

# Kinesis Aithein Evo

A new alloy racer with an endearing simplicity that won't leave you feeling bruised



Words **STU BOWERS**



## THE SPEC

### Model

**Kinesis Aithein Evo**

### Groupset

**Shimano Ultegra R8000**

### Deviations

**None**

### Wheels

**Reynolds Assault**

### Finishing kit

**Ritchey WCS Evocurve handlebar, Ritchey WCS Alloy stem, Ritchey WCS Alloy seatpost, Ritchey WCS Skyline saddle**

### Weight

**7.92kg (56cm)**

### Price

**£730 frame, fork, headset, approx £3,000 as tested**

### Contact

**kinesisbikes.co.uk**

I can't help coming over all nostalgic whenever I think of aluminium road bikes. My mind goes back to the mid-1990s when instead of meeting girls and getting drunk on cheap booze I was becoming more devoted to racing. Mario Cipollini and the Saeco team were dominant on their oversized alloy Cannondales and my teenage self would have killed for one of those back then. I did eventually blow a good chunk of a student loan on one, which means I'm probably still paying for it to this day, and a part of me regrets ever flogging it to buy a second-hand Ford Escort.

Much as I loved that bike, I'm sure if I rode it today it would feel ridiculously harsh, especially if I used 23mm tyres at 120psi, as was standard at the time. With the advent of easily moulded carbon and flex-permitting frame widgets, few brands now champion aluminium. It might be the third-most abundant metal in the Earth's crust, but you can usually find it languishing somewhere near the bottom of the order in most brands' catalogues.

That's not the case for Kinesis, however, which has eschewed the black stuff in its frames despite the company being founded on the creation of a carbon fork. I have tested a few of its bikes over the years, most recently the original Aithein (this frame's forebear, in Issue 20) soon after it launched in 2013.

Back then, the Aithein served to remind me that aluminium bikes were once the cutting edge of the peloton and could still be so much more than just hardy commuters or winter hacks. It was designed to appeal to crit racers and speed junkies who didn't so much care for comfort as they did for ripping the legs off anyone trying to sit on their wheel. It duly delivered a very reactive (I think I went so far as to call it 'twitchy') ride feel that was, as expected, somewhat unforgiving.

## Refined not redesigned

Those core values are still very much at the heart of Kinesis' latest addition, the Aithein Evo, but with

**TOP TUBE**

Externally routed rear brake cables are seldom seen these days, but drilling holes in the super thin-walled top tube wasn't an option without compromising its strength and stiffness.



## The Evo feels assured through low-speed turns and stable through fast bends



gear cables, although the top tube hasn't altered so the rear brake remains externally routed.

I certainly was not able to feel the effects of what is effectively around a 200g penalty out on the road. The total weight, with Shimano's latest Ultegra R8000 components, Reynolds Assault carbon wheels and a Ritchey WCS alloy finishing kit, is a sniff over 7.9kg.

The Evo is, as its predecessor was, a lively-feeling machine. It accelerates with a pleasing sense of tenacity and wouldn't lose out in this regard to carbon frames costing three or four times as much. Thankfully the handling foibles I noticed on the original Aithein have gone. The only geometry change is that the head angle is now half a degree slacker (at 72.25°) but that seems to have been sufficient to iron out the unnaturally snappy steering of the original Aithein. The Evo feels more assured through technical low-speed turns and remains stable through fast, sweeping bends.

Some of the enhanced cornering ability of this latest



◀ a few extra millimetres of tyre clearance plus a couple of tube and geometry tweaks.

In the early days the scope for tuning the ride quality of aluminium frames was fairly limited. Wide tubes added stiffness, while thin tube walls reduced weight, which is why oversized aluminium tubes create light, stiff race frames. Then hydroforming arrived to manipulate alloy into almost any prescribed tube shape. Kinesis uses a process called 'superplastic forming', a more recent technological breakthrough, it claims, which offers even more precise control over the shapes and properties of its tubeshet. The seat tube of the Aithein Evo is a good example, morphing as it does from rectangular in section at its base to circular by the time it meets the seatpost.

For the Aithein Evo, Kinesis has reverted to using a standard threaded bottom bracket shell (*hallelujah!*) but that means a reduced width for the down tube to mate with. In order to preserve stiffness the down tube has had to be redesigned with a subsequent increase in wall thickness, which has added some weight to the frame. A beneficial consequence of that, though, is that the tube is now able to take ports for internally routed

### TYRES

An aluminium frame will never offer the most forgiving ride, but fit some high-quality rubber and reduce pressures slightly (I used 70-75psi in these Challenge 27mm) and comfort comes flooding back with no discernable loss of speed.



#### TUBE SHAPES

Kinesis uses a process called 'superplastic forming' to create its 'Anti-Gravity' seat tube. Its rectangular base flares to meet the bottom bracket shell to achieve the desired strength and stiffness at the frame's core.

model could also be credited to the superb grip afforded by the 27mm Challenge Paris Roubaix tyres. Which brings me nicely to my next point.

#### Rubber revelation

The Aithein Evo has underscored for me the importance of tyres. Flicking back to my original review, that Aithein had 23mm tyres, which I would have inflated to around 95psi. This had a huge impact on how that bike rode. I wouldn't have known any different, as it was just the way things were. Now, though, our understanding of tyre widths and pressures has moved on and it has done the Aithein Evo a huge favour.

Kinesis hasn't had to focus any attention on making the Evo more comfortable, because that has come about as a natural consequence of an industry-wide progression to running wider tyres. This Evo came fitted with 27mm tyres, which at 75psi produce a palpable improvement in comfort. The road buzz from my scarred local country lanes was suitably deadened during test rides, and the Evo took bigger strikes in its stride too.

To my mind, the change in thinking around tyres has singlehandedly put aluminium right back in the fray as a do-it-all frame material. Who cares if the frame isn't overly forgiving if you're getting all the cushioning you need from the tyres?

If all this has whetted your appetite, then a brief word of caution: there's a slight irregularity in the sizing offered by Kinesis. The 53cm frame has a 55cm top tube,

and the 56cm a 57cm top tube, which doesn't align with many other brands' sizing, so check your required dimensions first.

There's a pleasing simplicity about the Aithein Evo, both in its raw, uncensored ride feel and also in the visual sense, especially in this black anodised frame finish (around 100g lighter than the painted version). Its performance unquestionably belies its pricetag and as a prospect for a great value race rig, it's a sound investment. Much better than my old Ford Escort. 🌸

#### The detail



Visible welds are a defining quality of an aluminium frame, especially when, as with this anodised version of the Aithein Evo, there is no paint to hide behind. Those characteristic TIG weld pools are super neat on the Kinesis, and aside from offering a weight saving of around 100g over a painted version the anodised finish is also more durable and gives the Aithein Evo a classy look and feel.