

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:**
cycle@jamespembrokemedia.co.uk

Microshift BS-M10 SHIFTERS **£87.99**

microshift.com.tw/en/

THESE 10-SPEED bar-end shifters provide a simple way to run mountain bike gearing on your drop-bar bike, so you can swap your 11-32 or 11-34 cassette for something the size of a dinner plate. Other solutions restrict you to 9-speed or require either some retro-fit fudging or a switch to Sram, where 42-tooth 'road' cassettes are already a thing (see p60).

I'd imagine these Microshift shifters will mostly be fitted to tourers or drop-bar off-road bikes; since they operate mountain bike derailleurs, the gearing can be as low as you like. I fitted just the rear shifter to my road bike to create a 'one-by' drivetrain similar to a gravel bike's, using an 11-42 SunRace MX3 cassette, a long-cage Shimano SLX M675 clutch derailleur, a 42-tooth chainring, and (since the chainring wasn't narrow-wide) a Paul Components chain keeper. That gave a gear range of 27-103in.

The BS-M10 shifter pulls the right amount

of cable for a 10-speed Shimano MTB derailleur and the indexing works

well. As there's no barrel adjuster at the lever or on a 10-speed MTB derailleur, it's vital to have an inline cable adjuster to fine-tune the tension. However, you can switch the shifter to friction operation if you need to. The front shifter is friction-only, so will work with basically any front derailleur and chainring setup – unlike an STI brifter.

I've been impressed by the BS-M10 shifter and the whole one-by setup. It's simpler and lighter than the Shimano Sora 'two-by' setup I was running before. Another advantage of a bar-end shifter is that you use more of your hand on the lever, so you don't notice the extra resistance from the clutch derailleur like you do when you're straining your thumb on a flat-bar trigger shifter. You have to move your



- PROS & CONS**
- + Lower gears for drop bar bikes
 - + Simple, lightweight, effective
 - Not as ergonomic as brifters

hand more than with any integrated shifter, of course, but that's okay for recreational riding.

Shifts were a little hesitant into and out of the two bottom sprockets (36 and 42t). This wasn't an issue with the shifter but rather the derailleur and its hanger: the SLX mech has a nominal maximum sprocket size of 36t and its B-screw was only just long enough to get the derailleur far enough from the sprockets. A longer screw should sort this.

Microshift also do bar-end shifters for 11-speed Shimano mountain bike derailleurs (BS-M11), as well as old-school flat-bar thumb-shifters for 10- and 11-speed (SL-M10 and SL-M11 respectively). The BS-M10 levers weigh 154g for the pair, not including cables.

Dan Joyce

OTHER OPTIONS



1 WOLFTOOTH ROADLINK £27.99
Repositions a Shimano road mech so it'll work with cassettes as large as 11-40. The simplest way to expand 10/11-speed STI.
wolftoothcomponents.com

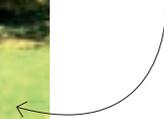


2 JTEK SHIFTMATE £29.99
Converts the cable pull of your shifter to work with a different derailleur and cassette. Fiddly to fit, but a wide range of options are available.
jtekengineering.com



PROS & CONS

- + Well-made and robust
- + Seatpack doesn't wag much
- Capacity



Passport BIKEPACKING BAGS £142.48 (SET)

passportcycles.co.uk

WITH THE full set of luggage costing less than £150, Passport's bikepacking bags seem to be designed for newbies who'll be bikepacking on a budget. The bags are robust and well-made. The only problem you'll face is packing, as space is quite limited.

I can fit a good, warm sleeping bag, an inflatable roll mat, and an Alpkit Hunka bivvy bag into my usual handlebar bag. Passport's 11L Handlebar Bag (38x17x17cm, £34.99) would only accept my thin summer sleeping bag and bivvy under protest. There are fittings for straps on the front, so you could lash a folding sleeping mat there, I suppose, but for overnight adventures I think I'll stick with my Alpkit Airlock.

The medium Frame Bag (45x11.5x13.5cm, 7L, £32.50) I reviewed was a little large for my small Surly ECR (as it was initially intended for the editor's medium size Genesis Longitude), but other sizes are available. Despite this issue, I was pleasantly surprised to find that it didn't interfere with pedalling. The storm-proof zip was initially reassuring, but allowed a little water in during an overnight downpour. The bag accommodated my usual bike tools, stove, gloves, buff, and a little food for an overnight trip in there with a bit of space to spare. The inside is a luminous green, which is handy for finding things in the dark. There's also a small internal zip pocket.

