

Kit reviews

GEAR

COMPONENTS, KIT AND MEDIA SELECTED AND REVIEWED BY SPECIALIST JOURNALISTS AND CYCLING UK STAFF

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PROS
 + Quality, lightweight construction

PROS & CONS
 + Free and adjustable float
 - Quirky entry, overly-easy exit



Speedplay SYZR STAINLESS PEDALS £189.99

speedplay.com

LIKE MOST MTB pedals, Speedplay's SYZR has a cleat-retention mechanism on both sides, and it uses shaped steel jaws to catch and retain the cleat. Unlike Shimano's SPD, however, the SYZR's moveable jaw is on the front of the pedal, as is the spring. This feature is designed to reduce the likelihood of premature release when pulling backwards and up on the pedals when sprinting or climbing.

Equally distinctive is the design of the cleat. Never mind the twin prongs on the front, which are there to help guide the cleat into place during engagement, the real innovation is the provision of 'free' – no centralising effect – float. The cleat is in two main parts: the inner circular piece bolts to the shoe sole, leaving the outer able to rotate around it to a degree constrained by two grub screws. Most MTB cleats 'float' thanks to slop in their fit with the jaws, the movement wearing the rubbing surfaces over time. SYZR cleats fit tightly in their jaws, which should greatly reduce wear.

Perhaps the cleats' most intriguing feature is the provision of small ceramic rollers

strategically placed to facilitate exit from the pedals. Needle and cartridge bearings ensure smooth operation and are easily lubed, provided a suitable injector is available, using the port in the dust cap.

How does it all add up? Those guide prongs notwithstanding, entry requires a bit of searching with the nose of the cleat, in part because, on exit, the moveable part of the cleat stays put and re-entry therefore needs a toe-in foot orientation. The cleat/pedal connection is certainly firm, as promised – the sole's walking bars either side of the cleat don't touch the pedal – but the metal-on-metal contact and freely-floating movement give a slippery feel that may not suit every rider. Nor will the ease of exit. Those ceramic rollers really do their job and pedal exit is, for me, too easy when pedalling aggressively.

The SYZR incorporates some innovative thinking and go a long way to bringing Speedplay's regular performance parameters to the mountain bike/touring market, but do not represent an obvious improvement on the direct competition. **Richard Hallett**

OTHER OPTIONS



1 SHIMANO PD-M9000 XTR £124.99

Shimano's top-of-the-range SPD pedal is a proven, top-drawer performer. Similar and much cheaper SPD pedals are also available. shimano.com



2 TIME ATAC XC8 £124.99

Super-light, steel axle, carbon-fibre race pedal with plenty of float and excellent mud shedding. time-sport.com



Blackburn OUTPOST FRONT RACK

£69.99

blackburndesign.com

MORE AND MORE touring and commuting bikes come with disc brakes, usually mechanical ones whose bulkier callipers can interfere with pannier racks. It's less of a problem at the rear: if the calliper is on the chainstay rather than the seatstay, a standard rack should fit; and if it isn't, most rack manufacturers have a disc-compatible model. At the front, however, the calliper can go only on the fork, and disc-specific low-rider racks remain uncommon. Using longer bolts and spacer washers moves the rack further from the fork and increases the risk that the bolts will shear.

Blackburn avoid this problem. The Outpost's lower attachment struts are L-shaped, with the horizontal sections being deep sockets. So they fit with short M5 bolts, the rack butted right up against the dropout eyelets. Its J-shaped upper attachment struts (not shown on the cutout picture) fit to a fork's low-rider mounts – or, if it lacks them, to cantilever brake bosses. There's a lot of adjustability and five height settings, so the Outpost will sit neatly over tyres as small as 26x1.25in or as large, Blackburn claim, as 29x2.35in. In fact, it will comfortably clear a 29x3in tyre or a 29x2.35in plus mudguard.

It's possible to fit the Outpost to a fork without any rack eyelets. You'd need P-clips around the fork legs for the upper attachment. For the lower one, you'd need an extra-long quick release hub skewer. I wouldn't be



- PROS**
- + Disc-brake compatible
 - + Large carrying capacity
 - + Versatile attachment



comfortable doing that; the front wheel would be clamped ~35mm outboard of the dropouts on each side. While you could fit the Outpost to a suspension fork, I wouldn't do that either. The unsuspended weight of rack and panniers would deaden the fork's function.

The platform section at the top of the Outpost rack can be removed but is worth keeping. It provides extra load space and, in joining the separate sides of the rack together, adds strength and stiffness.

It's rated to carry up to 20.5kg (45lb) and its size means that big bags attach securely. My 54-litre Carradice CarraDry rear panniers fitted fine. With all that mass around the front wheel, I found a wide, flat handlebar useful for steering leverage and a fat, low-pressure tyre helpful for control on unsurfaced tracks.

You don't have to attach big bags, of course. Conventional front panniers can be also be fitted: lower down, to keep the weight around the front hub; or up high for ground/undergrowth clearance.

