



DAN JOYCE
Cycle editor

Bike test

CONTEMPORARY TOURERS

Editor **Dan Joyce** reviews two new tourers: the Cinelli HoBootleg and the Light Blue Darwin Twin Peak

THE BIKE industry is taking a growing interest in adventure cycling, and not just the kind where bivy bags are strapped to gravel bikes. New touring bikes are appearing. The Light Blue Darwin – available in various configurations – is new for 2016, while Cinelli's HoBootleg (an awkward contraction of 'hobo' and 'Bootleg', Cinelli's urban and trekking range) is one I've seen at shows for a year or two.

Both have been sprinkled with some of that magic bikepacking marketing dust. The HoBootleg is 'the bike that didn't exist' and 'a fine blend of cyclocross and touring machine'. The Darwin's name implies it's an evolutionary product, and the Twin Peak model tested is the bikepacking-ist of the lot, with a flared drop bar and no mudguards or racks. It also has the lowest bottom gear in the Darwin range, which is why I picked it.

FRAME AND FORK

The Cinelli HoBootleg has a sturdy Columbus Cromor chrome-moly steel frame with the fittings you want for touring. Its cyclocross heritage is evident in the cables that run along the top tube. They make it more comfortable if you shoulder the bike but less comfortable if you rest your backside on the top tube.

Cyclocross heritage also shows up in the frame geometry. Not in the chainstays, which are long enough for panniers. But it shows in the seat angle, which is on the steep side for long days in saddle (although it didn't bother me). And it shows in the front centres measurement (bottom bracket to front hub), which is too short. I repeatedly caught my toes on the mudguard. I'm just tall enough to ride the Large HoBootleg, given a shorter stem. That would win 10-15mm of toe room, which might be just enough... unless I wore my winter SPD boots? To get the same toe clearance as the Darwin, I'd need the XL HoBootleg, a bike that's simply too big for me.

Front-end length aside, it's a decent frame. The steering limiter at the head tube is a nice touch, preventing the wheel from turning through more than 90 degrees. So even with heavy front panniers, it won't flop round when you park the bike. It's good to see a couple of spare spokes included. They're fitted to the drive-side chainstay, which makes removal fiddlier but will prevent a derailed chain gouging the stay. There's clearance for tyres up to about 38mm with mudguards; the HoBootleg has both. If you removed the guards, there's not much room for anything bigger between the chainstays but a 50mm tyre might fit the fork.

The Darwin is also chrome-moly steel: Reynolds 725. Narrower gauge tubes mean less metal and thus less frame weight than the burlier HoBootleg. With lighter wheels too (on which, more later), it saves well over a kilo compared to the Cinelli, even factoring in the latter's racks and mudguards. That difference is moot if you'll ride with heavy panniers but is worth considering if you'll travel light, especially off-road with frame bags.

The Darwin's seat angle is also, arguably, steeper than it need be. Otherwise, the frame geometry is well thought out. It has the same saddle-to-handlebar-centre distance as the HoBootleg, but achieves it with a significantly longer top tube that opens up the front centres distance; a shorter stem and a taller head tube keep the handlebar in reach. If the rear triangle looks tight in the photo, it's because the wheel is as far forward as it will go in the adjustable dropouts.



Above: Toe overlap is more troublesome on a bike like the HoBootleg, which will often be used for slow-speed meandering, than it is for a fast-riding road bike

BAR-END SHIFTERS ARE NOT QUITE AS QUICK TO SHIFT, BUT FOR TOURING, SPEED OF SHIFTING IS LESS IMPORTANT THAN HAVING THE RIGHT GEARS TO SHIFT INTO



**CINELLI
HOBOTLEG**

Cyclocross frame influences undermine some shrewd spec choices



**LIGHT BLUE
DARWIN TWIN
PEAK**

A versatile frame fitted with Sram Apex levers and a 2x10 mountain bike drivetrain



Left: The Darwin's dropouts allow up to about 15mm of fore-aft movement. So the frame is hub gear and singlespeed compatible. The lower rack eyelets use stronger M6 bolts (which the borrowed Tubus rack accommodates)

Tyre clearance is comparable to the HoBootleg. There's room for 38mm rubber with mudguards or up to 45mm in the rear triangle without. At the front you might go slightly larger.

