

GROUPTEST

CYCLING JOURNALIST **STEVE WORLAND** REVIEWS CYCLING SHOES

Casual cycling shoes

The best recreational cycling shoes offer both pedalling efficiency and walking comfort. Journalist **Steve Worland** tries four pairs

IF YOU use clipless pedals for mountain biking, touring or commuting, it makes sense to use shoes designed for recessed cleats such as Shimano's SPD so that you can walk too. There's no law that says you have to have use roadie-style projecting cleats on a road bike either. The bigger cleat might allow marginally better power transfer but it's nothing to worry about if you're not racing. The same goes for super-stiff, super-light carbon soled shoes favoured by off-road racers. The more casual offerings on test here offer good pedalling efficiency and walking comfort, as well as a style that won't jar with less bike-specific clothing.

1 Soles

If you spend a lot of time walking in your bike shoes, go for a shoe that's stiff around the cleat but with some flexibility between the front and rear of the sole. This will make walking more comfortable. Such shoes will tend to offer more grippy soles for difficult or wet surfaces too.

4 Weight

You'll occasionally hear riders talking about the weight of shoes. It's not a big deal unless you're concerned about the overall weight of the bike and rider on climbs. The fit, comfort and cleat positioning will affect your riding efficiency far more than shoe weight, and the more casual shoes tested here are often more comfortable than lighter weight race style shoes.

2 Cleats

These shoes are designed for a small, two-bolt cleat, some variant of which is used by all common 'off-road' systems: Shimano SPD, Crank Brothers, Time Atac and Speedplay Frog. Cleats are included when you buy the pedals. The force required to engage and disengage the pedals varies by system; easiest is Shimano's SPD with the springs set slack and with Multirelease cleats used – they're marked with the letter M.

4 Uppers

In terms of comfort and fit, the shoes here have a lot in common with trainers, with padded edges around the foot and a combination of laces and straps for fit adjustment. Most uppers are designed for fair weather riding. If you're looking for shoes that will keep you dry and warm, it's worth getting shoes with a Gore-Tex layer, like the Shimano boots tested here, or leather touring shoes such as Exustar's Stelvio.



Take a look at Giro's new Republic shoe. Aimed at urban riders (and tourers?), it has a different aesthetic.

**USE
WITHOUT
CLEATS**

All the shoes here are built with an inset in the sole for fitting cleats. If you don't use cleats, because you prefer toe clips and straps or plain flat pedals, you can leave the inset covered. If you're unsure about whether you're going to use cleats on your shoes or not, get shoes with soles that grip well to flat pedals. Vibram soles are particularly good, but for clips and straps users, a less grippy sole will slide in and out more easily.



SHIMANO MT91 £149.99

Styled to look and feel like thoroughbred hiking boots but still relatively light at just under 600g apiece, the ankle-protecting MT91s have a Gore-Tex liner as well as a padded and gusseted tongue to stop the weather from penetrating. The Vibram sole is hard wearing and very grippy, even walking on wet rocks, and there's just the right amount of give in the sole and uppers to make even long stretches on foot almost as comfy as in good walking boots. Reinforced lacing eyelets are easy to use, hooked on the top rows for a fast easy fit. The pedal part of the sole is fibreglass-reinforced to transfer your pedalling energy directly but a shock-absorbing midsole and dipped heel cup provide stability and comfort on or off the bike. The edges, toes and heels are well reinforced against scuffing and the cleat fixings are under an allen-bolt-fixed inset cover. Uneven or heel-in pedallers will often find that ankle boots scuff the cranks. Sizes: 40-48.

madison.co.uk

A superb option for heavy-duty terrain in all weathers



PEARL IZUMI X ALP £89.99

Don't let the running shoe aesthetics fool you. These X Alps combine stiff dual-density soles for firm pressure-point-free pedalling and excellent walking grip with soft but very supportive uppers and an adjustable lace system that keeps everything suitably snug, including the lace ends which tuck into a flap in the top of the tongue. The carbon rubber outsole is tough and grippy but meshed uppers are designed to keep you cool and comfy in summer rather than warm and dry in winter. Durability is okay for lightweight touring but don't expect too much abuse resistance from them in rugged off-road conditions. Weight is an airy-light 390g apiece. Fit is slightly smaller than average, most notably in toe room, so you might need to go a size larger than usual. The cleat fixings are under an allen-bolt secured inset cover. Sizes: 39-43, women's (X-Alp Enduro) 36-42.

madison.co.uk

Comfy and efficient pedallers but not suited to wet conditions



SPECIALIZED TAHOE SPORT £80.00

It's worth mentioning that there's a standard version of the Tahoe shoe at £15 less than this but with a less grippy sole. The Vibram sole of the Sport version is well worth going for if you're likely to be spending much time on foot, but for those who plan mainly cleated ride time the £65 version is worth considering. The composite midsole plate in the Tahoe Sport means it has the stiffest sole of the four shoes tested here. Its 420g apiece weight reflects a more durable build than some of its price rivals, but the supportive insoles and very snug fit of the Body Geometry uppers are comfy both on and off the bike. Despite the trainer aesthetics, the Tahoe Sport comes closer than the other shoes tested here to the typically narrower race shoe fit. Lacing is secure with both a strap and an elasticated flap on the tongue to keep the lace tops tidy. Sizes: 39-48, women's 36-42. specialized.co.uk

Well priced, very stiff but impressively comfy riding shoes



BONTRAGER SSR MULTISPORT £69.99

The sturdy construction of the SSRs is reflected in their 465g apiece heft. The fit is roomier than other same-sized rivals we've tried but walk comfort is good and a fibreglass-reinforced nylon sole plate creates a very stiff pedalling base, with a grippy rubber outsole providing decent traction on wet terrain. As with the Specialized Tahoes, you need to cut out the cleat cover with a bladed tool to access the cleat fixing recess, but a less aggressively treaded sole helps to make these the best of the four pairs tested here for use with clips and straps. Lacing is through canvas loops, with a Velcro strap for extra security, to tuck the lace ends under. The toes, sides and heel cup are suitably reinforced for fairly heavy-duty off-road use and the rugged build makes them more suitable than shoes like the lighter weight Pearl Izumis for colder wetter conditions. Sizes: 39-48, women's 36-43. trekbikes.com

Tough, no-nonsense all-rounders at a reasonable price