

GEAR UP



MIDDLEBURN INCY SPIDER

£276.50 (chainset as tested)

Reviewed by Chris Juden

Triples have been synonymous with touring since the late '70s, when we had only five gears at the back. Now we have 9- or 10-speed 11-36 cassettes, a double is enough... and shifts better.

Compact road doubles aren't compact enough. Cyclo-cross chainsets come with smaller outers, but the inner can't be any less than 34T. The new MTB doubles go small enough but are awful 'waddy' to pedal, with a wide spread across the crank ends. They also put the chain too far out for efficient use of big and big, a favourite gear on a double as it's the lowest before dropping into the inner ring. But cyclo-cross and mountain doubles have spawned potentially useful front mechs.

During 2013, I used a Middleburn Duo crankset to trial a number of 18-speed touring arrangements, and found that doubles as much as 20 teeth different with a chainline close to 43.5mm, typical of road doubles, could be shifted reliably by a Shimano SLX M667 mech intended for MTBs with even smaller rings and wider chainlines. This proved the concept, but the Duo spider slopes inwards giving the cranks a wide pedal spread. So I helped Middleburn design a new 5-arm spider to hold the smallest available chainrings closer to the back of the crank, on a much shorter axle. This spider being good for climbing, we called it Incy!

I have 40- and 20-tooth rings on the 110 and 58mm bolt circles of Incy's five arms. With a 9-speed 11-34T cassette, gears go from 16 to 98 inches, a broader range than most triples. Front shifting calls for a simultaneous rear shift of three

to four sprockets, but ambidextrous shifting is easy with indexed shifters. My set-up (600g, less axle) tests this concept to the limit. A less extreme range will need fewer compensatory rear shifts.

Outer rings from 34T up to 50T and inners from 20T to 32T can be fitted to an Incy spider. With square-taper cranks on a Shimano 113mm UN bottom-bracket, it gives a chainline of about 45mm – same as the middle rear sprocket on a 135mm hub. Choose road cranks for minimum pedal spread (152mm on that axle) or the wider splayed (by 14mm) rS7 cranks to clear the chain-stays on mountain bikes. On road bikes with 130mm hubs, or for smoother running in big and big and a narrower (146mm) pedal spread: use a 107mm Shimano or 110mm Stronglight axle – but only if your front mech will shift a 42mm chainline.

Outer rings 42T and smaller can be shifted by an SLX mountain double mech. That won't work with Shimano road STI, so drop-bar fans must use some other shifting option or mech. Also, a 1mm washer may be required with this spider when such small outers are used on road cranks (pictured).

A Sram XX mountain double mech will shift outer rings up to 46T on a 43.5mm chainline, but is too narrow for 9-speed chains; use 10-speed gearing. Outers up to 48T can be shifted by mountain triple mechs, but these are likely to foul chain-stays of 700C bikes with outers under 44T.

The range of interchangeable spiders with hard-wearing chainrings make these expensive Middleburn cranks a sound investment.

middleburn.co.uk, tel: 01420 520223

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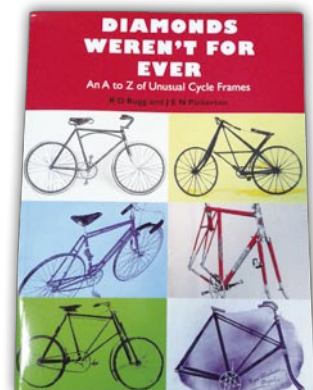


DIAMONDS WEREN'T FOREVER

£20 plus £2.60 p&p

Reviewed by Ross Adams

This coffee table book brings together 'An A to Z of Unusual Cycle Frames' in the format of catalogue extracts, advertisements, and magazine reviews, with accompanying text from the contributors. It provides a comprehensive view of quirky frame design from the early 1900s up to the 1960s. In the main, the photographs and scanned images are of good quality, although some of the text printed within is harder to read. This doesn't distract hugely from the book, which is interesting and informative. To order a copy, send a cheque for £22.60 to 'D Pinkerton', 522 Holly Lane, Erdington, B24 9LY. Tel: 07778 429313



