



BIKE TEST

PETITE ROAD BIKES

Helen Juden and Cherry Allan test ride a Liv/Giant Avail 1 and a Tifosi CK7 Gran Fondo Veloce Triple. Review by Technical Editor *Chris Juden*

SINCE WSD (women specific design) became a thing, there's no lack of lightweight bikes designed for sporty women. Because a few threaded holes weigh nothing and add a lot in terms of versatility, we searched for two you can easily bolt a rack and some guards onto. One even came with guards.

These are nevertheless road bikes – of the sportive, audax or endurance variety. Compared to race bikes, these trade a little speed for the comfort most people want (even if they're not riding all day) by putting the handlebars a bit higher and closer.

While Helen and Cherry rode the bikes, I measured and researched them, keeping the results to myself so as not to prompt them. For cycling is a hugely suggestible activity.

My wife Helen has ridden many different bicycles over the years, mostly drop handlebar tourers. She nowadays prefers flat bars, but also has a Trek Pilot road bike (reviewed in A/M 2010, which we've modified with lighter wheels, shorter cranks and lower gears). This is also a woman-specific sportive design, which accepts guards and a carrier, so it compares closely with our test bikes. We'll occasionally refer to the Trek, and its review (bit.ly/1gvnYcl) is also worth reading for what it says about sportive bikes in general – and particularly the Giant Defy, of which the Avail is a women's version.

Cherry has ridden nothing but flat-bar hybrids for ages, but she's always hankered after something lighter and nimbler. Her latest hybrid, a WSD Cannondale Quick, is by no means heavy, but 'these two defied

gravity, giving me more for less effort than ever before, both on the flat and up the hills and, boy, was that an epiphany!'

FRAMES

Although they're light as a road bike should be at this price point, neither of these small bikes weighs much less than a medium-sized men's equivalent, which will be ridden by someone 50% heavier and stronger. It wouldn't be reasonable to make all parts of a bike in lighter versions, of course, but small frames at least could have thinner tubes. Apparently they don't. Both are stoutly constructed from alloy that doesn't look any slimmer for being painted in pastel tones, though a hydroformed top-tube avails the Avail some elegance. Speaking of appearances: reactions to the Tifosi's Barbie



● Tifosi CK7 Gran Fondo Veloce Triple



● (Above) Good clearance under the brake calliper is wasted by thick mudguard fittings

(Below) The inner chainring hangs off the middle – and cannot be smaller than 30



pink varied from revulsion to 'magnificent'. Other colours are available.

The Tifosi frame does not pretend to be WSD; it's simply very small. The Avail does. The only difference, however, between this and a 43cm Giant Defy, is 1cm on the head-tube and half a degree off the angle. Some other sizes also subtract 5mm from the top tube – big deal! One more headset spacer and a shorter stem does the same for a Tifosi. Helen's Trek is also 'WSD' by components' and goes one better with 5mm extra fork offset to match the shallow head angle, which all small road bikes must have (or else a smaller front wheel). Result: the others have excess trail, which makes the steering floppy at low speed. Helen noticed that the Tifosi 'rides best when you try hard and pull on the bars, but when cruising, it tends to weave.' Cherry observed that the Avail 'gave me a more stately ride than the rather skittish Tifosi, and buffered me more effectively from the bumps in the road.'

Despite their shallow head angles, both bikes have potential toe overlap, depending on whether guards are fitted and how small the rider's feet are. The 50mm-offset fork and shorter cranks they need anyway would solve that problem too. Smaller bikes with shorter cranks also need a lower bottom-bracket, but seldom get it, and these are no exception. Result: short riders always find stopping and starting more difficult. The Avail's shorter seat-tube made it easier to step over. >>>

Also available



1) CANNONDALE SYNAPSE 6 TIAGRA WOMEN'S £950

The carbon fork has a 55mm offset on the smaller models to sharpen the steering. The bike has 57mm brakes too. Gearing is compact-double Tiagra. cannondale.com



2) RIBBLE SPORTIVE 365 FROM £870

See F/M 2014. Smallest unisex (carbon) frame has similar top tube length to the Giant and Tifosi. Components are à la carte, although short cranks aren't on the menu. ribblecycles.co.uk



● Liv/Giant Avail 1



● (Above) This mech goes no lower, so you can't retro-fit smaller chainrings

● (Below) Extra levers add from-the-tops braking confidence, but short-drop brakes mean scanty clearance



» Giant provide fittings for racks and guards but then don't leave enough space. Guards can be crammed in – notably, Giant's own special mudguards for the Avail, Defy and similar models. (A pair arrived separately and too late for this article, but will be reviewed next issue.) But as Cherry says: 'the Tifosi came with mudguards, so no nightmarish fitting sessions – there genuinely is room'. Tifosi, however, waste a lot of that room in the way they've fitted those guards.

“165mm is as short as cranks come from big brands such as Shimano. But anyone who needs a bike this small should expect 160mm”

CHERRY'S FIRST BITE

'The Tifosi was the first I tested. It took me a while to feel in control, but I think this was more to do with me than the bike. With practice and some saddle tweaks, I grew accustomed to the stretch to the bars. And once I'd relaxed enough to stop strangling them, I found the Campag brake and gear controls no challenge for my small hands.

