

## – FITTING SESSIONS –



One hour of riding at 90 rpm means each leg circles 5,400 times – that’s a lot of stress on the body. With such repetition, it’s little wonder that so many cyclists endure injury niggles. Getting a qualified ‘bike fit’ is becoming more and more popular to help increase power and reduce risk of injury. Jack Lynch explored some different methods.

PHOTOS: Lachlan MacKillop and Rob Arnold

Cyclists spend thousands of dollars on their bike(s). Then, we agonise for hours on what shoes, helmet and bar tape to buy. It’s not uncommon to have a drawer full of ‘uncomfortable’ carbon-railed saddles that are basically brand new and a shelf of handlebars with different reach, drop and curvature.

Most of us have adapted our position over the years by deviating from a bike shop’s initial set-up and tweaking until we find a reasonably comfortable arrangement. A sore knee or a tight back can occasionally flare up but we can live with that – it’s part of riding a bike isn’t it?

A ‘fit phenomenon’ is upon us. Like everything, technology has made it faster, easier and more reliable to get any cyclist comfortable. The development of different and more varied saddle and handlebar shapes, foot beds and even ‘endurance’ bike frames is a clear sign that the industry has acknowledged the myriad shapes and sizes of everyday cyclists and how few of these body types are able to ride with an aggressive ‘race’ set-up.

Sometimes there is a temptation to wish away different fit options as we yearn to achieve perfect cleat position and saddle height. Can’t manufacturers simply, “tell me what to ride”? Thanks to retailers’ eagerness to get more people on the bike, a small army of qualified bike fitters are out there

expertly catering to all rider requirements. They can definitively select the optimum seat height, bar drop, setback, handlebar type, saddle shape and width, cleat position and shoe size for the individual. Comfort nurtures power by virtue of the rider being able to hold a position longer and these knowledgeable fitters’ primary goal is to make the rider sit well and enjoy the bike.

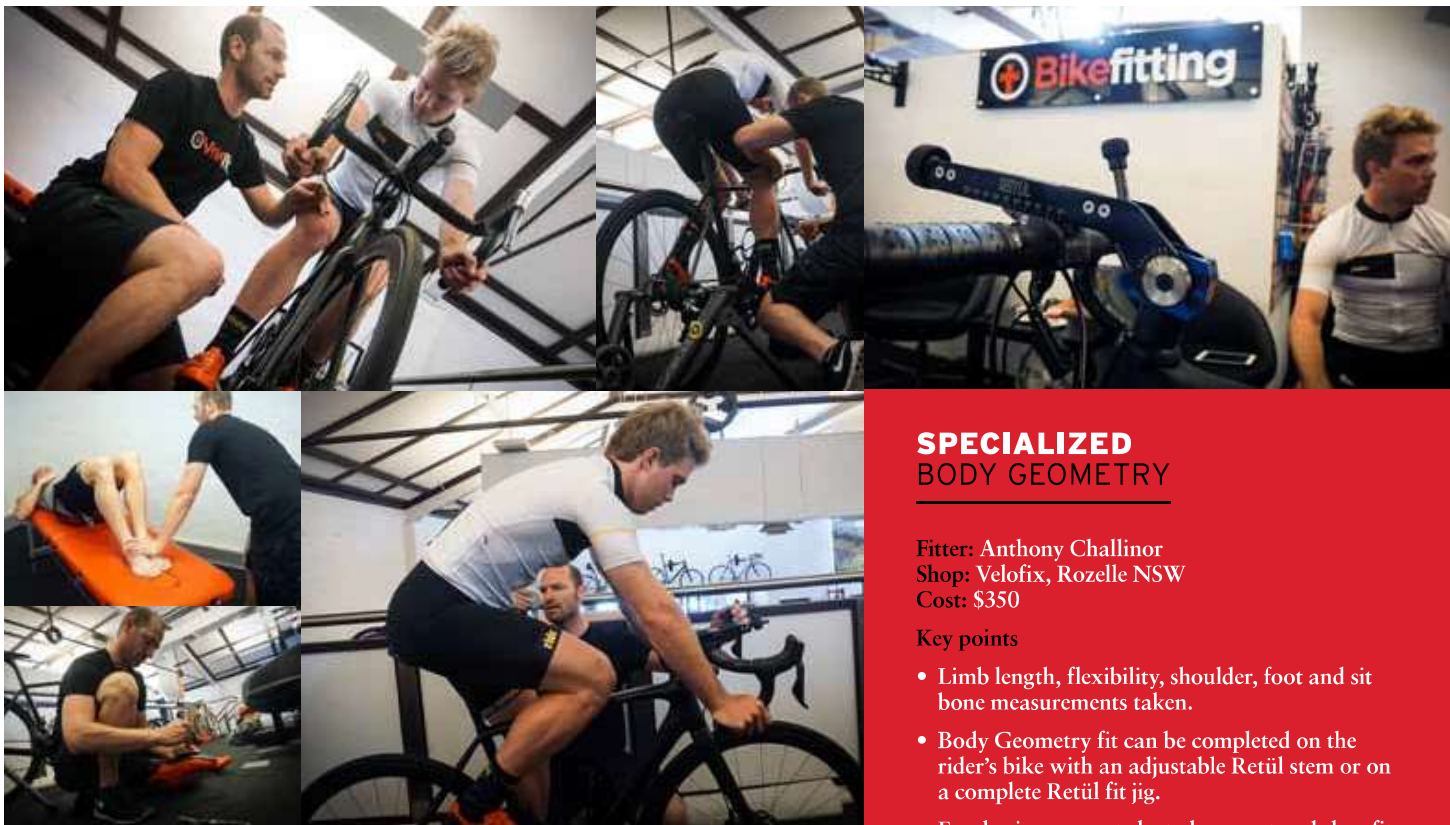
*RIDE* explored two of the most popular and technical fitting systems available. First was a visit to Park Bikes to undertake Trek’s Precision Fit. It is a relatively new player on the market, having been launched about two years ago.

