Kit reviews

GEAR

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

Review requests

Is there a product that you would like us to review?
WRITE TO: Cycle, PO Box 313, Scarborough, YO12 6WZ
EMAIL: cyclinguk@jppublishing.co.uk

Topeak NINJA SERIES £18.99+

extrauk.co.uk

PROS & CONS

+ Hidden pump is potentially useful
+ Ninja T8+ multitool is great
- Chain tool loose and rattly in handlebar

HIDING ESSENTIAL tools on the bike is a neat idea: you can't forget them; they less likely to fall off or be pinched; and they're protected from weather and dirt. Topeak's Ninja Series comprises the Ninja C chain tool (£27.99), Ninja P pump (£18.99), and a selection of tool-carrying bottle cages like the Ninja TC Road (£36.99).

The Ninja C hides a rivet extractor, a 4mm Allen key, and a chain hook in your handlebar ends. It's compatible with chains up to 11-speed, including hollow-pin Campag, and includes a stiff-link remover. It works quite well as a tool. To store each part in the bar ends, you twist the knurled end-cap to compress an adjacent rubber ring and make it more bulbous so it forms an interference fit – in theory. I had to wrap insulation tape around the rubber bungs for a snug fit. I ought to have wrapped the tools too, as they rattled annoyingly over bumps. Not exactly ninja stealth!

The Ninja TC Road has two tyre levers clipped to it, plus a piggy-backed plastic box containing an 8-function multitool (2, 2.5, 3, 4, 5, 6mm Allen, Phillips head, Torx T25). The multitool is the highlight, weighing just 72g and tackling key jobs well. The tyre levers are effectively half-length, as the narrow sections are too flexible for leverage. They were fine for the road tyres I removed but might struggle with tighter ones.

The cage has unusual, lollipop-shaped mounting holes, pointing downward. By undoing the bottle cage bolts slightly, you can slide the cage up and off the bike. I'm not sure why you'd want to, however, and the design restricts fitting options. The cage has to fit low down – where the tool box then interfered with a second cage on my bike's seat tube.

The Presta-only Ninja P hides inside the seatpost, using a rubber ring similar to the Ninja C. But this time it worked well, staying snug in my road bike's 27.2 post. It will also fit 30.9/31.6mm posts if you fit the bigger rubber rings provided. Like most mini-pumps, the Ninja P isn't ergonomic. Just 2 min 20 sec was as much pumping as I could tolerate. That was enough to get a 25mm road tyre to a get-me-home 62psi. Normally I'd take a better, external-fitting pump, but I'd consider this for my urban hack bike or my time trial bike.

There are some clever ideas here, but only the pump and the 8-function multitool stood out as useful. The cage isn't as practical as a small seatpack, while the chain tool wants expander wedges for a more secure fitting. Weights: Ninja C 80g; Ninja TC Road 174g inc multitool; Ninja P 62g. **Dan Joyce**

OTHER OPTIONS

1 SPECIALIZED TOP CAP CHAIN TOOL £25
Chain tool that replaces the top cap in a threadless steerer. Specialized's SWAT frames go further, including an integrated cubbyhole for tools/spares. **specialized.com**

2 INDUSTRY NINE MATCHSTIX £142
15mm through-axle that's a chain splitter, 5mm Allen key, spoke key, and tool handle. Tool bits (3, 4, 6mm Allen, T25 and T30 Torx, flat-head) fit in a sleeve inside the axle. **justridingalong.com**

PROS
+ Easy tubeless tyre inflation
+ Functions as a regular floor pump

CONS
- Lots of dead air space when used as a regular pump

Above: Pulling the lever releases a large volume of air quickly in order to seat tubeless tyres

Bontrager
TLR FLASH CHARGER £99.99
trekbikes.com/gb/en

IF THERE'S ONE issue that bedevils tubeless tyre technology, it's the process of getting the newly-fitted tyre inflated. The tyre bead must form a seal with the rim to make the chamber air-tight, but requires internal air pressure to push the bead into place and thus effect the seal. In the absence of an innertube, even the smallest opening can let air out faster than even vigorous hand-pumping can get it in, especially where the chamber has a large volume, as with mountain bike rubber.

The answer is to deliver a large volume of pressurised air, fast. Once the bead meets the rim all around the tyre and the seal is complete, the rest of the job is fairly straightforward, although 'popping' the bead over the retaining lip seen in a dedicated tubeless rim can take a lot more inflation pressure than needed for riding.

A powered compressor, as found in many workshops, will make light work of the task but is beyond most tubeless users. Other options include CO2 cartridges, which can get expensive; home-brewed contraptions, often based on large fizzy drinks bottles; and Bontrager's sturdy TLR Flash Charger floor pump.