Given the design, you should still be able to fit a water bottle cage on your bike too.

The Top Tube Bag (9.5x20x9.5cm 1.8L, £19.99) was a disappointment. On climbs and corners, it brushed my knees, though with a different frame geometry this might not be a problem. It swayed a little in motion – nothing major but irritating, just like the jangling zips, which are not storm-proof and consequently leaked. The touchscreen pocket for a mobile worked well, but that's not very important to me when I'm out riding.

The Passport Seatpack (medium 45x11.5x13.5cm, 7L, £55) seems to be the best thought-out of the bags. Based on my experience, I'd happily buy the 9.8L large. The thick tarpaulin base acts as an excellent mudguard, and even when fully packed there was little to no tail wagging. It's easily fitted and adjustable on the go. Another hi-vis liner ensures your kit stays dry, while also helping maintain structure. When fully packed, there are fittings to take a rear light – but half full I struggled to find a placement I was happy with. There's a secure bungee net for sticking a jacket in, and two handy little zipped side pockets.

My gut feeling is that the range is geared to the gravel bike owner looking for overnight adventures, rather than a bushwacking expedition on a mountain bike. If that's the kit you're after, however, it's well worth considering. And the Seatpack's great.

Sam Jones

OTHER OPTIONS



1 ALPKIT RANDO SERIES £197

Tough and water resistant, thanks to waterproof fabric and stitchless construction. Generous capacity. Price is for 13L Tivaro bar bag (£40), Fiana 12L seatpack (£70), Analoko medium frame bag (£60), and a non-series 0.8L Enduro Pod top tube bag (£27). alpkit.com



2 ORTLIEB BIKEPACKING BAGS £325

Waterproof and tough, with a five-year guarantee, but you pay for it. Good capacity. Price is for 16.5L Seat-Pack (£120), 15L Handlebar-Pack (£95), 4L Frame-Pack Toptube (£60), and 0.8L Cockpit-Pack (£50). ortlieb.com

Sena
X1 SMART HELMET €229
sena.com/product/x1/



'HELLO,' THIS 21st century helmet says when you turn it on. There are speakers above your ears, a microphone above your forehead, an FM radio, a USB-rechargeable battery, and three buttons to operate the various functions. These are: taking and making phone calls; listening to music or GPS directions from your phone; listening to the radio; and using the helmet-to-helmet intercom with up to three other Sena X1 helmets within range.

Many cyclists won't want to spoil the serenity or aural awareness of cycling with phone calls or music, but for those who might otherwise use in-ear headphones, this helmet is a safer option: the ears aren't blocked and any phone calls will be hands-free.

I took an immediate dislike to the Sena X1. Fit is tight and uncomfortable for a medium (55-58cm). I got pressure marks on my forehead after every ride, even after removing the rear padding. It gave me a headache.

The tinny speakers may have contributed. The sound quality isn't good. It's like listening to a mobile phone's speaker or holding an in-ear headphone outside your ear. That's okay for conversations but not for music you want to enjoy. Being external, the speakers broadcast noise too – not like a boombox, more like an '80s Walkman with 'leaky' headphones.

Phone calls are straightforward, once you've paired your phone to the helmet via Bluetooth. You just need to know the helmet's button sequences. As only three buttons control everything, there's a learning curve to pressing

the right ones for the right duration for each task. For example, I sometimes found myself listening to music when attempting to activate the intercom...

To use the intercom, all helmets must first be paired via Bluetooth. (Sena sent me two helmets.) If there are more than two, you can speak to everyone via group intercom or to a specific individual – so long as you remember which helmet corresponds to which number of button taps. The range of 'up to 900 metres' will require line of sight. In an urban environment, conversations beyond about 100m became increasingly choppy.

The battery is good for up to 16 hours of talk time. The helmet itself meets the EN1078 safety standard. If it does get broken, replacement will be much more expensive than a normal helmet. And that's ultimately what I'd choose instead: an 'unsmart' helmet, for the occasions I wanted a helmet at all; and separate bone-conducting headphones for those times I wanted to listen to anything on (or indeed off) the bike.

Sizes M or L. Weight (M): 398g. A version with a camera in the front is on the way.