FASTRIDER AQUADUS PANNIERS

£89.99 per pair

Reviewed by David Dowling
These panniers go head-to-head on price with Ortlieb Roller Classics. I tried the 16-litre ones – on the rear as I couldn't adjust them to sit securely on a front rack. Contents remained dry in winter rain, and even when I tested them in the shower. They're sturdy too. When I overloaded the bags and bumped up and down a series of kerbs, the hooks

were fine. However, the hook's catches are basic: a spring-loaded screw that needs to be turned to release or lock the bags. Misjudge the number of turns and the whole assembly can spring apart! And the canoe closure attaches to a strap that goes around the bag's circumference. This makes it slower to fasten the bag and leaves loose ends near the wheel. chickencycles.co.uk



ALTURA PROGEL SHIELD BIB SHORTS

£69.99

Reviewed by Dan Joyce

What's special about these bib shorts is the seat panel: it's waterproof. The idea is that wheel spray from wet roads or trails won't give you that squelchy seat-pad feeling. The other panels are normal, so these are not waterproof shorts per se. Even the seat panel didn't seem impermeable, although that could be dampness seeping in from elsewhere. They're nevertheless drier and hence cosier than other bib shorts. I wore them throughout the recent wet winter, and they became my first choice as undershorts for mountain biking. (My road bike has full length mudguards.) Fit and comfort are as good as any other bib shorts, as the seat panel is stretchy. You pay a £20 premium compared to the non-Shield version. It's worth it. Sizes: S-XXL. zyro.co.uk

BLACKBURN AIRSTIK 2-STAGE PUMP

£19.99

Reviewed by Dan Joyce

The smallest pump I've got that I don't hate using is a Topeak Mini-Morph: 152g without its frame bracket, and 26cm long. But on many rides over the past few years I've carried a tiny Blackburn Airstik SL (58g, 15.8cm). The times I've needed it, it's done the job – just. This Airstik 2-Stage is its slightly big brother (86g, 17.4cm). It has a switch to flip between low and high pressure

pumping. Low pressure means more volume per stroke. It's still like filling a bath with an egg cup but it's tangibly better for fatter tyres. I tried it on a 700x25C road tyre and a 29x2.3in mountain bike tyre. After losing count of the absurd number of strokes, I just checked the pressure at two and four minutes – at which point I'd had enough. I managed 60psi and 70psi respectively for the road tyre, 15psi and a usable 25psi for the 29er tyre. It's now my go-to get-me-home MTB pump. It comes with a bracket (22g) that fits offset under a bottle cage. Presta only. zyro.co.uk



DUAL EYEWEAR V6 SUNGLASSES

£39.59

Reviewed by

CTC member Nigel Bell
Dual Eyewear's

V6 sunglasses are lightweight, stylish and comfortable. They're also bifocal, with a magnification section built into the lower portion of the lenses. As reading glasses they perform well, making it easy to see the detail on a map or GPS. The transition between the lens elements is obvious, but it is relatively unobtrusive and easily ignored. Optical quality seems good, and the grey lenses aren't too dark, so they should be usable on all but the dullest of winter days. At around £40, they are good value for money and



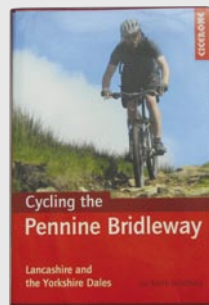
they've transformed my cycling: no more swapping specs at every junction to check the route. They are available in +1.5, +2.0 or +2.5 magnifications, and there are several different styles in the range, including shields with optional interchangeable lenses. For the price, it may be possible to find better sunglasses, but for sheer convenience these V6 specs are hard to beat. ctcshop.org.uk

CYCLING THE PENNINE BRIDLEWAY

£14.95

Reviewed by Gavin Wood

The Pennine Bridleway is a National Trail that heads up the spine of England from Derbyshire to Cumbria. Although the trail is multi-use, this guide is written with mountain bikers in mind. The book covers sections of the trail that lie in Yorkshire and Lancashire; it just sneaks into Cumbria. There is a useful



introduction covering start points, accommodation, and the route grading system. Routes are accurately described with a good level of detail. A summary provides practical information such as OS map segments, grid references for start and finish points, distance, ascent, and the very important detail of cafés and pubs you'll find en route. An excellent book, with some great photos of gritty Pennine landscapes to help inspire your ride. cicerone.co.uk