EQUIPMENT

Bar-end shifters, as fitted to the HoBootleg, are part of cyclocross history; cycle-touring's too, although for touring they're still an excellent alternative to brifters. They're not quite as quick to shift, but for touring, speed of shifting is less important than having the right gears to shift into. With bar-end shifters, your drivetrain choices are wider – and the gear range can be.

Cinelli have been conservative with the HoBootleg, specifying a Sora front derailleur and a trekking triple chainset. Bottom gear isn't bad at 21 inches, but could have been 18in with a 42-32-22 triple and a mountain bike front mech. While that difference looks small, it will be tangibly better with a heavy load and another hill ahead. A smaller chainset would lose gears at the top end, which is no loss: I've no use for anything above about 90in on a tourer let alone 122in.

The HoBootleg's wheels use Sora for the hubs, a curious choice. Being steel, the

frame's 132.5mm rear triangle will accept either 130mm road or 135mm mountain bike hubs. I'd always pick the latter for a tourer, as it should build into a stronger wheel. Having said that, the distance between hub flanges is pretty much the same as the Darwin's Halo rear hub, which has to squeeze in a disc rotor, and at least the HoBootleg's wheels get 36 spokes apiece.

Mudguards and a rear rack are standard equipment for a tourer; the HoBootleg gets a front one too. The mudguards aren't great. There's no safety release for the front one, should anything get jammed by the tyre, and both could do with mudflaps. The pannier racks are top drawer: sturdy Tubus ones rated for 40kg at the rear and 15kg up front.

By contrast, the Darwin Twin Peak comes as a bare bike. Putting the Tubus racks and a set of mudguards on it would add about £200 to the price and 1.5kg to the weight.

Despite using only a double chainset, the Darwin's gears go as low as the HoBootleg's. That's because it's a super-compact double: a 42-28 mountain bike chainset driving an 11-36 cassette. The shifters are Sram 10-speed Apex road levers, which are compatible with Sram's

Details



■ Bar-end shifters are simpler and probably more durable, and this Microshift rear one can be switched to friction operation if the indexing goes out of whack



■ The Darwin's drive-side seatstay separates, so it's possible to fit a belt drive to this frame. But I think the Shand Drove (p14) and my own Carver (Feb/Mar 16) do this neater

OTHER OPTIONS



1 Dawes Coast to Coast £999.99
Dawes's roughstuff tourer gets 26x1.75in tyres, bar-end shifters, Alivio gears, and Shimano R517 disc brakes. dawescycles.com



2 Genesis Tour de Fer 20 £1299.99
Reynolds 725 tourer with Tubus racks, mudguards, and dynohub lighting. Flat bar allows full Deore gearing. genesisbikes.co.uk



An uphanger improves the front brake's cable routing – and its feel



Fitted to a flared drop, the Apex levers stick out vulnerably

DISC BRAKES ON A TOURER WILL DIVIDE OPINION, BUT I LIKE BB7 ROAD ONES

10-speed mountain bike derailleurs, front as well as rear. So you could retrofit an even smaller chainset – 38-24, perhaps?

The Darwin arrived with a bent gear hanger that needed some judicious bending before the rear derailleur indexed accurately. After that, mis-shifts were down to the fact that I don't often ride bikes with Sram's double-tap levers. You press the lever *further in the same direction* to shift the derailleur the opposite way. Given time, it'd become second nature.

Disc brakes on a tourer will divide opinion. I like these Avid BB7 Road brakes, however. You can adjust each piston independently so it's easy to set them up to provide powerful, progressive braking without suffering from rubbing pads. Avid BB7 MTN callipers are better yet, the longer cable pull translating into improved brake feel. You can't easily have brifters then as you need linear-pull levers, such as Tektro RL520.

The Darwin's wheels are 29er mountain bike ones with rims wide enough for more substantial tyres than will fit the frame or fork. Each has 32 spokes. I'd prefer 36 in the rear at least. The bikepackers that this model is pitched at might carry less luggage but they'll ride in rougher terrain. And four spokes is such a small weight penalty.

RIDE

When I wasn't tangling with the front mudguard, I enjoyed riding the HoBootleg. It's sedate and surefooted. The handlebar is a more traditional drop but with a flattened top,

giving a good range of comfortable handholds. I'd wrap it in cork tape instead of the strange rubbery tape specified.

