Argon 18 is a small privately owned Canadian bike company that has been around for around 25 years. They expanded their global presence in 2015 with a pro tour sponsorship in the Bora-Argon 18 team. They offer a range of road going bikes from TT/Tri to the “so hot right now” off-road category. Given their long history with building TT/tri bikes, aerodynamics and integration is not new to them, so it was no surprise when they introduced their first aero road offering in late 2014: the Nitrogen
New for the 2016 season, the Argon 18 Nitrogen Pro builds upon that bike. In order to make it “Pro”, the engineers at Argon 18 made it lighter and more aerodynamic. The 830g claimed frame weight is light for any road bike, let alone an aero bike. The fork has been re-worked as well, coming in 50g lighter at a claimed 315g. All told, the Pro is 180g lighter than the Nitrogen frameset. This puts it remarkable close to their lightweight Gallium Pro (790g claimed weight).

We have ridden the Gallium Pro previously and liked it. It compares quite favorably to the Cervelo R5 (not surprisingly). However, with the remarkably low weight of the Nitrogen Pro combined with aerodynamic improvements over the Gallium Pro, there seems to be little reason to choose that Gallium Pro over the Nitrogen Pro.
The Gallium is definitely more comfortable on rougher roads, but the Nitrogen is not nearly as harsh as many of its aero competition, so it is closer than you would expect. The brakes are really the only reason for pause (more on that below).

The Nitrogen Pro features an aero version of Argon 18’s unique 3D head tube system. The idea behind the system is that it allows you to increase the stack height without compromising front end stiffness (when compared to a standard stack of spacers). By firmly attaching “spacers” to the headtube and moving the upper headset bearings up with it, they are effectively increasing the length of the headtube. It seems to work pretty well, and it is nice to be able to have both “racy” and “relaxed” geometry options in the same frame.

Our test bike came equipped with the always dependable Ultegra mechanical drivetrain, integrated brakes, and Vision wheels. This is fairly close to what I would consider an ideal build: save a bit with a second tier group (that performs nearly identical to Dura Ace) and spend more on a good set of fast wheels.
I feel like the market is currently flooded with high end carbon wheels. Big brands, small brands, hub manufacturers, rim manufacturers, everyone seems to be getting in on the game. It is hard to keep track of them all. In addition, there doesn’t seem to be much for market differentiation: all seem to be fairly similar in specs and pricing. I imagine that someone in the market has a difficult time deciding on where to spend their $2400-3000. This is a large amount of money, so you want to make sure you are getting the best wheels for your needs. I suspect that most people just play it safe by going with the large, well known brands like Zipp and ENVE (not exactly a losing strategy, grin).

The carbon clinchers in this case the wheels were Vision Metron 55 wheelset. This was my first experience with Vision wheels and had no real expectations for them. Their spec sheet isn’t particularly noteworthy: 55mm depth, bladed spokes, 18/21 front/rear, 25mm width (outside), a claimed weight of 1730 grams, and a MSRP of $2600.

Note: When these wheels first debuted their claimed weight was a much more competitive 1620 grams, but all of the current information has them listed as 1730g.

The Metron 55’s looked right at home with the aero styling of the Nitrogen Pro. Their performance felt up with the task as well. They spun up nicely and I found them to be very stable in cross winds. Helping to create the fleet footed feel of the Nitrogen Pro were high end tires: Vittoria Open Corsa CX Tires in a 23mm width. Fast tires really do make a big difference on how a bike feels; it is easy to see why Vittoria has such a
devoted following. As a complete system (frame, wheels, and tires), the Nitrogen Pro felt very quick, confident, and sure footed in almost all situations. As set up, there was no doubt that this was a top level racing bicycle.

As anyone who has read our previous reviews should know, I am a stickler for braking quality. You can’t go fast if you are not confident in your brakes. There are many variables in a brake system (caliper, cables/housing, brake track, brake pads). Some work, and some don’t. In this instance, the braking was surprisingly good. The integrated V-brakes/carbon brake track is usually a recipe for disaster in my opinion, so I went in with pretty low expectations. That being said, I would deem them to be acceptable, so long as conditions were dry and the terrain relatively flat. If you are someone who is 30-40 pounds less than me, you would probably be happy with the result in a wider range of conditions.

We talked about the terribly named, yet nicely made, integrated handlebars in our Interbike write up. The AHB5000 bar/stem combo is unique due to the fact that they offer some amount of adjustability in fit. The “stem” portion is removable to allow for different lengths of extensions to be swapped in. Cool stuff. Company propaganda tells us that the bar/stem combo has a 30% reduction in drag when compared to a traditional set up. Before we get too impressed, we should note that the amount of drag attributed to the bar is quite small, so a 30% reduction of a small number is a very small amount. It all counts, I suppose.
As for the actual use of the bar, I found the smooth curve and compact shape of this bar to be to my liking. As always, personal preference takes priority here, but I found the shape to be comfortable in all positions, including the aero profile tops.

Last year, we rode and reviewed the Fuji Transonic, a bike we praised for its great ride qualities and superior value. The Nitrogen Pro, as an aero focused bike, seems like an obvious comparison (as does the Propel Advanced, for that matter). Based only on feel, the Argon 18 does a better job at cheating the wind, maintaining speed well while remaining stable in high cross winds, even with the deep Vision wheels. The integrated bars add to the premium feel of the bike. Premium features come at a premium price, however, the Nitrogen Pro retails for around $4500 for the frame module (frame, fork, headset, seatpost, brakes, bars/stem). Which isn’t that bad considering it is a Pro tour level frame.
While it can’t provide the value of the Transonic, the Nitrogen Pro makes up for it with superior road feel. Our only major issue comes from braking performance. While we don’t score it as high as the Transonic, it is a superior bike in many ways, depending on your needs. If you are in the market for a top level aero road bike, and are happy with the brakes, it is worth checking out.

**RATING:**

**Comfort:** 3.0

**Handling:** 3.3

**Acceleration:** 3.4

**Total:** 16.2

**Bonus:** +0.5 for tech and integration. Bars, brakes, 3D headtube

**Final: 8.4/10**

*Note: As well as the Vision wheels performed, I don’t think that I could recommend them to purchase separately as an upgrade for your current wheels. Shimano Dura Ace C50 can be found for far less money, weigh a little less, have bulletproof hubs and add the confidence and security of an aluminum brake track. Even the latest Zipp 404 Firecrest wheels are priced below the Metrons (they also weigh a little less).*