

## Bontrager Affinity RXL carbon saddle (Product review) \*\*\*\*\*

Several months ago I'd brought home and never got around to installing a new saddle for my Madone, a Bontrager Affinity RXL carbon. Why so long to get it on the bike? Partly because I've got so little "extra" time that bike maintenance and improvement has a lower priority than actually riding the bike. Partly because I've not really had much issue with my original saddle (a Bontrager Inform RXL that has virtually zero padding but somehow I've gotten along with it). And partly because I lost track of it.



Bontrager Affinity RXL carbon-railed saddle. Just 157 grams, \$179.99, and worth every penny in my opinion. Less-expensive options will be similarly comfy. 5 star rating!

Let me tell you, I should have done this a long time ago! The Affinity RXL is the most-comfortable saddle I've ever ridden, and I've ridden many. Second place would probably go to a version of the Flite saddle I used to use (it's no longer made and the new ones don't work well with me). I've use a less-expensive version of the Affinity (the RL) on my BikeFriday travel bike, which has worked out well, but that's a very different environment than a world-class road machine like the Madone (the BikeFriday's 2 foot+ seatpost introduces an awful lot of flex that both cushions bumps and makes the seat position a bit of a moving target).

By the way, mounting a new saddle to your bike is not something you casually do. Depending upon the saddle, you may have to re-fit yourself to the bike, as it can change the angle your body feels comfortable on the seat, which can have an effect on handlebar positioning. Assuming your prior saddle was set up correctly, at the very least you need to carefully measure the seat height and setback (distance of the nose of the saddle behind the bottom bracket) of the original saddle, before making any changes. Then, try to duplicate that position as precisely as possible with the new seat. And, as always, use a level (don't trust your eyes!) and set the saddle perfectly flat to start with.

Should you install a new saddle and do a challenging 67 mile ride to check it out? Probably not! But it went far better than expected, with the duplicated setup (from the prior saddle) being near-perfect. Might need to move it rearward just a little bit.

Why so excited about a saddle? Because Bontrager saddles have never really gotten the respect they've deserved in the past, partly because they haven't always been world-class. That has clearly changed! I'm a believer. **5 stars out of 5!** That's not a rating I'd casually hand out just because I sell the product; my favorite tire (Bontrager R3) I would only give 3.5 stars to because they wear out more quickly than I'd like.

**Added 02/17/2014-** I have yet to find a saddle as nice as the Affinity RXL. I've tried quite a few, not because I wanted something better, but because it's my job to know what's out there, what others think to be "new & improved." The Affinity RXL remains the best saddle I've ever used. It's less-expensive cousins, the Affinity RL and R, are just a bit heavier and maybe not quite as perfect but better than just about anything else I can throw at your tail end. --Mike--