

Gear up!

A cross-section of cycling products selected and reviewed by CTC staff, specialist journalists and CTC members

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A-Z LONDON MINI STREET ATLAS £6.95 (PHONE NOT INCLUDED)

Reviewed by CTC Campaigns Officer Chris Peck

For several years now Transport for London has produced paper maps of the still-embryonic London Cycle Network, showing specific signed routes and quieter roads 'suitable for cycling'. Now the same survey work (from Transport for London and CycleCity Guides) is available as a software package for use on a GPS-enabled pocket PC or mobile phone.

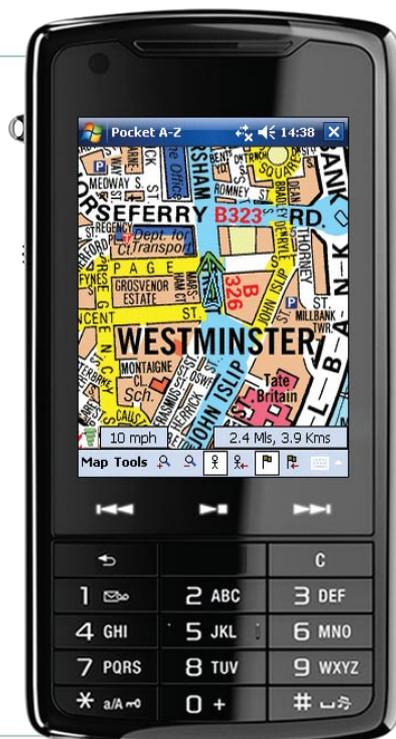
The software doesn't work like a car's sat-nav. Instead you can search for a destination street address and mark it on the scrolling map. An arrow then points to your destination giving a distance. You've then got to navigate using an A-Z style street map, or hope that the cycle routes marked will take you there – the arrow won't plot out a route for you.

Designated cycle routes often make use of cut-throughs, snickets or greenways which make it much easier to thread through a city's backstreets without running into dead-ends.

Although it only covers inner London this is a handy tool, if only as a mobile version of the A-Z maps. While using the software I was able to follow some of the less well signposted cycle routes in London. One was a real discovery: a quiet, fairly direct and useful route that I had never seen before, even though it was just a mile from my home!

Digital A to Z maps are also available for other cities, such as Bristol, Leeds, and Glasgow.

From: www.a-zmaps.co.uk, tel: 01732 738422



SHACKUP TRIDOOBBIKESTORE

£289 RRP, INC DELIVERY

Reviewed by editor Dan Joyce



This low shed is specifically designed for bikes. Two adult bikes will fit in the main section, while the end section can be used for panniers or other paraphernalia. It's 148cm high, 75cm deep and 248cm long – of which the main compartment is 200cm. The walls and doors are 12mm tongue-and-groove panels, floor and ceiling OSD plywood, and there's roofing felt for the top and bolts for the doors. It comes flatpacked and it's not a trivial task to assemble. You'll want to treat the wood too;

there's only a preservative base coat. In use, it's less hassle than fighting past a lawnmower in a standard shed and its overall footprint isn't that big – though you need a good space in front to open the main doors. I've had three bikes in it, or two and a Burley luggage trailer (just!). Many trikes would fit too. Being a shed, its main weakness is security. The (more expensive) Trimetals Bicycle Store is more durable, takes as many bikes, requires less space because of its up-and-over door, and is easier to beef up with extra locks and a ground anchor, so I'd recommend that first. But as sheds go, this is a good one. Info: www.shackup.co.uk, www.diy.com, tel B&Q: 0845 609 6688

CARRADICE CARRADRY CITY FOLDER £69.95

Reviewed by editor Dan Joyce

Satchel-style office panniers such as the Carradice Bike Bureau and Ortlieb Office Bag have been around for a while. This is one of Carradice's new versions, specifically for the Brompton. The Originals City Folder is cotton duck and leather, while the Carradry version tested is made from seam-welded PVC/polyester and is 100% waterproof.

The Brompton front carrier frame (not supplied) fits in the back of the bag and there's a detachable shoulder strap. Capacity is 22 litres, making it a bit smaller than the 28L Touring Pannier, but it's enough and it's a lot more comfortable to cart around off the bike – especially if you put the front of the bag and not the rigid frame against your body. There's a padded laptop pouch and pockets for phone etc. inside, and a few mesh pockets (suitable for gloves, cap, cycle clips and so on) outside. Silver won't be to everyone's taste, but the bag's weatherproofing and dual use as a courier bag makes it probably the best Brompton bag yet.

From: www.carradice.co.uk, tel: 01282 615886



KNOG GATOR 305 LED LIGHTING SYSTEM £149.99

Reviewed by touring and commuting cyclist Michael Stenning

The Gator is a high-power LED lighting system that allows the integrated 5mm blinking LED to be run simultaneously (or independently) of the main beam, with a claimed total output of 320 lumens. This gives visibility to around 30 feet – fine for road use and adequate for off-road routes you already know. Silicone housings with stretch clips fit to any diameter of handlebar without tools. The same system secures the NiMH battery to the frame.

Handlebar switch gear is intuitive and tactile, allowing easy toggling between full and dipped beams. Build quality is excellent with weatherproof connections and solid aluminium casings. Run times between 2 hr 20 min and 4 hr make it viable for longer commutes. Audax riders would be better served by a Li-ion lamp.

