and lighter loads. In many ways, including the colour, it reminds me of my first ‘serious’ road bike: a 1984 Raleigh Clubman. The Spa’s components and ride are superior, however. Not everything was better back in the day!

Cannondale was a pioneer in aluminium frame building so it’s no surprise to see a neatly welded, oversize aluminium frame at the heart of the Synapse. It features a chainstay bridge drilled for a mudguard and single eyelets at the rear dropouts for a mudguard and rack to share. The rear dropouts are quick release rather than a thru-axle, presumably as a cost saving. There’s clearance front and rear for 35mm rubber.

The frame is accompanied by a full-carbon fork that uses Cannondale’s ‘SAVE technology’ – which is to say, the design and carbon layup are intended to improve comfort. The fork has a 12mm thru-axle, to make the most of the disc brake, and mudguard mounts on the inner faces of the fork blades. The steerer is tapered to maximise front-end stiffness.

Components
The price difference between the two bikes is evident to some degree in the components, though if I’d tested the next model up in the Synapse range – the £1,200 Tiagra – the disparity wouldn’t have been as striking.

Spa’s Steel Audax 105 is equipped, as you’d expect, with Shimano’s 11-speed 105 groupset. A 50-34 double chainset is paired with an 11-32 cassette, though Spa can fit a bigger cassette to give a lower bottom gear if you prefer. (It’s also available with a triple chainset.) Shifting is light, smooth and accurate, and the brakes are easy to set up and easily good enough for the steep descents around Bath, where I live. With 11 sprockets, the gaps between gears are less obvious than on the nine-speed Cannondale.

Spa doesn’t use Shimano 105 for the brake callipers. Instead they’re Tektro Decoder R cable disc, 160mm rotors.

Tech Spec
CANNONDALE SYNAPSE SORA (2022)

Price: £1,000.
Sizes: 48, 51, 54, 56, 58, 61cm.
Weight: 10.36kg (54cm, no pedals).
Frame & fork: SmartForm C2 alloy frame with fittings for flat-mount disc brake, rack and mudguard, and two bottle cages. Full-carbon SAVE fork with tapered steerer, 12×100mm thru-axle, and fittings for flat-mount disc brake and mudguard.
Wheels: 28-622 Vittoria Zaffiro tyres, RD 28h rims, stainless steel 14g spokes, Formula CRX-512 12×100 thru-axle front, alloy quick-release rear.
Transmission: no pedals, FSA Vero alloy 50-34 chainset, FSA cartridge BB30 bottom bracket, KMC Z9 9-speed chain, Shimano HG400 11-34 cassette, Shimano Sora shifters, Shimano Sora Sora front and rear mech. 18 ratios, 27-121in.
Brakes: Promax Decoder R cable disc, 160mm rotors. Steering & seating: Cannondale Grip bar tape w/gel 3.5mm, Cannondale 6061 compact alloy bar, Cannondale 4 6061 alloy stem (31.8mm, 7°), threadless headset. Cannondale Stage Ergo saddle, 25.4×350mm Cannondale seatpost.
cannondale.com

The Synapse handles confidently even on unsurfaced tracks like towpaths

Top: Internal cabling keeps things tidy. Replacement is more fiddly, of course
Bottom: The Sora front mech doesn’t shift as smoothly as 105 but an 11-34 cassette gives a slightly lower bottom gear