

Biketest

High-end all-rounders

When one bike can fill several roles, it's a little easier to justify the expense. **Dan Joyce** tests premium-priced gravel bikes from Isen and Vielo



DAN JOYCE

Cycle Editor

Dan's multi-purpose bike is a Genesis Vagabond. He does like lightweight bikes as well, however

The ultimate do-everything bike is a chimera because we've all got our own definitions of 'everything', but if your budget stretches beyond the breathtaking figure of £5k you should, at least, be able to acquire an all-rounder that's very nice indeed.

Isen Workshop produces handbuilt steel bikes in three off-the-peg models (All Season, Mountain GOAT, and Race Ready Road), all with numerous à la carte options. The All Season is "a bicycle for adventure and adrenaline that goes beyond the road". I tested a prototype with some upgrades.

Vielo was founded in 2017 by Ian Hughes and son Trevor, who previously worked with Scott and Storck. Their bikes, the V+1 gravel and R+1 road, are lightweight carbon fibre builds based around 1× drivetrains and wider-than-usual tyres. The V+1 is "engineered for riding on rough British roads plus off-road gravel tracks".

Frame & fork: Isen

Underneath its eye-catching paintwork, the Isen All Season is a neatly assembled collection of quality steel tubing. The test bike also has an ENVE carbon seat tube bonded into steel lugs, a framebuilder's flourish that costs an extra £449 over a steel tube. While there will be a small weight saving, compliance differences are less than pea-sized – and I'm no princess.

To accommodate the fork's tapered steerer, there's a 44mm head tube with an external lower bearing. The test bike's bottom bracket shell is chunkier too because (brace yourself) it's a new standard: T47. Designed by Chris King and Argonaut Cycles, T47 is a PressFit 30-sized shell with threads for screw-in cups. So it's like a bigger version of a Hollowtech bottom bracket.

Production All Season bikes have 135mm QR or 142mm thru-axle rear dropouts. The test bike's were 132.5mm, which gives the option of running either 130mm or 135mm hubs.

This frame size of All Season is meant to accommodate 700×35C or 640×42B wheels/tyres. It doesn't – or not with sufficient clearance. There's scarcely more than millimetre between the seatstays and the tyre. This bike goes

First look

The All Season is a good looking bike with a great wheelset, but it feels more road bike than gravel bike



“The test bike has an ENVE carbon seat tube bonded into steel lugs, a frame-builder’s flourish that’s £449 extra

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Tech Spec

ISEN ALL SEASON

Price: £6,499 as tested (framesets from £1,999)

Sizes: 47, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59, 61cm

Weight: 8.75kg/19.25lb (53cm, no pedals)

Frame & fork: Steel and carbon frame (Dedacciai Zero Uno down tube and chainstays, Columbus Max top tube, Columbus Spirit seatstays, ENVE Carbon seat tube) with fittings for 2 bottles, rear rack, and mudguard. Columbus Futura carbon fork with mudguard mounts.

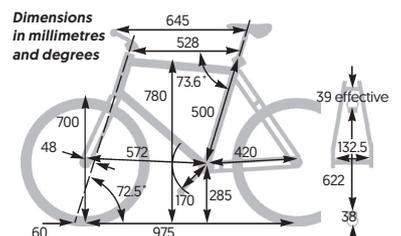
Wheels: 35-622 Schwalbe G-One Speed TLE tyres, Hunt 30 Carbon Gravel Disc wheels with 28x2 bladed

spokes, 100x12mm thru-axle front hub, 135mm QR rear.

Transmission: 170mm 50-34t Rotor Flow chainset, T47 bottom bracket, KMC X11 EL chain, 11-32 11-speed Ultegra cassette. Ultegra-equivalent (non-series) levers, Dura-Ace derailleurs. 22 ratios, 28-125in.

Braking: Shimano Ultegra-equivalent hydraulic levers, 160/140mm discs.

Steering & seating: 400x31.8mm Bontrager Race bar, 100mmx6° Zipp alloy stem, Chris King headset. Specialized Toupé saddle, 27.2mm Fizik Cyrano R1 carbon layback post, Thomson clamp. isenworkshop.com



off-road! Isen did say that different seatstays and chainstays are now being used “for added clearance”.

