

THE LOWDOWN

LEVERS

Weight/Cost: 280g/\$540

REAR DERAILLEUR

Weight/Cost: 153g/\$304

FRONT DERAILLEUR

Weight/Cost: Clamp [72g];
Braze [58g]/\$105

CRANK W/BB

Weight/Cost: 760g/\$360
plus \$190 for ceramic BB

BRAKES

Weight/Cost: 265g/\$290

CASSETTE

Weight/Cost: 160g/\$230

CHAIN PC 1090

Weight/Cost: 257g/\$80

COMPLETE GROUP: \$2142



THE WORLD OF RED

SRAM's attempt at a road drivetrain was seen as success. The minor issues were the lack of trim in the front derailleur and the amount of movement in the shift levers, and we always wanted the product to be lighter. Now all of these issues have been addressed in the new Red group. And straight of the gate, Red took overall honors in the first Grand Tour. It took other manufacturers a lot longer to claim those bragging rights. The standout features of the Force and Rival groups are the ergonomics of the hoods and how the derailleur is actuated, but these improvements come at an additional price. SRAM's defense is that the Force group is equivalent to Shimano Dura-Ace and they are positioning the new Red group as above Dura-Ace, hence the 50 percent increase in price versus the Force group.

The Red levers, while similar looking to Force, have been improved. The curve at the tip of the shift blade isn't so sharp on the Red lever and it is also slightly longer in comparison to the Force lever. Luckily what we like, the ergonomics of the hoods, have not been changed, however pull back the rubber hoods and some changes are evident. Brake and shift lever reach adjustments are made with an Allen bolt and are done so independently from each other. The internals of the levers are called Zero Loss, which means that the play in the shift levers has been eliminated. The amount of throw necessary to shift the derailleur has nearly been halved. Another nice tweak is that when you shift to either the biggest or smallest cog the Red shift levers stop and no longer move, unlike the Force and Rival levers, which give the illusion that there is another gear. Gore Ride-On coated cables are included to improve the shifting. The weight savings between Force and the Red levers is just 10

grams: not a whole hell of a lot, but enough to give weight weenies something to chat about.

THE CRANK SET

The crank arms are constructed from a carbon over aluminum spine fabrication and with a narrower profile versus Force and are about 30 grams lighter overall. The GXP bottom bracket is a hybrid ceramic setup (the bearings are ceramic and the races are steel) and SRAM recommends that after 100 hours of use they are lubricated. The outer chain rings are almost solid in an effort to improve shifting, and SRAM claims that the Red crank is stiffer than Force. The chain rings will be available in both standard and compact with arm lengths from 165mm to 180mm. Visually, the Red cranks stand out with a large SRAM graphic sublimated on the inside of the crank arm and coupled with the substantial look of the chain rings (especially the big ring), it has a "Don't f*!k with me" look.



THE DERAILLEURS

The Red's front derailleur's cage is made from aluminum and titanium and, like previously mentioned you now have the ability to trim the front derailleur. This is a welcomed refinement, however trimming the front derailleur in the small ring still isn't possible. The rear derailleur is constructed from carbon fiber (pulley arm), titanium (parallelogram spring), aluminum (body) and ceramic (pulleys). Beneath the exotic materials, is what SRAM refers to as "zero loss travel." This has been carried down from their mountain bike shifters and refers to the complete lack of play in the shifter before the derailleur is activated.

THE BRAKES

The SRAM engineers went crazy with their efforts to shave weight off the brake calipers. The arms have oval holes and have been slimmed, and even the brake pad shoes are drilled out! Changes over the Force calipers is an external centering screw, which balances the brake shoe placement on the rim and a spring tension adjustment screw. These keep the pads perfectly centered on your rim. No more wrangling, guessing, crying and cussing (in that order) when trying to get the perfect fit.

THE POWERDOME CASSETTE

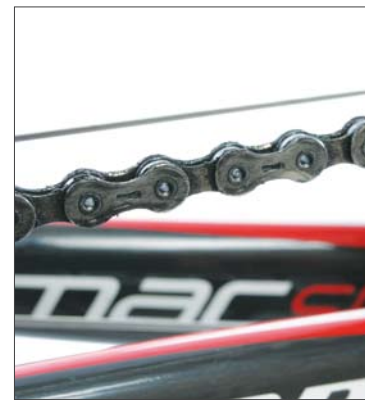
The rear cog really captured our attention. The main cog body is designed out of a piece of steel that is CND'ed into eight cogs and is hollow. The two smallest cogs are the only ones that are removable and separate. The OpenGlide feature is still a prominent design characteristic of the cassette body. OpenGlide is what SRAM calls the channel that runs down the cogs. It looks like there are missing teeth; however this gap facilitates quicker shifting up and down the cassette. So technically the biggest cog (the 26) is missing three teeth making it a 23, but has the radius of a 26 tooth. To further improve shifting, the steel cogs are hardened and coated with an electroless nickel plating. It's one of the slickest design out there.

THE CHAIN

The SRAM chain is still the 1090R with the PowerLock connecting link. The pins are hollow and the links are drilled out for weight savings. The strongest feature of the SRAM chain has always been the ease of installation and adjustment. It's carries over into this particular model year as well. The old "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" mentality on this one.

THE RIDE

The overall graphic package of the Red group stands out from the Force. This is more in your face and lets everyone know you are riding Red. This was taken both ways. Some liked the bold SRAM graphics and industrial looking carbon crank arms, while others didn't. The back plate of the PowerDome cassette is a bright red, which adds a nice splash to an area that has always been neglected color-wise. No one could argue with the design elements of the rear derailleur with its dashes of carbon and aluminum married to smooth sweeping lines elevated it from being merely a device that shifted gears to a piece of functioning art. Shifting up and down the cogs was spot on under all types of pressure. A slight inward motion of the shift lever and boom, the gear is engaged. However, due to the construction of the cassette being hollow for weight saving purposes, it seems a little noisier. One of my favorite climbing gears is the big front ring, big rear cog. Yes I



know that's the "forbidden gear ratio," but for gradients under 5 percent I find the 53x26 tooth combination to be perfect. With the Force group if the front derailleur was not adjusted perfectly, there would be some rub in the combination. Now with the ability to trim the front derailleur this combination can be had without rub.

The weight savings on the brake arms gave me a moment of pause when I first laid eyes on them. I've tried über-light brake calipers in the past and wasn't especially impressed with either modulation and stopping power. The best compliment I can say is that I couldn't tell the difference from the Red calipers or the competitors' calipers. The reaction was solid with no chattering. And on the topic of solid; the Red cranks spun as smooth as silk in the work stand, and on the road they continued to impress with no discernable flex.

The pièce de résistance of the Red group are the levers. When I hear that something I love has been "improved" it makes me worry. Remember New Coke? The redesign of the levers is truly an improvement. In those critical moments when you need to shift to the important cog it clicks reassuringly into that gear. In a close second place for most noticeable improvement is the cassette body. The hollow body design drops the weight to an amazing 160 grams, a savings you can feel on the climbs.

After a couple of months of riding and racing in all types of conditions on varying terrains, it is obvious that SRAM has listened to what people want: lighter weight, crisp shifting and spot-on ergonomics. It seems the bar has been raised... Again! *R*



RANDOM PHONETIC LESSON
SRAM = Sss R A M not SHRAM.