



Left: It doesn't draw attention in town – except in headlights, due to reflective decals

Below: No more 'washing lines' or 'mouse ear' levers on Sora shifters

£850 road bike

BOARDMAN ASR 8.8

Road bikes don't have to be racers. **Dan Joyce** tests a disc-braked workhorse for year-round UK riding

DISC BRAKES ARE everywhere in the road bike world now, even appearing in the Grand Tours. Sometimes rim brakes are a better solution – see bit.ly/discbrakesdissent – but for a bike like this one, discs make sense. The acronym ASR stands for 'all-season road'. Hence mudguards, for which there's proper clearance, and discs, for reliable wet-weather braking that won't wear out the rims or turn them filthy with pad residue.

The ASR 8.8 is the cheaper of the two bikes in the range. There's also an ARS 8.9 (£1,300), which has a Reynolds 725 frame, Shimano 105 gearing, and hydraulic disc brakes.

FRAME & FORK

The ASR 8.8 has a chrome-moly steel frame and a full-carbon fork with a tapered steerer. The straight, oversize head tube (44mm internal) accommodates that via an external lower bearing, a neater solution for a skinny-tubed steel bike than tapering the head tube. At 160mm long on this Medium, the head tube is tall for a road bike. I had no difficulty in setting the handlebar at a comfortable height, and still had spacers to spare.

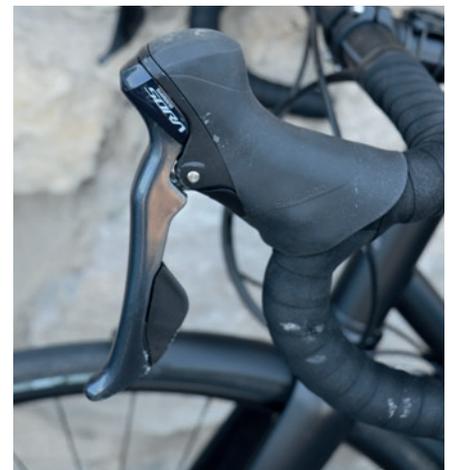
The top tube is also quite long, perhaps 15mm longer than usual for this size. It doesn't stretch the reach to the handlebar, however, as the ASR 8.8 is designed for, and comes with, a commensurately shorter stem. It does provide a longer front centres distance (front hub to bottom bracket), so there's room for your toes even when the mudguard stays have been left too long and the cranks are 175mm. The wheelbase is longer too, because the chainstays aren't fashionably short either. There's nothing unusual about the steering geometry – the head angle is maybe half or one degree slacker than your typical racer – but on paper the ASR 8.8 should be a more stable bike.

As well as fittings for the mudguards it comes with, the frame has mounts for two bottles and a rear rack. You could easily add a couple of small panniers for commuting. I was happy to see a threaded bottom bracket, which should provide creak-free longevity. There are two more nice details: the grey decals on the frame and mudguards are reflective; and the fork steerer bung/top cap arrangement should eliminate the risk of an overzealous home mechanic cracking the carbon steerer when adjusting the headset

bearing. The top cap is itself threaded and screws onto the steerer bung without increasing the wedging force that holds the bung in place.

COMPONENTS

Gearing is 2x9 Shimano Sora, with a compact double chainset driving an 11-32 cassette. Although it's an industry standard, I'm not a fan of the 50-34 chainset. For most of my riding,





TRP Spyres are effective cable discs, and they're positioned to avoid a rack and mudguards



THIS COULD BE YOUR GO-TO ROAD BIKE FOR YEAR-ROUND CLUB RIDING AND COMMUTING

➤ I wanted a chainring sized somewhere in the middle, e.g. 42. The sub-30in bottom gear was nice for spinning up hills but I never used the 122in top gear.

These days Sora looks much like Tiagra. The gear cable 'washing lines' from the shifters are gone, as they're now routed under the bar tape. Also gone are the little 'mouse ears' on the hoods for shifting to a smaller sprocket/chainring. This means it's easier to change gear on the drops. The chainset looks smarter too, although I'd prefer 170mm cranks.