It comprises a regular long-barrel floor pump with long hose and auto-select valve chuck, a large-diameter pressure vessel with gauge and bleed valve and a lever that seals the vessel. Once the pump has pressurized the vessel – up to as much as 160psi – the lever is opened, delivering a substantial volume of air in a few seconds. It is not 'instant'; filling an MTB tyre to 40psi through a Presta valve takes about three seconds.

It is fast enough to get almost any bicycle tubeless tyre seated first time. The only failure I had was with a box-fresh 27.5in gravel tyre on Stan's No Tubes rim tape, where the residual kinks in the folding bead left openings big enough to let air out before the seal could be made. Leaving it inflated by a tube on a rim would ease the kinks.

The Flash Charger also works well as a regular floor pump, although the additional volume of the pressure vessel means it takes more work than usual to get a road tyre to 100psi. Used as an on-off switch, the handle can be used to preserve pressure in the vessel when the hose is removed or to partially-inflate an inner tube before installation. Given this versatility, it makes a great option for the tubeless tyre user and multi-bike household alike

Richard Hallett

OTHER OPTIONS

1 AIRSHOT £49.99
Standalone pressure vessel does the same job but needs a separate floor pump.
airshotltd.com

2 SKS AIRBUSTER £21.99
A good example of a CO2 inflator, meant like all of them for road- or trail-side inflation. Requires expenditure on cartridges.
sks-germany.com

Stan's No Tubes
STANDARD TUBELESS KIT £70
notubes.com

PROS
+ Tubeless with conventional MTB tyres and rims

CONS
- Can prove problematic and time-consuming to fit
- Limited inflation pressure

NOTHING QUITE hammers home the main benefit of tubeless tyre technology quite like pulling a thorn from a slowly-deflating road tyre at the start of the local hedge-trimming season. With tubeless, you could ignore this. There are other benefits, but near-imperviousness to punctures has to be the most appealing feature of riding without innertubes.

On the downside, the material cost is significant; going Universal Standard Tubeless means buying dedicated wheels and the tyres to go with them. UST tyres are coated on the inside with a layer of butyl to render them air-tight, while a UST rim is profiled to make a seal with the tyre bead – and has no spoke eyelet holes to let out air. There are a couple of cheaper options: so-called 'ghetto' tubeless, which involves stuff like a BMX or 24in innertube sliced around its circumference as the rim strip and valve; and tubeless conversion kits.

Stan's No Tubes is the daddy of the genre, and per wheel comprises a rubber 'sealing' rim tape, tape to cover the eyelet holes, and half the contents of a bottle of sealant liquid. Once fitted, the rubber tape's profile gives the rim a roughly 'tubeless-ready' cross section. The tyre is doused with soapy water to help make a seal as the tyre is inflated. With sealant added, the tyre is inflated once again, and the wheel then spun to spread the sealant around the tyre and rim inner surface.

The sealant is critical to the system's success, since it lacks the inherent air-tightness of UTS components. The sealant plugs not only imperfections in the fit between rim tape and tyre bead, but the tiny holes in the tyre sidewall covered in a UTS tyre by that inner layer of butyl. If it sounds like a poor alternative to genuine tubeless, it has a couple of advantages: it lacks the weight of the butyl layer, which also adds to rolling resistance, and is said to be less susceptible to 'burping', where air can escape a UTS tyre's seal in small bursts, leading to early deflation.

Using a Bontrager TLR Flash Charger pump, I tried with immediate success two tyres on an MTB wheel – an old folding-bead knobbly and a wire-bead Conti Top Touring – but failed repeatedly to get a box-fresh Panaracer Gravel King 650B tyre to seal, the kinks in the bead leaving big gaps for air to escape. Leaving the tyre inflated on a rim for a day or so might cure this, but in any case there's a 40psi pressure limit on the system, precluding its safe use with the Gravel King at road pressures. The sealant works well, rapidly plugging a hole I made with a sharp object. Little pressure was lost over five days. With the right MTB tyre and rim combo and suitable inflation pressure, Stan's makes a practical alternative to dedicated tubeless.