BRIDGE STREET SADDLEBAG, LARGE

£80

Reviewed by Tim Trew

Bridge Street saddlebags launched last year. Made in Britain, they're more minimalist than Carradice saddlebags, with one roll-top compartment holding a couple of zipped pockets. There are three sizes: this large (15 litres), medium (8 litres, £70) and small (4 litres, £60). Maximum load for any is 7kg if you use the 'low bracket', which holds the bag next to the seatpost, or 5kg for the 'high bracket' that I used. This holds the bag further back. The bag clips on bar-bag style to either bracket. Fitting is dead easy.

The large bag held all my supplies for a weekend of rainy cycling around North Wales. The roll-top expandable closure meant there was space for extra food shopping in the evening too. The two-layer coated nylon fabric kept my spare clothes dry, and the simple quick-release clip meant it was easy to



take off for café stops.

The bag held firm even on rough tracks and didn't swing around; I started to forget it was even there. The only drawback was that opening and closing it with cold hands was a bit fiddly. Perhaps a couple of buckles on the webbing would make it quicker to get your map or waterproof out in a hurry. The strapping system was, I think, the main downside against Carradice bags. The fabric isn't as tough as Cotton Duck either, although it is lighter – 700g for the whole bag, including fixings, versus 1215g for a comparably sized Carradice Nelson plus SQR bracket (which will carry 10kg rather than 5kg). But if you want to travel fast and light, this could be just the bag for you. bridgestreet.cc



SELLE ROYAL BECOZ MODERATE SADDLE

£49.99

Reviewed by David Dowling

This sits in the middle of the Becoz range of generously upholstered saddles padded with 'corkgel'. At a smidge over half a kilo, it's about the same weight as a Brooks B17 (and half the price). The marketing materials make great play of the saddle's 'eco' credentials. They also suggest that this saddle is ideal for a riding position where your back is 60 degrees from horizontal – touring, recreational riding, and commuting. I found it comfortable from tops to drops even on a sporty bike. The surface of the saddle, while waterproof, seems to grab at clothing. Shifting your weight on the saddle requires you to lift your rear and put it down again. The rails are unusually steep and quite short, and the whole design is set back. I had to put the saddle as far forward as possible to get a normal position. It was then comfortable, supporting my sit bones well. For me, it still errs a little on the squidgy side. A women's version is available. selleroyal.com

ALPE DEUX MERINO WOOL JERSEY

£78

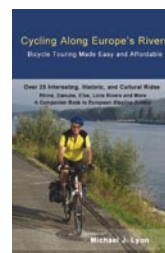


Reviewed by Editor Dan Joyce

Woollen jerseys look classy, insulate well when damp, and don't pong after a day's use like lycra. On the flipside, wool gets a lot heavier when it gets wet and it doesn't have Lycra's elasticity. Fit is looser, and I found the buttoned rear pockets useful for only the lightest items, such as a gilet. Any weight made the jersey sag too much – and it's long and loose to begin with. Alpe Deux now recommend going down a size. This UK-made jersey is lovely and soft to wear. I just didn't wear it often, due to the lack of pocket practicality, looser fit, and fussier laundry requirements (30 degree wash, liquid detergent). Nice for special occasions, though. Sizes: S-XL. alpedeux.com

CYCLING ALONG EUROPE'S RIVERS

£14.95



Reviewed by David Dowling

Michael J Lyon's book is a companion to the highly-regarded German Bikeline series of guides. It's a solution to a problem that doesn't exist. Cicerone, amongst others, produce excellent, pocket-sized guides for each of the Rhine, Danube and Loire rivers in English, giving you everything you need for each trip. This bigger book looks like a personal desktop publishing project. The maps and images are monochrome and add little. The writing is subjective and occasionally defies received wisdom; he advises against waterproof panniers. There is some useful information. If you want it, get the ebook. cycletouringbooks.com