Disc-braked road bike

+ For: Alan Sheldon, aged 75, from Bedford  + Bike needs: I’ve been using a basic hybrid for exercise during lockdowns. I’d now like a road bike to allow me to increase my mileage and fun.  + Must have: A good range of gears to allow my old legs to cope with hills, disc brakes, and enough space for my 6ft 2in frame.  + Must not have: It does not have to be super-lightweight or have aggressive geometry.  + Budget: up to £1,250

Liz Colebrook
Congratulations on getting back in the saddle!
My recommendation is the Boardman ADV 8.9 in XL (£1,100, boardmanbikes.com). It tips the scales at around 10.3kg with a triple-butted aluminium frame, carbon fork, and ‘adventure’ wheelset. With the £150 remaining, I’d add lightweight mudguards and potentially upgrade the pedals and saddle.

The frame geometry will suit your departure from a flat bar without too much extra forward lean. Tubeless-ready Schwalbe 700×38 G-One tyres are ideal for our weather-weary roads, and should make for a compliant ride even off road. We can lose some flexibility in our spines over time, so I suggest the shop ‘flips’ your handlebar stem to raise the front end a little. I’d also suggest a gel pad set under the handlebar tape to absorb road shock (e.g. Fizik Bar Gel, £17.99).

The 46cm handlebar is the ‘short and shallow’ style where the distance to the drops and reach forward are both reduced. There’s a flare to the bar as well, so your hands are a little wider on the drops; the added stability is reassuring on descents. When riding on the brake hoods, Shimano’s hydraulic set-up makes braking less effort, and the integrated ‘paddle’ style gear shifters are also very light action. So they suit older hands.

This leads nicely to your request for lower gearing: the range is super wide (24-118”), thanks to a 2×10 transmission with an appropriate-length (175mm) 48-32 crankset and an 11-36 cassette. Altogether, this mix should deliver plenty of enjoyment per mile.

Dan Joyce
Most disc-brake road bikes have the ‘aggressive’ geometry you don’t want, with a steep seat angle that tips you forward onto a handlebar that’s low down due to the combination of a short head tube and a carbon fork. They also have relatively high gears. You need a bike whose largest rear sprocket is smaller than the smallest chainring (i.e. under 27”).

Gravel bikes can make better general purpose road bikes than road bikes. The Boardman ADV 8.9 that Liz describes is one we both picked, having written our initial responses independently. I’d swap the tyres – perhaps for 700×35C Rene Herse Bon Jon Pass (£80 each!) – and, like Liz, fit mudguards.

Alternatively, some ‘endurance’ road bikes could be suitable. They tend to have taller head tubes and slightly shallower frame angles. The Sonder Colibri on p60 (£999, alpkit.com) is a good example: you’d want the XL size in this. To lower the gearing, fit a SunRace MX3 11-40 cassette (£79.99), a Wolf Tooth Roadlink (£23), and some extra chain links.

The Spa Cycles Aubisque (currently £1,150, spacycles.co.uk) ticks all your boxes with no modifications required. Being steel it is heavier, but you say that doesn’t bother you. See cyclinguk.org/cycle-magazine/bike-test-four-season-road-bikes for our review. The Aubisque comes with a triple or double chainset. Either can be bought with smaller chainrings, such as a 46-34-24 triple or a 42-26 double, which I think you’d appreciate. You’d likely want the 60cm model (out of stock) but might fit the 57cm.