



Cycle's test promise

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determined to take higher speeds through corners. Headwinds are more obvious too. Some of my testers did prefer the more upright position – the 'sit up and enjoy the view' vibe is great for less hurried riding, whether that's in town, rolling along back lanes, or on the trails. It also takes weight off the wrists and more strain off the lower back if you're not used to 'assuming the position'. With less weight on the front wheel and a noticeably less grippy tyre, it's much more tentative through turns. As the bars aren't flared, there's no increase in leverage if you drop your hands either. The higher position obviously maintains the more 'heads up' advantages even when you switch to using the drops to get more leverage from the brakes.

As well as its more orthopaedic position, the Schwinn is the more comfortable bike to ride on and off road. Most of this comes from the fatter tyres, which I ran at 30-35psi with a 70kg rider. Also, the longer, narrower-legged fork doesn't jab and jar as much as the Voodoo's can. My less experienced test riders preferred the long, soft saddle. On longer riders, however, the WTB Volt saddle on the Limba offers more support and its flatter handlebar top, flared drops and cork tape offer more cushioning.

When I switched wheels (there's actually more tyre space in the Voodoo than the Schwinn), the overall comfort gap was far narrower, with the Limba noticeably benefitting from more bounce and the ability to run lower pressures. It was still faster, so upgrading to a larger volume tyre offers useful versatility if you'll be riding off-road – or on rough roads – regularly.

While the Schwinn delivers a more enjoyable ride than its frame and feature suggest, it falls down very badly in one area: gearing. The Microshift 1x gears are intuitive but the compact cassette is a killer on even gentle climbs. The range of 42-106in is more suited to the Low Countries than loaded riding on any gradients. You could switch the chainset for one with a smaller chainering but that loses the taller gears. What's frustrating is that the medium cage R10 rear mech will happily cope with a 34-tooth maximum sprocket, and an 11-34 10-speed cassette is right there in the Microshift catalogue. It should have been on the Schwinn.



An 11-28 cassette limits the Schwinn's gearing



Same cassette but with a 46-30 double

Other options



TRIBAN ROAD BIKE RC120
£499.99

Sitting next to the Schwinn in the French-based sports supermarche is their excellent own brand all-rounder. Tyres are thin and gears are tall, but a carbon fork and tubeless ready rims give it great gravel potential.
decathlon.co.uk



MERLIN MALT G2 CLARIS
£599

Lancashire direct-sell stalwarts Merlin offer an entry level version of their Malt G2 gravel bike that still gets a carbon fork. While the Claris gear range is more on road than off, 35mm Kenda tyres provide a good off-piste start.
merlincycles.com

In contrast, the double chainset arrangement on the Voodoo seemed clumsy and noisy to our novice riders but its gear range (30-117in) was more forgiving of fitness limitations and closer-spaced contours. I still want a bigger cassette. The rear mech can take a 34t sprocket, which would enable pedalling rather than pushing up longer, steeper slopes off-road. ●

Verdict

I didn't have high hopes for the Schwinn initially but it delivered a smoother, comfortably upright and more enjoyable ride than expected. It particularly appealed to the less experienced testers who liked the softer saddle and the intuitive single-ring shifting. The choice of chainering size and close-ratio cassette hamstringing it horribly on hills or with loads, however, and the lack of front mudguard mounts is annoying for commuting.

In terms of both everyday riding and weekend exploring, the faster, wider-gear-range, full-mudguard-ready Limba is the more versatile bike. If you find its ride harsh over rougher terrain there's plenty of space to add the float of fatter tyres. The frame and overall spec are good enough to make upgrading the transmission or even fitting a lighter carbon fork a viable option in the longer term. Aspects like the better-sealed hubs, twin-bolt seat post, WTB saddle and superior bar tape that might seem trivial now will be more important further down the line too.