

compiled research for the steel-loving tifosi: colnago master family tree

in the beginning, there was the nuovo-mexico / esa-mexico -- arrived early/mid '80s:

- basically, a super with “grooved” tubes
- nuovo-mexico had 2 light grooves, one on each side of the top- and down-tubes
- esa-mexico had 6 deeply shaped grooves, initially on just the top- and down-tubes and later on all 3 main tubes
- there is evidence of transitional nuovo-mexico variants with 4 light-groove downtubes, as well

then came the master / master-piu / master-equilateral -- arrived late '80s:

- introduced the 4-sided “master-profile” gilco tubeset as standard-issue and alot more chrome!
- master: external top-tube cable routing
- master-piu: internal top-tube cable routing
- master-equilateral: a modified seat-stay arrangement that bypasses the seat-lug
- early examples had curved forks and one set of bottle-bosses
- later examples had two sets of bottle-bosses and the straight “precisa” fork was introduced (became standard-issue)

and then came the master-olympic / master-light -- arrived early '90s:-

- retain the 4-sided “master-profile” gilco tubeset
- retain internal top-tube cable routing
- integrated rear-mech cable-stop @ rear dropout
- introduced the garishly-lovely "art decor" colorways
- in the mid '90s rear dropouts were shortened (still horizontal), added a new integrated seat-lug w/ “plug-in” fastback style seat-stay attachment
- some late examples went back to external top-tube cable routing
- for a 1-2 year period, there was a version made with tange tubing (retaining the 4-sided "master profile“
- eventually was re-christened the "master-light" probably due to trademark protection action by the IOC

which brings us to the well-known master-extra-light / master-x-light / master -- arrived mid/late '90s and continues to this day:

- retain the 4-sided “master-profile” gilco tubeset, but introduced slightly oversize down-tube spec and larger profile chainstays
- external top-tube cable routing across the board
- return to “normal” rear-mech cable-stop on the chainstay
- rear drop-outs now semi-vertical, yet still retain adjuster screw
- some examples (sadly) fitted with a variety of colnago-branded cf forks
- reconnected with its origins early in the new millenium with a return to the pure and simple "master" moniker
- current production removes the down-tube shifter bosses, replaced with integrated adjuster-barrel bosses

compiled research for the steel-loving tifosi: colnago master family tree

lastly, there have been curiosities and offshoots of the master in the lugged-steel colnago lineage featuring variations on the geometrically enhanced tubing theme:

- master-dual -- arrived in the late '80s, it is a "proper" master but was available for 1 year only and produced in such incredibly small numbers that was never really a mainline model. this model starts with the master-piu and splits the 4-sided master downtube into a wishbone structure that flares out to attach near the sides of the BB shell to increase lateral stiffness. colnago initiated this split-downtube with the "master-progress" concept bike before producing a series of related designs: the steel master-dual in 1987, the aluminum "dual" in 1988, the carbon "carbi-tubo" in 1989, and finally the titanium "master-bititan" in the mid '90s. the steel master-dual is a true unicorn in the cycling world – i have seen only 1 example ever "in the wild" which was listed for-sale in italy this year for over US\$12,000!!!
- arabesque / regal -- arrived early/mid '80s, there was a very small production run of these models that are basically nuovo-mexico / esa-mexico that featured very ornate/artistic lugs. produced in the '83 timeframe for 1-2 years only, the arabesque features lightly grooved tubes from the nuovo-mexico, the regal features heavily grooved tubes from the esa-mexico.
- slx-conic-spiral -- arrived in the late '80s, the conic models featured a flared/conical downtube (the larger diameter making for a stiffer BB) with 8 deep grooves of the sort found on the esa-mexico. the balance of the tubeset was normal round stuff you'd find on a super. the flared downtube "conic" concept lives on today in the various lugged carbon colnagos -- starting with the c40-mk2 thru to the C60.
- tecnos -- arrived in the mid '90s, available alongside both the master-olympic/light/x-light, featured lightly grooved tubing like the nuovo-mexico (5 grooves instead of just 2).
-master-b-stay -- arrived in the mid/late '00s, it's another "proper" master but in reality it is a bit of a franken-bike that combines the master-x-light main triangle with a carbon rear end. some examples (early?) had only the carbon b-stays and steel chainstays, others (later?) had a full carbon rear end that added 4-lobed carbon chainstays.
- arabesque (re-edition) -- arrived mid '10s, this is a very small production run of new-build master-olympic/light that feature the ornate/artistic lugs as found on the original arabesque/regal produced in the early '80s. apparently colnago found a box of original arabesque lugs gathering dust in a warehouse and decided to re-introduce this model to the delight of the tifosi!
- others -- i should mention there were master TT, track, and even MTB variants, but this effort is focused entirely on the core road-variants.

disclaimer: keep in mind we're talking colnago here -- considering the vagaries of artisanal italian bicycle production control methods, there will always be outliers and exceptions! this effort represents the majority of cases. if anyone can ID errors or omissions, please comment!