

Campagnolo Super Record EPS electronic transmission



James Huang of Bikeradar was lucky enough to test ride the new Campag EPS, so far seen only as prototypes on professional bikes. This might be just the thing for Christmas for the Waratah who has everything. Here is a sample of his first impressions:

Riders who are interested in electronic shifting but aren't smitten by Shimano Dura-Ace Di2's ultralight touch may find Campagnolo's distinctly more feedback-laden Record EPS and Super Record EPS transmissions to be just the thing they've been waiting for. Launched recently after years in development, the EPS system is a technical marvel with impressive performance credentials, plus it's lighter and arguably prettier than Shimano. But just like with Shimano Di2, our first ride revealed a few chinks in its otherwise hardy carbon-clad armour.

Shifting precision is just as spot-on as with Di2 – hit the button and you're rewarded with an uncannily faultless shift in either direction, regardless of whether you're pedalling lazily along or attacking a short rise out of the saddle to close a gap. Lever effort and feel don't change with different shifting conditions, either – just push the button and let the system do the rest.

Front shifts are especially impressive, with the same sort of overshift functionality built into Di2. When moving to the big ring, the EPS front derailleur pushes further than would be typical for a mechanical setup to insure the chain makes the jump – sort of like it's yelling at the chain to move rather than politely asking it to oblige. A split-second later, the cage magically trims itself to the correct position. Speaking of trim, the EPS 'brain' automatically trims the chain depending on the rear cog position, so once you've selected a chainring, there's nothing else to do up front.

Lever feedback is heaps better than Di2 – Campagnolo have done an excellent job of convincing your fingers that you're actually doing something when you press a lever. Lever throws are very short but significantly longer than Di2 and you can feel the click through your fingers when you've hit the switch – a good thing since the audible click is pretty easily drowned out by wind and road noise.

Moreover, the two levers are distinctly separated, just like with mechanical Ergopower, so while our brief 50km test ride was done mostly in warm and dry

conditions, we expect EPS to be much easier to operate confidently when wearing full-finger gloves or in the wet. The higher spring tensions and relatively high button force thresholds also do a great job of warding off accidental shifts.

Campagnolo has achieved something Shimano either couldn't or wouldn't with Di2: the ability to request multiple shifts without having to repeatedly stab at the buttons. The Italians' solution is to simply hold down the button, and for the most part it works as advertised and reasonably quickly, too. There's no indicator as to how many gears you're selecting so there's a bit of a learning curve to figure out the timing but we had it down within a couple of hours so longer-term users should have few issues.

That being said, our initial opinion on Multi-Shift is still a little mixed. There's a bit of a lag while holding down the button before the 'brain' realizes you're asking for multiple gear changes, and while you can move across the entire cluster in just a second-and-a-half according to Campagnolo (and roughly verified by us during our test ride), that's still distinctly slower than what we can do with the company's mechanical drivetrains – albeit not quite as smoothly.

We found that we could hit the button 10 times in rapid-fire fashion in less than 1.5 seconds but that didn't yield any improvement in shift speed. Campagnolo told us that the EPS brain requires a short lag between button pushes – about 100ms or so, and faster pushes aren't always recognized. Accordingly Campagnolo believe the Multi-Shift technique is better than multiple stabs but even so, we'd prefer that the company provide the option. More worrisome was the handful of times we felt the rear upshift button click but got no gear change in return. Campagnolo say that 'click' comes from their Multi-Dome concept – multiple contact-lens-shaped metal discs stacked on top of each other to achieve the desired amount of resistance – it's impossible to click those discs without also making electrical contact. We have to reserve final judgment until after our long-term test group arrives but initial impressions have. Campagnolo's new EPS design improves on Di2 in many ways while also adding the company's own design philosophy and ergonomics for a final product that's more tactilely rewarding and arguably prettier.

Time will tell if our mis-shift issue was a fluke and more testing time might sway our opinion on Multi-Shift, too, but either way, if you're a Campagnolo fan and have been waiting for Vicenza to offer their own take on electronic, your day is finally here. There's no word yet on pricing for the Super Record EPS groupset. As the present top range 11 speed mechanically operated Super Record retails at about \$3800, expect the EPS to be considerably more at first, before discounting begins.

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This article first appeared on [Bikeradar](#)