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The Buyer's Guide

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BEGINNER'S GUIDE
HOW TO BUY A BIKE

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THE BEST
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DREAM ▾

**PARLEE Z3SL
CUSTOM \$12,195***

EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT Perhaps it's fate that I review of a custom carbon Parlee Z3SL on my 10th anniversary as a bike reviewer. In the past decade I've ridden more-costly bikes, lighter bikes, prettier bikes and even bikes that are rarer. I've had a number of custom bikes built—some I liked more than others. But I've never had a bike that does what this bike does: completely and perfectly fulfill what I want in terms of fit, handling and ride quality. It is, without question, the finest road machine I've ever ridden. ■ And all this is from a seven-year-old Peabody, Massachusetts, company that builds only around 300 frames a year. In 2000, carbon sailboat builder Bob Parlee, decided he could build a better carbon bike. After 25 years in the nautical world, he designed a tubeset and building process that allowed him

flexibility in the sizing and tuning of tubes. ■ I won't bore you with the details of my bike because, honestly, its specific qualities don't matter. What's important is that on the very first ride, I had the oddest epiphany: It was like the Z3SL wasn't new to me, as if it had always been my bike, as much a part of me as my right arm. ■ There was something else: Parlee sent the finished frame, along with my setup numbers and the parts, to KGS Bikes in San Antonio, Texas (kgsbikes.com), for build-up. They did the finest build I've ever seen. Every detail—from bar and saddle height, hood placement and length of the cables to spacer and stem cap—was exact. Even the bar tape wrap was perfect—perfect. ■ Which brings me to my greatest conundrum: Would your custom Parlee be as perfect for you as mine was for me? There's no way to know. But what I can say is that I gave Parlee the same information I've given other custom builders, and none has ever translated my desires so perfectly. ■ It's been said that the anticipation is often more fulfilling than the reward. I used to believe that, but then I had a dream come true.—*Matt Phillips*



BUY IT IF: You're ready for the ultimate carbon bike: custom sized and custom tuned **FORGET IT IF:** You don't sweat the details **SIZES:** S, M, ML, L, XL; custom **WEIGHT:** 14.9 lb. (custom M) **FRAME:** Parlee SL Unidirectional carbon tubes w/ woven lugs **FORK:** Reynolds Ouzo UL carbon **COMPONENT HIGHLIGHTS:** Campagnolo Record 10 group; Zero Gravity OG-07 brake calipers; Chris King NoThreadSet; Nokon cable housing; Reynolds seatpost, Fi'zi:k Arione braided carbon saddle; Reynolds MV32C wheelset; Vittoria Open Corsa Evo CX tires