The brakes are TRP Spyres. Unusually for mechanical discs, both pistons are actuated. This makes it easy to centre the calliper so the pads don't rub, and they work smoothly and effectively. The only drop bar mechanical discs that I prefer are Avid BB7s, specifically the MTN ones used with linear pull levers like Tekro's RL520. You can't have briflers then, though.

The brake callipers fit closer to the frame and fork thanks to flat mounts, and the rear brake is on the chainstay where it's out of the way of a rear rack. However, the cable runs upwards to reach this calliper. Water can get in here and freeze. It happened to me twice last winter on a bike with a similar setup.

The Boardman Road Five wheels have tubeless-compatible rims (you'll need tubeless tape etc). They're fairly wide rims (24mm external), so the 28mm tyres plump up a little. Tyres up to 32mm will fit but I didn't have any issues with these Vittoria Rubino Pro G+ ones. Due to the lower pressures you can use, they're noticeably more comfortable than

25mm tyres, notwithstanding the fork and frame reinforcement required for discs. Their rolling performance and grip are good.

It's nice to see mudguards as standard.

These ones are too short and require mudflaps front and rear. Saddles are subjective; I liked this Prologo.

THE RIDE

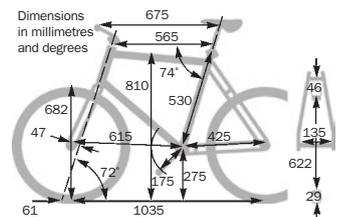
My first outing on the ASR 8.8 was a 50-mile hilly club ride with companions on expensive carbon road bikes and a moving average of 18.5mph. The ASR was fine. It might have lost a marginal amount of speed on long climbs; given the price, disc brakes, and steel frame, it's relatively light, but it's not light in absolute terms. I'd nevertheless be happy to do all-day rides on it.

It descends very well; I set a number of downhill Strava PRs. I'd put that down to the security of more rubber in contact with the road, dependable brakes, and – unlike some road bikes – handling stable enough to apply those brakes *hard* without worrying about mishaps. I liked it. It felt safer.

SUMMARY

The Boardman ASR 8.8 is a well-conceived road bike for UK conditions. It doesn't try to be a race bike and is all the better for it. This could easily be your go-to road bike for year-round club riding and, with the addition of a slimline rack like a Tortec Velocity, weekday commuting. It's good value too, especially if you use your Halfords discount (see p14). **C**

Tech Spec



BOARDMAN ASR 8.8

PRICE: £849.99

SIZES: S, M, L, XL (M tested)

WEIGHT: 10.76kg (no pedals)

FRAME & FORK: 4130 chrome-moly steel frame with fittings for rear rack, mudguard, two bottles, flat-mount disc brakes. Tapered, full-carbon fork with mudguard fittings.

WHEELS: 28-622 Vittoria Rubino Pro G+ tyres, Boardman Road Five wheels (tubeless-compatible 622-18 rims, 32x2 spokes, unbranded QR hubs)

TRANSMISSION: 175mm Shimano Sora chainset, 50-34 chainrings, Shimano BB-RS500 external BB, KMC Z Super Narrow chain, Sora 11-32 9-speed cassette. Sora STI shifters & derailleurs. 18 ratios, 29-122in.

BRAKING: Shimano Sora levers, TRP Spyre C disc brakes with 160mm rotors

STEERING & SEATING: 31.8x420mm Boardman alloy compact drop bar, 90mmx7° Boardman alloy stem, FSA No. 9 threadless headset. Prologo Kappa saddle, 27.2x350mm Boardman alloy seatpost, Allen-bolt seat clamp.

boardmanbikes.com

OTHER OPTIONS



1 Ridgeback Ramble 1.0 £1,149.99

Nominally a gravel bike but otherwise similar: rack & guard ready chrome-moly frame, carbon fork, 2x9 Sora gearing, TRP Spyre C brakes, 32mm tyres. ridgeback.co.uk



2 Cube Attain Pro Disc £849

Aluminium framed, carbon forked road bike with screw-through axles and mudguard eyelets. Shimano Sora 2x9 gearing, TRP Spyre C brakes, 28mm Conti Ultra Sport tyres. cube.eu