Info: weighs 420g, replacement battery £69. Distributed by Moore Large, www.moorelarge.co.uk, tel: 01332 274200



PLETSCHER MULTI ZOOM £17.59

Reviewed by expedition cyclist Cass Gilbert



Kickstands can be surprisingly useful when touring. At 473g, the Multi Zoom will add heft to your bike, but it is tough enough to support one laden with four panniers. It fits a range of frame sizes, thanks to adjustability in the leg, and is braced across the seat and chainstays; the chainstay clamp is also adjustable depending on tubing size or disc brake tabs. In use, the Multi Zoom works very well and saves scuffing your panniers on the ground

when making a stop to take a picture. The stand is also handy when loading up your bike on a solo trip. When riding, my heel occasionally clipped the pivot point and I'd advise using rubber shims to protect the frame. Also, wrap an elastic band around the brake lever and handlebar so you can engage the brake and stop the front wheel arcing around when the kickstand's down on an uneven surface.

From: www.chickencycles.co.uk

THORN T20 FUNCTION MULTITOOl £19.99

Reviewed by touring and commuting cyclist Michael Stenning

This 20-function multitool has all the features you'd expect, including chain-breaker, 2 to 8mm Allen keys, torque driver for disc brakes, two spoke keys, Phillips and flat screwdrivers. Unique to this design is a T20 torque key specific to Rohloff transmission, fitting the shifter/hub bolts and allowing cable replacement. Shorter Allen keys lack leverage, making removal of stubborn fasteners more awkward and I dislike steel tyre levers, especially on alloy rims. These are minor points. It's pretty rugged and at £1 per function it's good value, especially if you have a Rohloff hub.

From: www.sjscycles.com, tel: 01278 441500



Best of the rest

ORTLIEB CAMERA INSERT £16

Reviewed by CTC Technical Officer Chris Juden

This insert adapts any Ortlieb medium or large handlebar bag to carry camera equipment. I've carried a digital SLR and up to three lenses in this on most rides over the past year, with no problems, and wouldn't use anything less than Ortlieb to keep my camera gear safe and dry.

Details: More info at www.ortlieb.de

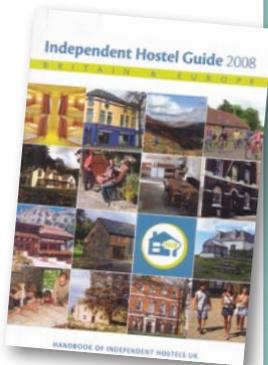


INDEPENDENT HOSTEL GUIDE £4.95

Reviewed by Mark Waters

With holes appearing in the YHA network, this little guide is becoming ever more useful for finding budget accommodation while touring. With 326 places to stay featured in the 2008 edition, there's certainly no shortage of places to stay – in accommodation ranging from camping barns to international hostels.

Details: More info at www.independenthostelguide.co.uk



GREASEBAG £17

Reviewed by editor Dan Joyce

This is a drivetrain cover for a bike in a bike bag when flying, made from wipe-clean polyester. It does keep oil off the inside of the bike bag and anything else in there, if that's a problem for you. I think it's more useful for putting a wheels-off bike on the back seat of a car or for storing your bike overnight in a hotel room. It weighs 220g. It won't fit over a rear carrier or full mudguard so best suits road or mountain bikes.

Details: www.greasebag.co.uk



IRWIN 4WR VISE-GRIP £8 APPROX

Reviewed by CTC Technical Officer Chris Juden

Disposing of broken chain links (see Q&A) is just one of the 101 jobs around bikes I've tackled with the aid of my mini Vise-Grip. It does everything you'd want normal pliers for, but better since it locks on, also acts as a spanner (the jaws open to 20mm) and whilst the wire-cutting feature isn't great, it'll do. It's my third hand with super-strength fingers for any task that involves clamping, pulling, bending, twisting etc. A couple of the things I'd struggle to handle without it are pulling up and holding brake straddle yokes whilst tightening the nut and fitting 'slip-in' brake pads.

Actually nearer five inches long (125mm) and weighing 100g, the four-inch Vise-Grip is smaller than most of the tools it replaces and lighter than any – including the chain tool. After the tyre lever and allen keys, it's the third most essential item in my cycle toolkit.

I've modified my Vise-Grip, fixing a 3/8 Whitworth screw onto the adjuster knob, to which I attach a ball-and-socket camera mount.

You're unlikely to find the Irwin 4WR Vise-Grip in a bike shop. I found it for about £8 at a couple of webshops: jindustrial.co.uk and dm-tools.co.uk.

ARKEL XM-45 PANNIERS £149.95

Reviewed by CTC Technical Officer Chris Juden

XM stands for Extreme Mountain, which means fewer pockets, zippers and possible leaks than the Arkel 'Grand Touring' panniers I tested a few years ago. The main compartment drybag kept its promise on tour in Northern Ireland. That's despite the two-way zipper running the full height of both inner and outer. The close-fitting, lined hood does its job. There's a pocket on top of it, handy for hats and gloves, and another on the rear for toolkits etc. Capacity is 45 litres per pair and they weigh 2.46kg, but Arkel aim to build the strongest not the lightest panniers. They can rightly be proud of their cam-lock system. The hooks are extruded from solid aluminium, with nylon inserts to cushion the carrier and anti-jump cams that lock onto any size of rail from 6 to 15mm. This shape of pannier, with a slanted leading edge and vertical rear, is good for heel clearance and volume. Arkel claim to be the best. They could be – it depends how you rate each aspect of a pannier.

From: www.edinburghbicycle.com, tel: 0131 331 5010