The Outpost is well made from aluminium tubing and weighs 816g, including the top section and fittings. For big loads or bad roads, it's an excellent choice. **Dan Joyce**



Above: Big rear panniers will fit fine on the Outpost rack, making it handy for tandemists, kitchen-sink tourers, or parents carrying luggage for children

OTHER OPTIONS



1 TUBUS TARA £69.99
Rated for 15kg, this chrome moly tubed rack has a simple shape that shouldn't interfere with a disc calliper. There's a Tara Big Apple version for bigger tyres (up to 60mm wide). tubus.de



2 OLD MAN MOUNTAIN SHERPA FRONT RACK £90
Designed for forks without eyelets, this attaches to clamps (P-clips) or V-brake bosses at the top and to the dropouts via the hub's skewer at the bottom. Carries up to 18kg. carradice.co.uk



TRP CX8.4

£99.99 (TWO PAIRS)

trpbrakes.com

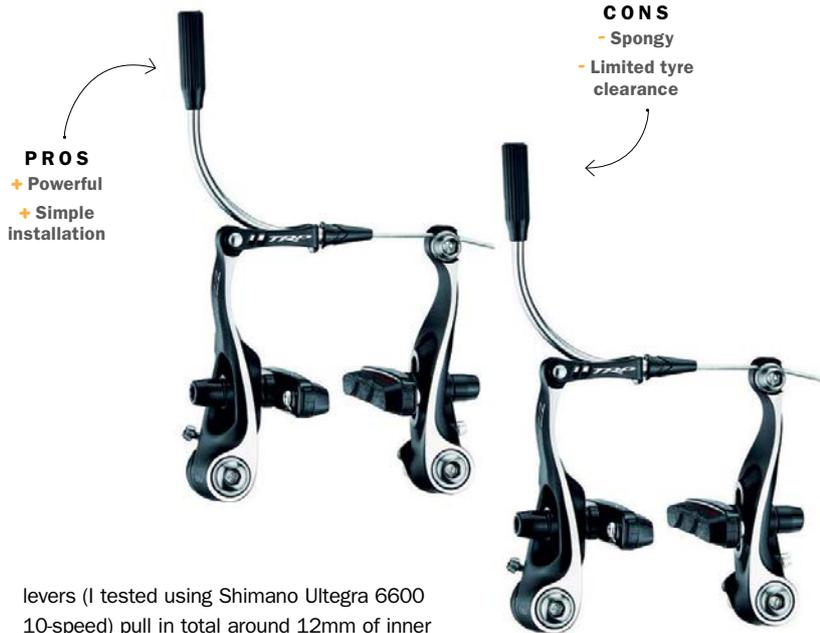
MINI V-BRAKES, AS the name suggests, are smaller than full-length examples of what are generically known as linear-pull brakes. 'Smaller' means shorter in the arm; where regular V-brakes employ arms around 105mm long from pivot to cable-clamp, those on minis are typically between 80 and 90mm. Minis fit the same standard cantilever bosses and the brake blocks therefore sit at the same height above the bosses and pivots.

The idea is to make them suitable for use with standard road bike (drop handlebar) brake levers, which do not pull enough cable to operate the full-length type correctly. This, in theory, makes mini V-brakes a straight alternative to the traditional cantilever brakes reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

Back to arm length: standard road bike



Above: Mini V-brakes are compatible with the shorter cable-pull of most drop bar levers



levers (I tested using Shimano Ultegra 6600 10-speed) pull in total around 12mm of inner wire, or 6mm at halfway through their stroke. Full-length V-brakes require about twice the cable pull. A 'road' lever used with a V-brake will barely pull enough cable to bring the blocks up to the rim before the lever comes back to the handlebar – unless they are set very close to it at rest, which makes them prone to rub.

Shorter V-brake arms require less cable pull. The blocks of the TRP brakes, which have arms 80% of the length of standard V-brakes, move 25% further for the same cable pull. Cantilever or calliper brakes move still further for that amount of cable pull. That is, they require even less cable pull. On the plus side, this makes mini V-brakes more powerful than either. (Braking power depends mainly on mechanical advantage, which increases the further the lever travels in relation to brake block movement.) In practice, 84mm seems about the optimal length for mini V-brake arms; those with longer arms may cause problems with excess lever travel.

With this in mind, TRP CX8.4s are the pick of the bunch. Beautifully made using forged and CNC-machined aluminium alloy arms with stainless steel hardware, they are simple to install and adjust and use thick, durable road-type blocks in preference to the thin, short-lived MTB type. The supplied 90-degree noodle pipes have integral cable adjusters. I'd like to see a 135-degree noodle provided (I pressed one into service) for those who prefer a right-hand front brake.

The brakes need careful setup, with the blocks set fairly close to the rim. The action is a little spongy, but there's a surfeit of power and plenty of feel. They are popular with cyclocrossers and deserve consideration by touring cyclists, who may nevertheless find that they lack the plentiful tyre and mudguard clearance provided by conventional cantilevers.