The all-carbon fork is roomier. You could fit a mudguard – there are mounts – over the 35mm tyre. However, a mudguard would exacerbate what is already a serious issue on the All Season: toe overlap. The front centres distance (bottom bracket to front hub) is way too short.

Frame & fork: Vielo

This is the more expensive ‘UD’ version of the V+1, signifying that the frameset’s carbon lay-up is UniDirectional. The frame weighs a mere 880g (claimed), with the fork around 400g. That’s high-end racer light! Lose the dropper seatpost and you could easily assemble a sub-8kg V+1.

Like all Vielo’s bikes, the V+1 UD is 1x only; you can’t fit a front derailleur. Lack of an inner chainring gives room for the frame around the bottom bracket to be enormous. It’s a huge fist of carbon fibre, stiff enough, I imagine, to satisfy



Top: Toe overlap with a size 42 shoe. This is awkward when steering around stuff off-road at slower speeds

Bottom: Cigarette-paper clearances. Note that the 35mm tyre plumps up to about 38mm on the wide rim

pedal-stompers much stronger or heavier than me. The down tube is 74mm across at its widest.

The bottom bracket itself is a BB86/PF86 PressFit. While the V+1’s frame tolerances are surely better than those of cheaper carbon bikes, I would nevertheless install a screw-together bottom bracket such as Hope’s Press-Fit PF41 here.

Tyre clearances are good in both frame and fork. You really can run 700x42C or 650x50B tyres. Vielo sent me some mudguards, which sat too close to the 42mm tyres supplied. I’d want smoother 38mm tyres with mudguards.

Gear cable and brake hose routing is internal. This makes the V+1 easy to clean but complicates maintenance. I had intended to swap the gorilla-sized 46cm handlebar for a narrower one but discovered that the cables and hoses ran through the bar too. Swapping the levers over was suddenly not trivial; I put up with the wider bar.

**Go online**

A do-it-all bike could look very different from these. Read:

cyclinguk.org/article/can-you-just-have-one-bike-does-everything

**First look**

A carbon-framed lightweight that's practical as well as performance-oriented, it's good off-road and on

Tech Spec

VIELO V+1 UD FORCE EDITION

Price: £5,499 as tested (frameset £2,999)

Sizes: XS, S, M, L, XL

Weight: 8.52kg (M, no pedals)

Frame & fork: UD carbon fibre frame, integrated seatpost clamp, 142x12mm thru-axle, and fittings for 3 bottles, top tube bag, and mudguard. UD carbon fork with 100x12mm thru-axle and 'guard fittings.

Wheels: 42-622 WTB Rolute tyres, DT Swiss CR1600 wheels with 24x2 bladed straight-pull spokes, aluminium rims and Centerlock hubs.

Transmission: 175mm 42t SRAM

Force 1x chainset, Token PF30 bottom bracket, KMC DLC 11-speed chain, SRAM X01 XG 1195 10-42 cassette. SRAM Force shifters (left works dropper), SRAM Force 11-speed long-cage derailleur. 11 ratios, 28-118in

Braking: SRAM Force levers & callipers, 160/140mm rotors. **Steering & seating:** 460x31.8mm Vielo carbon handlebar, 100mmx7° Vielo alloy stem. Fabric Scoop Shallow carbon rail saddle, 30.9mm RockShox Reverb Stealth dropper (100mm drop) with adapter. vielo.cc

► The geometry of the V+1 is more gravel bike than road bike. The wheelbase is longer – no toe overlap even with 175mm cranks – and the 71° head angle provides more trail.

Components

Of the two bikes, the All Season has the better wheel package. Its Hunt 30 Carbon Gravel Disc wheels are a little lighter than the DT Swiss CR1600 wheels of the V+1 despite having four more spokes each. The weight saving is surely at the carbon (versus aluminium) rim. More importantly, the All Season wheels are shod with Schwalbe G-One Speed tyres, which are lightweight and fast rolling. The result is a pair of wheels that feels easy to spin up to speed.

