4 titanium dropouts. As if each frame itself doesn't represent enough handiwork under one roof, each frame is painted at Calfee. This is where our test bike really stood out: the translucent root beer-colored tubes offer a magnificent contrast to the high-luster carbon weave of the lugs.

What differentiates the Dragonfly from the earlier Tetra model from whence it derived is the high-modulus tube and lug set with a front triangle that is comprised of 35mm tubes that are made stiffer and more durable with the addition of Boron fibers.

## THE PARTS

As if there needed to be any higher level of awe in looking at the Dragonfly beyond the stunning level of craftsmanship, it's found in Calfee's ingeniously integrated Shimano Di2 battery. As Calfee sales manager Michael Moore put it, "We love the Di2 system; it's brilliant. But the battery is visually offensive. We decided to come up with our own design and make it how it should be." How it "should be" involves internally routed cables and a Calfee-sourced battery that resides inside the Enve carbon seatpost. Fabulous. And best of all, at least for Di2 owners, is that Calfee can perform the same magic on any frame for \$500.

Another slice of this tantalizing carbon pie was the one-piece carbon bar/stem combo. Yes, another Calfee signature piece. Starting with an Enve carbon stem and bar, the combo is wrapped in place at either Calfee's own stock position or any custom position that's asked for. As with the Di2 battery operation, the stem/bar combo is available to the public, also for \$500.

The crank on our test bike was a denuded BB30 SRAM Red crank, but since Craig wasn't an aesthetic fan of the stock SRAM chainrings, he mated the crank to a pair of nicely machined Cannondale compact rings—a nice, elegant touch. Rounding out the package was a set of 45mm-deep carbon clincher Enve rims laced to DT Swiss 190 hubs.

## THE RIDE

If you're still reading at this point, you might be wondering exactly what we were referring to when we used the word "dangerous" to describe this bike. As soon as you start riding the Calfee, you'll start missing turns and riding into



# BIKES TEST: CALFEE



parked cars because you're so enthralled with how the bike looks—especially in bright sunlight. Riding the Calfee is akin to a 14-year-old walking down the street with a new smartphone—it's hard to look up to watch where you're going! Yes, it's that beautiful.

In terms of ride quality, it shouldn't come as any surprise that a bike with so much attention to detail would ride great too. As one test rider said, "The Dragonfly has superior vibration and bump damping over any other bike I've ridden. I would pick this bike over any other for any type of riding other than high-level racing." Under hard sprints, some riders felt some front-end flex, which could be tamed with a tapered head tube. As good as the overall ride quality is, one rider felt a bit more

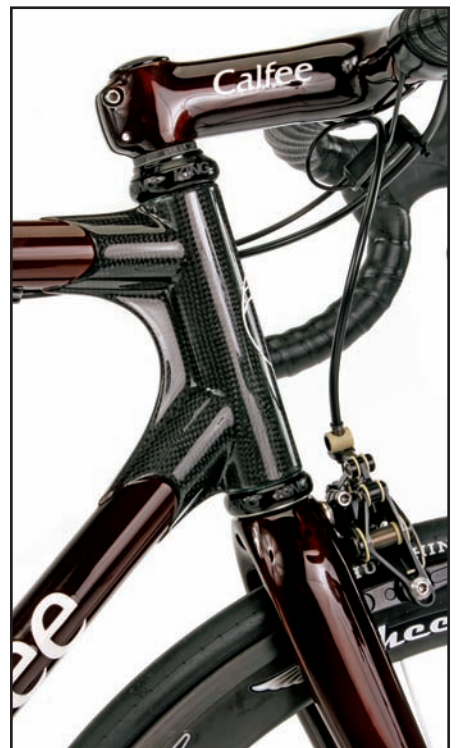
"rattled" on hard-edged bumps, which he attributed to the stiffness of the one-piece bar/stem. The rear end had some flex, but the ride was so smooth we wouldn't sacrifice the ride quality for extra rigidity.

## THE VERDICT

The Dragonfly is not the first bike we've tested that is valued at a \$10,000 market price. Although not a single one of us could afford the bike, or even half of it, to a man, everyone agreed that if any bike is worth such a high asking price, the Calfee Dragonfly is it: brilliant design and construction mated to a fantastic ride, made in America with a certifiable sense of brand prestige, and all with a 25-year warranty. In short, the Calfee Dragonfly is as good as it gets. ■



Calfee's custom compact crank, courtesy of SRAM and Cannondale.



The Dragonfly's lugs are among the most beautiful anywhere.

## PUNCH LINES

- Just plain beautiful
- Just plain fantastic
- Just plain expensive

## STATS

Price: \$12,000 (\$4195 frame)  
Weight: 14.2 pounds  
[www.calfeedesign.com](http://www.calfeedesign.com)