Richard Hallett

OTHER OPTIONS



1 TRP CX9 MINI V-BRAKE £99.99 (2 PAIRS)

Same design and construction, longer 95mm arms to work with some current road levers. trpbrakes.com



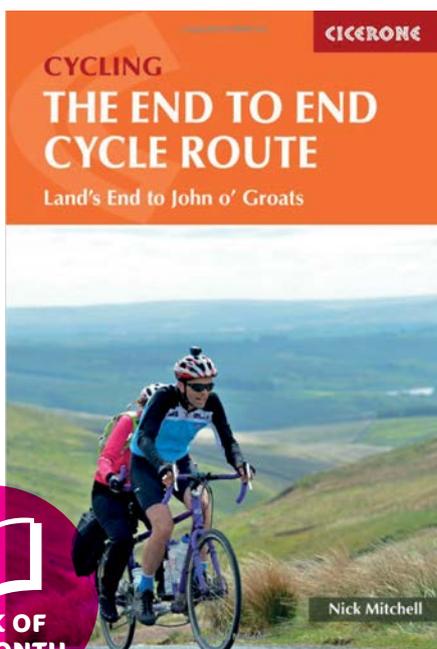
2 TEKTRORX5 MINI V-BRAKE £19.99 (1 PAIR)

85mm arms and basic but sound construction provide similar performance at less than half the price. upgradebikes.co.uk

Book reviews

BOOKS

A ROUND-UP OF THE LATEST CYCLING-RELATED BOOKS & DVDs



Nick Mitchell

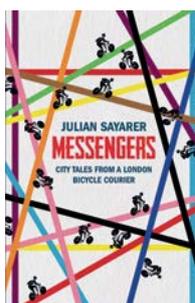
THE END TO END CYCLE ROUTE £12.95

cicerone.co.uk

THIS IS A GUIDE to a 14-day, 1,000-mile route from Land's End to John o' Groat's. It's not the one I took with my wife Julie Rand earlier this year (which you can read about online: cyclinguk.org/blog/julie-rand/lejog-blog). We took a little longer and utilised quiet back-roads more. However, Nick Mitchell's route is ideal if you only have two weeks to spare; it does keep away from busy main roads where possible.

The book is well-organised. It breaks the journey down into daily sections using: a clear and simple 1:250,000-scale map; information on more detailed maps needed, handy places to stop, etc; and a written description with turn-by-turn details. I'm not sure if the latter is vital, as I think most people will follow a map or a GPS unit. (Links are provided for GPX downloads.)

It's written in way that will appeal more to older cyclists than younger ones and some of the photos used, even the front cover, are a little dull. But overall I found this book useful, practical and informative. It's also a handy size, so doesn't take up too much pannier space. (Don't forget you can get feedback from other Cycling UK members about the End to End online: visit bit.ly/cyclinguk-e2eforum.) **Roland Seber**

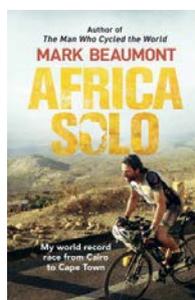


Julian Sayerer

MESSENGERS £8.99

arcadiabooks.co.uk

SIX MONTHS AFTER breaking the 18,000-mile world record for a circumnavigating the globe in 2009, Julian returns to work in London as a bicycle courier. Messengers is a beautifully-written and easy to read diary-style book. Julian cycles 60-100 miles a day and his deliveries detail the social history of London and take him to places that most people never go. Yet it's his tales of friendship, camaraderie and 'alley cat' races that offer a real insight into the normally closed world of bicycle couriers. (Julian Sayerer is a guest speaker at the Cycling UK members' conference in October.) **Victoria Hazael**

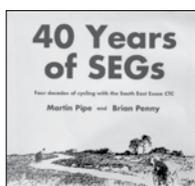


Mark Beaumont

AFRICA SOLO £14.99

penguin.co.uk

THE COVERLINE referring to Mark Beaumont's 'World Record Race from Cairo to Cape Town' made me wary. I wanted to read about the journey, the experience, and the people he met cycling the length of Africa unsupported. Fortunately, as with all the best adventure books, the challenge set the scene and held the narrative together, but the real story was a bike ride through Africa as the continent unfolded and changed as Mark pedalled southwards. The stars of the story are the places and people. From the mountains of Ethiopia to elephants on the road in Botswana, it is the vibrancy of Africa which leaps from the pages. A superb travel book. **Duncan Dollimore**



Martin Pipe & Brian Penny

40 YEARS OF SEGs

£12 INC P&P

CYCLING UK MEMBERS Martin Pipe and Brian Penny spent 2015 travelling throughout Essex, interviewing the people who helped to make the South East Essex Group what it is today. Their documentary celebrates 40 years of the group and the history of recreational cycling in Essex in general. The video is on the club website (essexcycling.co.uk/southeastsex) but the DVD includes three hours of additional material. To purchase, email tekktalkuk@virginmedia.com or tel: 07802 200660. **Tony Upfold**



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