In terms of gearing, the two bikes are quite different. The All Season has a road bike drivetrain: 50-34 double chainset, 11-32 cassette, and (largely wasted on me) silky-shifting 11-speed Dura-Ace derailleurs. By contrast, the



Top: The fork has mudguard mounts and is rated for a disc rotor up to 180mm in size, though this one is 160mm

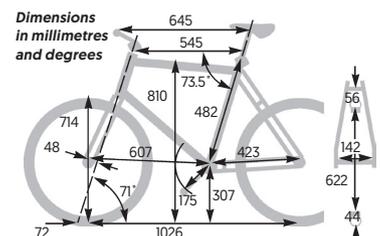
Bottom: No toe overlap despite 175mm cranks. With 650B wheels there'd be even more room

V+1 has a gravel bike drivetrain: a SRAM 1x11 setup with a 42 chainring and a huge 10-42 cassette. Although the steps between gears are smaller on the All Season, bottom gear is slightly lower on the V+1 and the 11 ratios it has are more evenly spread rather than being biased towards the top end.

The V+1 came fitted with a RockShox Reverb dropper seatpost. It's operated by the bike's otherwise unused left-hand shift lever; no mean feat, since the gear shifter is mechanical and the dropper hydraulic.

There's a converter device, exclusive to Vielo, underneath the bottom of the Reverb.

I didn't use the Reverb much. A dropper post is indispensable on a mountain bike but I don't ride drop-bar bikes on such demanding terrain. On the other hand, a dropper does enable you to adopt a super aero tuck on descents, rather like pro cyclists perched on their top tubes, except





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Above: 10-42 cassette gives wide range gears
Near right: The Isen's 50-34 road double
Top right: Carbon seat tube in steel lugs (Isen)
Bottom right: Internally-routed everything (Vielo)



you're on the lowered saddle instead.

The All Season has a 27.2mm rigid post. I'd be happy with that except the seat tube isn't 27.2mm and requires a shim. And, as it turned out, some carbon assembly paste.

The ride

The All Season felt like a road bike to me, albeit one with bigger tyres. That was fine on tarmac, where it fairly flew along. With tyres 10mm wider and a good deal softer than those of a dedicated road bike, it purred over chipseal and instilled confidence on descents. Off-road its short wheelbase and steeper frame angles worked against it, compromising control and comfort and, as a result, speed. When riding slowly, I frequently hit my feet on the front wheel.

The V+1 was noticeably more stable off-road. No surprise: it has longer front

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 The V+1 was noticeably more stable off-road – and significantly more comfortable
 ”

Other options



KINESIS TRIPSTER ATR V3 £2,200 (FRAMESET)

Titanium-framed, carbon-forked all-rounder with 68mm threaded bottom bracket and space for 700×45C or 650×50B tyres. kinesisbikes.co.uk



MASON INSEARCHOF RIVAL 1X £3,140

Off-roadly adventure bike with a nice steel frame and carbon fork. Heavier (~12kg) but takes 27.5×2.8in/29×2.4in tyres. masoncycles.cc

centres, a longer wheelbase, and more trail. It was also significantly more comfortable. Partly that's the larger air pocket in a 42mm tyre versus a 35mm. The geometry makes a difference too: a slacker head angle puts the front wheel further out front, and a longer wheelbase means you're not sitting right on top of the wheels. It's possible that there's more give in the V+1's carbon frame too.

Strava says I was about half a mile an hour faster on average on the V+1 than the All Season, largely due to the off-road section of my test loop. ●

Verdict

These bikes aren't in my price range, but riding them made me wonder what I could build up in the same vein for around £1,500.

The Isen All Season is more road bike than gravel bike. Frame angles, wheelbase, clearances, gears... they all shout 'road' to me. With narrower tyres and mudguards, it could be a refined, do-it-all road bike for club rides, commuting, audax, lightweight touring, etc. Even then, I'd want more toe room.

The Vielo V+1 is a well-designed gravel bike for British conditions, with room for bigger tyres, mudguards and/or mud. There are some parts I'd change but the frameset is really good. With the right tyres, there's not much in the realm of 'sporty drop-bar cycling' the V+1 won't do. Chaingang? Sure. Dirty Reiver? Yep. Year-round club runs with the hard-riders? No problem.