



£1000 TOURING BIKE

Spa Cycles Steel Touring

New own-brand touring bike from the Harrogate shop ticks all the boxes. Review by **Chris Juden**

▶ **I ALREADY** have a Spa Titanium Touring (reviewed in J/J 2011, see tinyurl.com/pfmnhrb), so to give myself more to write about the Steel version – and because I'd be testing it in February – I asked for the £150 lighting upgrade. More on that later, but remember this bike is only £945 and 13.8kg (with pedals) when comparing with usual daylight-only tourers.

Frame

The two Spa Tourings are very similar bikes, fit just as well, ride just as well... and I think any difference in feel is more attributable to tyres and saddle than frame material. The Titanium one is £535 extra, which is a lot to save 0.3kg and no paint to chip. And an all-black finish comes close, since touching up is easy and doesn't show.

I can't fault the geometry or tubing

choice and was pleased to see a reinforcing plate under the down-tube/head-tube joint. I think lugless frames often need a bit of stiffening there (the Spa Ti frame now also has this).

Kudos to Spa for 6mm threads in the bottom rear carrier eyes. They're much less prone to loosen and strip under the weight of a touring load. The usual 5mm are adequate for the upper fixings and lighter front panniers.

Wheels

Plain Marathon tyres have more puncture resistance and don't roll quite as freely as Marathon Racer (on my Ti Tourer), but you can have those instead if you like.

The wheels are handbuilt in Harrogate and the rear has differential spoking. That means thicker spokes on the right, where dishing ▶▶



Above Carrier wants and gets a bigger (M6) bolt

Also consider



1) Ridgeback Panorama £1249.99

Quite well equipped but less keenly priced. Reynolds 725 frame, CroMo fork, 27-speed mix of Shimano Sora and Deore. Reviewed Aug/Sep 13. ridgeback.co.uk

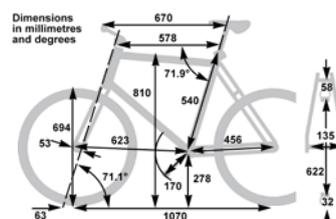


2) Dawes Galaxy Classic £1299

£350 extra gets a Reynolds 631 frame, CroMo fork, and 30-speed largely Shimano Tiagra gearing (so a 12-30T cassette) with bar-end shifters. dawescycles.com



Tech spec



SPA STEEL TOURING

Price: £1095 (£945 without lights)

Weight: 14.1kg (as shown, inc lighting)

Sizes: 51, 54 (tested), 57cm

Frame and fork: Reynolds 725 & CroMo. Fittings for 3 bottles, guards & carriers.

Wheels: Schwalbe Marathon 32-622 tyres, Exal LX17 rims, 36x3 spokes 2.0/1.8 db with 2.3/2.0 sb rear right on SP front, Shimano Deore rear hub.

Transmission: 27-speed 24-119in. Sugino XD-2 170mm 48-38-28 chainset, 11-32x9 cassette, Shimano Deore rear mech, Sora front and STI shifters.

Braking: Tektro RX-5 mini-V brakes.

Steering & seating: Tange Terious hset, 6cm spacers, FSA 9cm stem & Wing 42cm bar. Spa Nidd saddle on FSA post.

Equipment SP-PV8 hub generator, B&M IQ head & Selectra+ rear lamp. Tubus Logo rear carrier. 2 alloy bottle cages.

Contact: spacycles.co.uk, 01423 887003

first-class luggage carrier – plus the optional extra of built-in lighting. Very few manufacturers offer this. Don't they realise touring bikes are also ideal for commuting? SP hubs are close to market leader Schmidt for efficiency and lamps don't come much better than Busch & Müller. I'd rather see (or not see) internal wiring, but coaxial rubber-insulated cable is tough and zip-ties blend in against black paint!

Conclusion

This is probably the best touring bike you can get for under a grand. Apart from the front mech – already sorted – my criticisms are mostly at the level of 'ashtrays too small'. Recommended!

for derailleur gears increases spoke tension, and thinner on the left where tension is low. This equalises the stresses and strains, so the wheel is more balanced and less likely to buckle or break a spoke. It's a small thing that avoids trouble on tour.

All this turns on reliable Shimano Deore MTB hubs, except where the lighting upgrade substitutes a SP-dynamo hub in front. It's a very small generator that delivers the full 3W. Apart from lights, the electronics we now take on holiday need charging, so I think such generators will be increasingly demanded on tourers.

Componentry

As the sporty road and mountain sides of cycling grow further apart, drop handlebar touring bikes are falling down the gap. But if you stick at 9-speed no compromises are required in the gearing at least. Except that since Tiagra went 10-speed, you can't have anything 'better' than Sora, which nevertheless works perfectly well. It puts gear cables in the way of a bar-bag, but there are workarounds.

The test bike actually came with a Tiagra 10-speed front mech, which rubbed in some gears. A word to Spa and the spec is now changed for a wider-cage Sora mech.

I nowadays find more use for gears below 20 than over 100 inches, but imagine that most tourists will be perfectly happy with the range on this bike. It's better than any 30-speeder.

Brakes are the other road-mountain conflict zone. If you want STI levers,

you can't have the long cable-pull efficiency of full-size V-brakes and must stick with cantilevers (tricky to set and prone to fork judder), or sacrifice clearance with mini-Vees. The latter is Spa's favoured compromise. They make the best of it by positioning the braze-ons high, so tyres up to 32mm fit comfortably – with the mudguard hard against brake! Although they're mini, these Vees could do with more cable than an STI lever pulls, so must be kept adjusted very close to the rims. That done, the braking should be more powerful, but I didn't find them any stronger (or weaker) than the cantis on my Ti Tourer, which takes 37mm tyres.

Points of contact

At the rear is a Spa Nidd (made in Taiwan) saddle. It's very like a B17: same leather thickness, same width, but 1cm shorter and with the flaps laced together to help keep its shape.

At the front an FSA Wing bar has nice shallow drop, and as Spa let you choose your stem extension, whilst leaving plenty of length on the steerer, a comfortable touring position is almost guaranteed.

Fit your own pedals to some proper touring cranks, with nice narrow pedal spread, which (though they come with 48, 38, 28 rings) can fit chainrings down to 34 middle and 24 inner, via five bolts for stability, on a square-taper axle with big, reliable bearings.

Equipment

Touring equipment comprises two bottle cages, sturdy guards and a

1 It's a squeeze but Mini-Vees accept a 32mm tyre all right!

2 The down-tube is reinforced where it meets the head-tube