

By Red Knepp October 14, 2012

Camelbak Podium: the answer to a cyclist's hydration needs



A Camelbak Podium water bottle is essential cycling gear for rides both long and short.

RATING FOR CAMELBAK PODIUM 24-OUNCE WATER BOTTLE



Houston lies on the sweaty swamp we call the southern coastline, so hydration is nearly as essential to a cyclist's survival as sharp eyes and a healthy distrust of local drivers. While I typically carry 70 ounces of ice water in a hydration pack for longer rides, for ride of an hour or so I merely use a bottle. Of dozens of water bottles I have around to keep my fluid levels up, some are better-designed than others. I'm currently carrying one that's a vast improvement on the cheap bottles handed out free by shops and rides.

It's a Camelbak Podium Bottle, the 24-ounce size. The podium (doesn't Camelbak know that one meaning of "podium" is "foot"?) is made of specially-formulated polyethylene with antimicrobial properties imparted by silver compounds. This plastic is also more flexible than ordinary low-density polyethylene used in inexpensive water bottles; it slides easily into cages and is also very "squeezy." The lid is HDPE (high-density polyethylene), with food-grade silicone seals.

The bottle's shaped for secure handling, with an indentation about $^2\!/_3$ of the way up to keep it from

slipping in the hand. It's BPA- and phthalate-free, dishwasher-safe on the top rack, and recyclable. It appears to be made in Asia (home of Camelbak's "dedicated business team"), apparently China. The bottle is available in a bunch of colors, but mine is clear - after all, clear goes with everything.

There's no doubt that the best thing about the Podium bottle is Camelbak's Jet Valve. It releases water under pressure while otherwise sealing it in. You can suck on the valve like an oversized straw or point the valve at your mouth and squeeze: bingo, there's your water. Camelbak's improvement over other, similar valves is the addition of a "dial-in" feature: there's a little lever on the cap that lets you lock the valve open or closed, or even restrict the flow. Great idea, especially when compared to flip-tops or the cranky old plastic valves you have to pull open with your teeth.

The bottle can be frozen and stands up to sports drinks and ice without imparting any taste to the contents. It's always wise to rinse it thoroughly after using anything containing sugars, of course. It's easy enough to clean, although Camelbak warns not to use a brush to clean the valve. Mine gets used a couple of times most weeks, year-round (one of the few advantages of our climate), so it rarely sits idle long enough for anything to grow in it, anyway.



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Camelbak also sells insulated versions (Podium Chill and Ice) for those who depend on bottles for rides lasting hours; me, I just fill my Camelbak Rogue with ice cubes. At a list of \$10, the Podium is already expensive enough, and insulation makes them even spendier.

Still and all, for a quality, feature-rich bottle that can last for years (it has a lifetime guarantee from Camelbak); ten bucks isn't much to pay - you'd probably go through four or five of the cheap plastic ones in that time. You can pick one up at almost any local bicycle shop in Houston (try Bike Barn or Sun & Ski Sports) or at REI, Dick's, or Academy Sports.