The Giant's frame fitted me equally well, although the Shimano STI hoods felt slightly too bulky for me to hold comfortably. Some of my old troubles with road bikes momentarily returned, so it's good that Giant provides a second pair of brake levers on

top of the bar – a most reassuring feature. As smooth and capable as the gears were on both machines, I found shifting with the Tifosi's thumb button and lever considerably more intuitive than the integrated brake/gear lever system on the Giant.'

Although Helen is used to Shimano STI on her Trek (the levers are fitted with reach reducers, as are those on the Avail) she too preferred Campag Ergopowers, for their shorter shifting stroke and for making use of her thumbs.

The only significant difference between the systems controlled by these levers is a lower bottom gear on the Tifosi thanks to its triple chainset. This will be useful on hillier rides than our testers undertook, but to be fair we should have compared a Giant Avail with the double version of the Tifosi Gran Fondo, which has identical gear ratios and price tag. I think £200 is a lot extra to pay for only one gear lower, but from Giant you don't have that option. A smaller double is out of the question too: the front mech won't fit any lower.

I mentioned shorter cranks already: short legs want them. But I said nothing to our





● Road bikes this small with 700C wheels require a shallower head angle to prevent toe-overlap. A longer-offset fork – which neither has – would sharpen the steering

testers. Helen noticed immediately that the Tifosi was uncomfortably long: standard 170mm on a bike this small is unforgivable. She found the Giant not so bad: 165mm is as short as they come from big brands such as Shimano. But anyone who needs a bike this small should expect 160mm.

BATTLE OF THE BRANDS

Almost everything that isn't Shimano on the Avail is made, or branded at least, by Giant – even the tyres. The saddle, however, gives more prominence to 'Liv'. This is Giant's new brand for women. Our petite testers were amused and some women might be unhappy to ride a bike that shouts GIANT! In future these bikes will whisper 'Liv'.

Tifosi supplement Campag with parts from other Italian brands. The Miche brakes functioned equally well, but Shimano's have adjustable shoes with replaceable pads. And whilst Miche's wheels rolled like a very round thing, as much as 45° twist in bladed spokes is a sign of poor building. The wheels on both bikes are secured by the weight-saving kind of quick-release that

unfortunately takes more finger strength to open and safely close – a bad choice, especially for women.

The Selle Italia Lady is a favourite of many women, but Tifosi instead choose a hard and narrow Selle Italia saddle that neither of our testers found at all ladylike. Liv felt much better and comes on a carbon post. Both bikes get a narrow handlebar (Helen found the Avail a bit too narrow) with a nice shallow drop. Both bikes offer 4-5cm of bar height adjustment, with the Avail generally higher by 3cm.

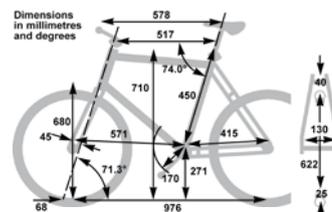
Tifosi's mudguards are a reliable German brand with safety-release fittings – whew!

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Giant is a more pleasant bike to ride and better value for money, but it's a close-run thing: the Tifosi has nicer levers and versatility on its side. Of the two, it was Cherry's favourite – and she's bought it!

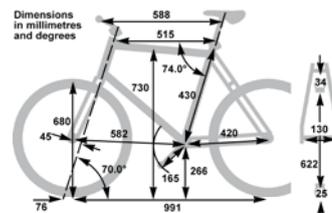
This review shows that Women Specific Design can tempt women onto road bikes, but I think we have some way to go before we can say these bikes are truly specific. ●

Tech Spec



TIFOSI CK7 GF VELOCE TRIPLE

- PRICE:** £1199
- SIZES:** XXS (tested), XS, S, M, L, XL
- WEIGHT:** 9.24kg
- FRAME & FORK:** Alloy & carbon. Fittings for 2 bottles guards & carrier
- WHEELS:** Vittoria Rubino Pro 25-622 tyres, Reflex RX5 15mm rims, Miche hubs, 2.0 part-bladed spokes, front 24×0, rear 32×3
- TRANSMISSION:** 30-speed: 27–112in.
- Campagnolo Veloce group:** 170mm 50-39-30T chainset, 12–30 cassette
- BRAKING:** Miche Performance, 57mm
- STEERING & SEATING:** Deda 13cm drop 38cm bar, 6cm ±6° stem. Integrated headset. Selle Italia X1f saddle, alloy post
- EQUIPMENT:** SKS Bluemels narrow guards
- CONTACT:** chickencycles.co.uk



LIV/GIANT AVAIL 1

- PRICE:** £999
- SIZES:** 50, 52, 54, 56, 58cm (56 tested)
- WEIGHT:** 8.76kg
- FRAME & FORK:** Hydroformed alloy and carbon. Fittings for 2 bottles & guards
- WHEELS:** Giant PR-3 25-622 tyres & wheels, 2.0/1.8 db spokes, front 24×0 rear 28×0/×3
- TRANSMISSION:** 20-speed: 30–112in.
- Shimano 105 STI group:** 165mm 50,34T chainset, 12–30 cassette
- BRAKING:** Shimano 105 short-reach dual-pivot. STI plus Tektro RL721 top levers
- STEERING & SEATING:** Giant 12cm drop 36cm bar, 7cm ±8° stem. Integrated headset. Liv/giant saddle, carbon post
- CONTACT:** giant-bicycles.com