Dan Joyce



- PROS & CONS**
- + Can still hear traffic etc
 - Unusually tight fit
 - Speakers broadcast noise

OTHER OPTIONS



1 AFTERSHOKZ TREKZ TITANIUM
 £99.99
 Wireless headphones that work via bone-conduction, so you can listen in silence and still hear. Microphone included. aftershokz.co.uk

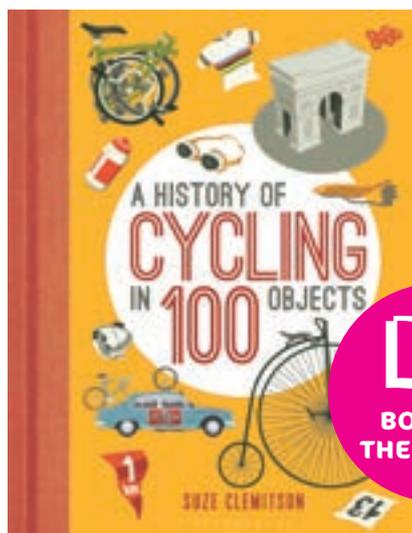


2 COROS LINX £179.99
 The first (but probably not the last) helmet with bone-conduction technology built in. Can also be configured to send a smartphone alert in the event of a crash. corocycling.co.uk

Book reviews

BOOKS

A ROUND-UP OF THE LATEST CYCLING-RELATED READS



Suze Clemitson

A HISTORY OF CYCLING IN 100 OBJECTS

£20

bloomsbury.com

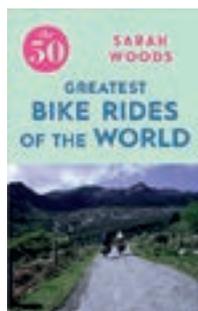
HERE'S ANOTHER cycling history book, but one with a different and novel approach: A History of Cycling in 100 Objects sets out to help us understand the world of cycling today by exploring a selection of iconic items from the last hundred years or so.

The objects are grouped into categories, including obvious things such as bikes and slightly more obscure categories such as 'marginal gains' (are they objects?).

The book's structure is simple but brings the history to life effectively. It's easy to read in a 'dip in, dip out' way, so it works well as a coffee-table book. However, I would have been more engaged if there were some kind of narrative thread to hold it together, and I couldn't help wondering what it would have been like if the objects had been listed chronologically rather than in subject-related sections.

The writing style felt a little textbookish to me, and the list of 100 objects does include quite a lot of things connected to racing, which is fine if that's your thing. But on the whole, it's an attractive and engagingly presented book, with some excellent archive photos and drawings. History can be heavy going in some books; here it's accessible.

Roland Seber



Sarah Woods

THE 50 GREATEST BIKE RIDES OF THE WORLD

£8.99 bloomsbury.com

ANY BOOK with a superlative in the title involves some subjectivity. This selection is at least diverse, with rides that should appeal to hard-core mountain bikers, seasoned road riders, and adventurous cycle tourers. It covers destinations as far apart as Bealach na Ba in Scotland and the Northern Tuli Game Reserve in Botswana, exploring the cultural and historical context of each area as well as its suitability for cycling. It lacks detailed route descriptions and maps.

Julie Rand



Nick Moore

MINDFUL THOUGHTS FOR CYCLISTS

£5.99

quartoknows.com

THIS BOOK shows how cycling fits in with meditation and mindfulness, even if you have not consciously practised either. It would be a great read for someone thinking of taking up cycling – although I'm not sure about encouraging a newbie to set off for a ride in the rain in order to experience 'the mindful qualities of wet weather riding'. The book is compact and illustrated with lovely cartoons, and its readable, poetic style fits the subject well.

Roland Seber



Simon Warren

CYCLING CLIMBS OF SCOTLAND

£8.99

quartoknows.com

SIMON WARREN'S guides are an encyclopaedic reference for uphill riding throughout Britain. His eighth book focuses on Scotland. Bealach na Ba, the Holy Grail for grimpeurs, deservedly bags an '11 out of 10' rating as the toughest and wildest climb in Britain. Yet I must dispute the coverage of the Nick of the Balloch in South Ayrshire. 'The Nick' was a decisive feature in the Girvan Easter stage race for years. Few people reach its summit desperate to ride it 'again and again', as Simon suggests!

Duncan Dollimore



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