Richard Hallett

OTHER OPTIONS

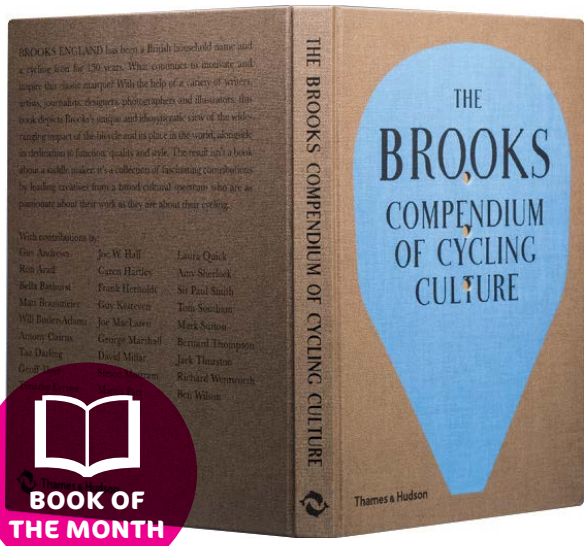
1 EFFETO MARIPOSA CAFFÉLATEX TUBELESS KIT £34.99
Converts MTB and road rims – the latter only for use with dedicated 'road tubeless' tyres.
effettomariposa.eu

2 JOE'S NO FLATS TUBELESS CONVERSION KIT £29.99
Does same job as Stan's and is available for various rim sizes.
joes-no-flats.com

Book reviews

BOOKS

A ROUND-UP OF THE LATEST CYCLING-RELATED READS



BOOK OF THE MONTH

Fabio Fedrigo & Andrea Meneghelli

THE BROOKS COMPENDIUM OF CYCLING CULTURE £29.95

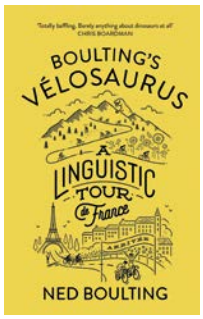
thamesandhudson.com

THIS COLLECTION of articles, interviews and photographs looks at the history of cycling and cycling culture. It examines how designers and inventors (including John Boultbee Brooks, inventor of the Brooks saddle) have influenced the growth and popularity of cycling, and how cycling has influenced modern culture.

The feel of the book, reflecting Brooks' place in the cycling market, is one of quality; it costs nearly £30, a price that buys thick paper stock, excellent binding, and an unusual hessian-style cover. (I didn't quite get the blue, vaguely saddle-shaped pattern on the cover, but the three holes in it are an obvious Brooks-ism.)

The content encourages coffee-table-book browsing, as it has no strong structure to the way the chapters are laid out. This is fine as it is chock-full of fascinating articles covering all aspects of cycle culture, from the naked bike ride to the wall of death, as well as interviews with cycling celebrities such as clothes designer Paul Smith. There's also lots on innovation, saddlemaking (not surprisingly), and the reasons why, according to Brooks, the world loves British-made things.

Easy to read but very informative, it should appeal to all cyclists – especially hipsters or those interested in cycle history. ISBN 978-0500519608. **Roland Seber**

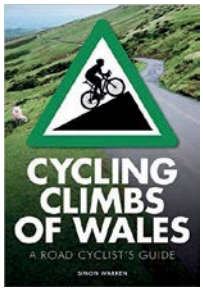


Ned Boulting

BOUTLING'S VELOSAURUS £10.99

penguin.co.uk

SUBTITLED 'A LINGUISTIC Tour de France', this 'totally baffling' book has 'barely anything about dinosaurs at all', Chris Boardman notes. This nicely sets the tone for Velosaurus. Ned Boulting famously called the Tour de France's yellow jersey a 'yellow jumper' on his first day in the job as ITV's race commentator, and it's in this spirit of irreverent interpretation that this A-to-Z of both well-known and less well-known cycling terms is presented. It's a 'dip in and smile' book that deserves to be on any Tour de France fan's shelf. ISBN 978-0224100649. **Sam Jones**

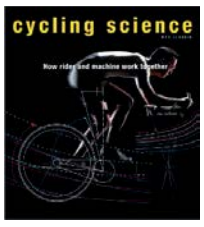


Simon Warren

CYCLING CLIMBS OF WALES £8.99

quartoknows.com

AUTHOR, AND somewhat obsessive researcher of uphill gradients, Simon Warren returns to Wales to discover yet more fiendish cycling climbs. Although many of the ascents featured in his original guide, 100 Greatest Cycling Climbs, with over 30 new challenges spanning the length of the country, this book works as a stand-alone guide to Wales. As with his previous guides, the gradient graphs and difficulty ratings encapsulate the somewhat compulsive and masochistic nature of some cyclists. It's a good book that gives you the nudge to go and ride these climbs yourself. ISBN 978-0711237032. Duncan Dollimore



Max Glaskin

CYCLING SCIENCE £16.99

quartoknows.com

DOES SUSPENSION make a significant difference to efficiency? What happens to energy during braking? What is the environmental impact of cycling? These questions and many more each get a double-page spread of clear text and three-colour infographics in Max Glaskin's book. It's not as in-depth as Whitt and Wilson's scholarly Bicycling Science, but it's far more accessible. So read this one first. Like Bicycle Design by Mike Burrows, it's a technology book that any cyclist can enjoy. ISBN 978-0711233591. **Dan Joyce**

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