The Darwin's ride feel is dominated by its exceptionally wide flared drop bar. I never really got used to it and would swap it out for something narrower, possibly a standard drop. Even off-road, I never felt like I needed the leverage of that 60cm width – I wasn't riding technical terrain on it. On road, it just felt ungainly. Otherwise, the Darwin rides fine.

SUMMARY

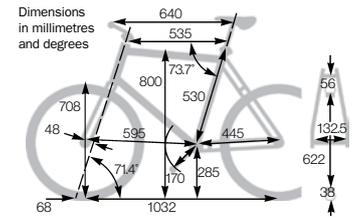
The HoBootleg is a robust tourer compromised by two things. One is the tight front centres distance – a consequence of its cyclocross roots? The other is the road rear hub. Having 132.5mm dropouts in a steel frame isn't a bad idea; if your rear wheel fails on tour, you've more options for replacement. But why not start with a stronger wheel on a 135mm hub that's less likely to fail in the first place? Top marks, however, for the Tubus racks, comfortable handlebar, and practical shifters.

The Darwin Twin Peak isn't the Salsa Fargo alternative I thought it might be: it has 29er wheels but not quite enough clearance for the 29er tyres I'd prefer. If it's a narrower-tyred roughstuffer or more traditional tourer you're after, this or one of the other models (respectively) might suit. Or you could get just the frameset (£549.99) and build it up yourself – to my mind the best option, given the keen prices of alternative off-the-peg touring bikes from Spa, Surly, Ridgeback, and others. [C](#)



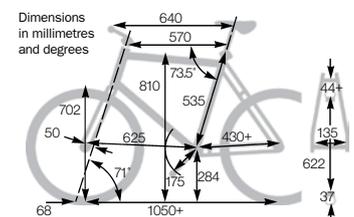
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Tech Specs



CINELLI HOBOOTLEG

PRICE: £1249.99
SIZES: XS (46), S (49), M (53, tested), L (56), XL (59), XXL (61)
WEIGHT: 14.43kg (no pedals)
FRAME & FORK: Columbus Cromor butted steel frame & Cinelli chrome-moly fork with fittings for mudguards, racks, 3 bottles
WHEELS: 40-622 Vittoria Randonneur Trail tyres, Alex DA16 rims, 36x3 spokes, Shimano Sora Hubs
TRANSMISSION: no pedals, FSA Alpha Drive Trekking 26-36-48t 170mm, square taper bottom bracket, KMC Z Narrow chain, Shimano CS-HG50
11-34t 9-speed cassette. Microshift BS-T09 bar-end shifters, Shimano Sora front derailleur, Shimano Deore rear. 27 ratios, 21-122in BRAKING: Tektro RL340 levers and Oryx cantilevers
STEERING & SEATING: 400x31.8mm Cinelli Bootleg handlebar, 110x6° Cinelli Bootleg stem, Tange Terious threadless headset. Selle San Marco Bootleg saddle, 27.2x350mm Cinelli Bootleg seatpost
EQUIPMENT: Tubus Logo Classic rear rack, Tubus Tara front, unbranded mudguards chickencyclekit.co.uk



LIGHT BLUE DARWIN

TWIN PEAK

PRICE: £1399.99
SIZES: S, M (tested), L
WEIGHT: 11.54kg
FRAME & FORK: Reynolds 725 steel frame and chrome-moly steel fork with fittings for racks, mudguards, 3 bottles
WHEELS: 40-622 Halo Twin Rail tyres, Halo Vapour MT wheels with 32x3 spokes and Halo hubs
TRANSMISSION: no pedals, 175mm SRAM S1000 GXP 42-28 double chainset, SRAM GXP bottom bracket, KMC X10 chain, SRAM 1020 11-36T 10-speed cassette. SRAM Apex levers, Sram X5 front derailleur, SRAM GX LC 10-speed rear. 20 ratios, 21-105in
BRAKING: Avid BB7 Road mechanical disc with 160mm rotors
STEERING & SEATING: 600x31.8mm Genetic Digest bar, 90x7° Gusset Staff stem, threadless 1 1/8in headset. Gusset Black Jack saddle, 27.2x400mm Genetic Sygenic seatpost.
EQUIPMENT: 2 bottle cages thelightblue.co.uk