

Interbike 2008

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New shifting systems, Lance Armstrong and Greg Lemond discussing the seven-time Tour champ's comeback, and hot night criterium racing highlighted the 2008 Interbike International Bicycle Expo in Las Vegas Sept. 24-26.

Shimano and Campagnolo showed new top-end road groups.

Shimano presented the 7900 wire-activated shifting group with hidden shifting cables, which is due to ship this week, as well as the electronic-shifting Di2 group, which is due out Spring 2009, according to Will Wheeler of Shimano America.

Both groups use a two-piece large chainring that Wheeler said is so stiff that the front derailleurs on both groups need no trim function.

People lined up to try the Di2 electronic shifting on a bike set up on a trainer. The system still uses the typical two-blade Shimano shifter/brake design, but instead of swinging the levers you simply touch them lightly to enact a shift.

The rear shifting was solid, quick and positive. The front made a slight clunking sound as it moved from one extreme to the other in order to switch chainrings.

The battery is expected to last up to 2,000 km and comes with a recharger. Wheeler said rain is no problem for the system, for which no price has yet been set.

Campagnolo showed its new 11-speed systems, which are already on the market, said Brian Sarmiento, marketing manager.

I assumed an extra cog was added to give an 11-23 cassette an 18-tooth cog, but not so.

It's all about shifting speed, Sarmiento said.

Races are won or lost by milliseconds, and by narrowing the distance between cogs, shifts can be made more quickly, he said.

Cogs remain the same thickness as seen in the 10-speed system, but the chain is narrowed from 5.9 mm to 5.5 mm by shaving the thickness of the chain's side plates. A higher-grade steel that is 20 percent stronger is used to ensure the chain will last, he said.

New brake/shift levers are more sculpted and feature a third position on the top of the hoods that angles inward, he said.

The 11-speed technology is used on Campagnolo's Super Record, Record and Chorus groups, with 10-speed used on the remaining groups, he said.

About 150 reporters showed up for a press conference where Lance Armstrong outlined his return to professional cycling in order to bring his fight against cancer to the public around the world. He will ride for the Astana team under Johan Bruyneel, and remain aboard long-time sponsor Trek's bicycles.

He introduced Dr. Don Catlin, a noted drug-test developer, as the person will provide "transparent" assurance that he is riding clean.

Armstrong seemed to want to bury, once and for all, doubts that his Tour wins were tainted and that victory is possible without drugs. "We wanted to be more sure on this go-round there would be no doubts," Armstrong said. "I didn't want to leave that box unchecked."

Three-time Tour winner Greg Lemond, an avid Armstrong doubter, asked questions and expressed doubts about the validity of the proposed testing regimen, seeking assurances that areas like VO2 max and power output would be part of the equation and that samples saved from past Tour wins would be scrutinized.

"It's time for everyone in the room to move on," Armstrong said, cutting off Lemond. "Next question."

Lemond later approached Catlin, who seemed interested in hearing what Lemond had to say about drug testing. "Come with your ideas of what to do," Catlin said.

Armstrong also announced a new development team, sponsored by Trek, centered around Taylor Phinney.

Armstrong also addressed potential conflicts with Astana riders Alberto Contador and Levi Leipheimer.

"I certainly would not expect to be the leader in any race if I was not the strongest rider," Armstrong said. "I will follow orders from Johan."

"(Contador) is the best bike racer in the world right now," he said. "I'm looking forward to a strong partnership."

A hot evening of racing at the USA Crits Championships Series Finals saw thrills and numerous spills.

In the men's race Hilton Clarke of Toyota United claimed the final sprint after crashes thinned the field.

Mesa's Brian Forbes well represented his RIDE CLEAN team well, figuring in two significant breaks and winning two \$100 lap prizes before finishing 20th.

Forbes said he avoided the plethora of crashes by staying in the front of the pack. He said the pace in the final laps was so fast the pack was strung out single file and he was unable to move up.

The off-camber, high-speed downhill first turn, which saw Tucsonan Paul Thomas taken out of the lead group in the Industry Cup event earlier, saw some pros crash multiple times.

In the women's race, Jen McRae won solo by about half a minute over a strong field.

Sabrina Savage of Phoenix placed seventh in the race, which capped a season-long national criterium series.