



Photos: Mike Blewitt

Tested



Low weight



Super fast hubs



Excellent ride quality



Lifetime crash replacement



Absolute premium pricing



Centrelock only

RRP: \$4595
bspokevelo.com.au

SCHMOLKE TLO XC RACE CLINCHER DISC WHEELS

Having been involved in the bike industry for over two decades, I've got to see and even ride some incredibly nice products. With a penchant for marathon and stage racing, I have also seen a lot of change in the equipment made for the cross-country end of the spectrum. This sort of gear has had just as many changes in two decades as the rest of the mountain bike industry, but wheel sets may be one area where there has been a big impact for the end user. And the new Schmolke TLO XC Race Clincher Disc wheels could just be the perfect example of how far things have come.

When I grew up riding in the mid to late 90s, rims were frequently a consumable item. Even on a cross-country bike, it was common place for my rear wheel to end up in the truing stand in the workshop at the tail end of a Saturday bike shop shift, after hitting the wrong thing on a group ride on the Red Hill DH or at Oxford Falls that morning. Or, maybe it was time to tape a new rim next to the old and lace it across, as your brake track had worn out with so much in the wet, sandy conditions.

Thankfully, a lot has changed. Even 10 years ago you could expect to use 2-3 rear rims each year, and probably one front rim, if you were racing a lot. Disc brakes took rim wear out of the equation, and NoTubes rims played a big role in getting 29er wheel weights down. Around the same time, carbon rims were becoming popular. From Specialized running them stock on top models to ENVE's first few deep mountain bike rims, or boutique brands like

Kappius bringing wide and low profile rims to market before anyone else even considered it. Good carbon rims brought strength, but often they also brought bone jarring stiffness as well, depending what you were on. The NoTubes Valor changed this, with a compliant and light wheel. But like most, they were all still narrow.

Now, the modern cross-country wheel is typically low profile with a 28-30mm inner width, 3mm (or more) rim edge and a weight under 400g per rim. This type of wheel accommodates 2.25-2.4" tyres at low pressure, while providing a less jarring ride than some earlier carbon rims. You can expect wheel set weights under 1500g, but without them feeling too soft. Throw in the now standard boost-spacing with through-axles, more supportive tyre sidewalls and even the advent of tyre liners, and our wheel systems may still look similar, but the ride is totally different. The new Schmolke TLO XC Race Disc ticks all of these boxes.

A CLOSER LOOK

The new Schmolke TLO XC Race Disc wheel set are 29er only, built around the super light and reliable DT Swiss 180 Boost hubs. They are centrelock only, and have 28 Sapim CX-Ray 2.0 spokes on each end. Our test wheels hit 607g and 705g for the front and rear respectively, before I added rim tape and the provided valves. For a combined weight of 1312g, this makes the wheels an incredibly light set of hoops, especially with a full spoke count and DT Swiss hubs, not an exotic hub



going. You make mistakes, you push the limits. But the Schmolke wheels never skipped a beat.

With the DT Swiss 180 hubs having a low flange height and straight-pull spokes and the low rim height, you do end up with a long spoke. So it would be justified to expect that the TLO XC Race Disc wheels wouldn't have the lateral rigidity needed. But even in muddy terrain with wide tyres I didn't have any unexpected frame rub. Instead, I just had the ride feel you would expect from a high end set of wheels.

Much can be said about the hub set of choice, but I think Ryan Walsch summed it up well when he first rode a set of wheels with the DT Swiss 180 hubs, in that the rear hub spins as freely as a front hub. The 36t ratchet in the Ratchet EXP hub has a good mix of engagement along with low rolling resistance. The wheels roll fast, they accelerate quickly thanks to their low weight, and they handle superbly. They do have a rider weight maximum of 120kg, but that seems plenty for within the specific market.

OUR TAKE

The Schmolke TLO XC Race Disc wheels are a top shelf wheel set made in Germany, with nothing that detracts from them in terms of performance or long term service life or durability. The downside is cost, at \$4595. Schmolke are a premium brand and the lifetime crash replacement warranty is in place to make sure these aren't a wheel set you have for a season or two - but for much longer. Marathon, cross-country and stage race wheels have changed. Rims are stronger and the wheels ride better, so investing in high quality wheels makes sense. One of my sets carbon of wheels has been in ongoing service for four years, with no need to be retired yet. And you should expect the same from a wheel set like the Schmolke TLO XC Race Disc. Other options are the Roval Control SL, which are a little lighter and sell for \$3800. Their rim cannot be used with tyre inserts, and that could be a deciding factor for you, as light tyre liners can make a lot of sense for XCO and high stakes events. That sort of compatability shows why the Schmolke wheel set gets top marks for a high-spec cross-country, marathon and stage race build. They're not cheap, but they're not cheap.

Mike Blewitt