Then was the famous Specialized Body Geometry Fit at Velofix. This process has been refined over many years and its fit technicians have tiered qualifications. A Body Geometry Fit can be booked at most Specialized outlets.

Both methods were extensive and carried out by experienced professionals. This piece is not a comparison between the two, that would be unfair because both achieved a similar result that suited me well.

When undertaking a bike fit, it is imperative to trust the technician. There’s no point blowing several hundred dollars on something you’ll change after a ride or two. Most are happy to schedule free follow-up appointments so go and get set up, ride, discuss, tweak, ride and sit well.

– By Jack Lynch



## SPECIALIZED BODY GEOMETRY

Fitter: Anthony Challinor  
Shop: Velofix, Rozelle NSW  
Cost: \$350

### Key points

- Limb length, flexibility, shoulder, foot and sit bone measurements taken.
- Body Geometry fit can be completed on the rider's bike with an adjustable Retül stem or a complete Retül fit jig.
- Emphasises correct cleat placement and shoe fit.
- Still shots and videos taken with a smartphone or tablet.
- Free follow-up consultation 2-3 weeks after the initial adjustment.

» While there was a Retül machine in Velofix's fit studio, Anthony Challinor – certified Body Geometry fit specialist – prefers to work with a rider sitting on their bike. His attitude is that “this is the bike you're going to ride, we might as well fit you to it.” Such an approach has to be admired. There is no doubt that it is a lengthier process than transferring a machine's position to a road bike but it ensures there is no chance of human error when adapting measurements. What it does mean, however, is that this fit is not for the time-poor. It takes three hours minimum (and usually more) but this is a good thing. Anthony was able to explain the physiological mechanics of a fit and it proved to me that he was not some weekend fit-course wonder. His understanding of both the bike and the body has been developed through a long history of training in and a genuine passion for fitting. His experience is vast having fitted hundreds of happy cyclists and his advice reflects this.

The Body Geometry fit began with an initial consultation in question and answer form to get a sense of the rider's goals, history and any past injuries. Then the physical assessment established sit bone and shoulder widths, as well as flexibility and any unusual physical traits. This information was used to determine the most appropriate saddle and handlebar combination.

Anthony also discovered my leg length discrepancy and with a series of measurements and tests determined hip misalignment to be the culprit. He had some ideas on how to fix this but would first see how I looked on the bike.

After setting up my cleats to a fairly generic position, Anthony asked that I jump on the bike to get a quick glimpse of how everything looked. We ascertained quickly that the saddle provided on the S-Works Tarmac was not the right one for me so I got off the bike and we fitted the newest saddle in Specialized's road range, the 'Power'.

It is really short and wide and it was instantly comfortable. Anthony acknowledged this response and we continued on with my position alteration.

First we worked on getting the seat height and setback correct before moving to the stem length. Achieving

the optimum seat height for me proved to be a bit of a challenge. We locked the saddle into position early but Anthony was unhappy with my foot placement and knee alignment. He carefully adjusted my cleats several times before working on the feet.

We examined my arches with a foot memory pad and selected the appropriate insoles (footbeds). These changed my amazingly comfortable S-Works 6 shoes into something much less pleasing but, after watching a slow-motion video of my pedalling technique before and after, it was clear that Anthony's selection was spot on. It visibly helped my knee-tracking issues and, after about 60 hours of riding, my ongoing knee ailments have ceased.

Stem length and height were relatively easy to configure because the bike had an easily adjustable Retül stem fitted. We settled on a length without stress and Anthony changed the position of the hoods to get my hands in the most ergonomic position possible.

The fit took me a short while to get used to. This new stubby saddle sat nearly 11 centimetres behind the bottom bracket, which is huge! Initially, I felt as though I squatted on the bike but after an hour or so I was very happy with the new position.

A compulsory follow-up after two weeks addressed some of my issues and Anthony was able to put to bed the concerns which rattled around in my brain when I had too much time to overthink things.

The Body Geometry fit demands a professional who knows what they are talking about. There is no pointing at a screen and saying, “you are here, but you have to be here,” just physiological, anatomical and cycling knowledge. Such a lengthy experience means that there is no hiding from the customer and Anthony's fit was excellent.

■ JACK LYNCH