Oxford Bike Works Model 1E

A comfortable commuter-tourer with tried-and-tested kit and a British-built steel frame. Review by Simon Withers

The 1E is Oxford Bike Works’ least expensive bike – and one of the least expensive complete bikes with a British-built steel frameset. Both the double-butted frame and fork are made by Lee Cooper in Coventry, and the super-smooth fillet brazing makes for a very handsome machine.

There are fewer options with the Model 1E than with Oxford’s other bikes but you still get the personal fitting session, ten-year frame guarantee, and one-year comfort guarantee, which allows you to change the stem, bar or saddle if they’re not working for you. You also get a lovely ride that’s suitable for commuting, day-long rides and light touring, and the 1E proved comfortable on road and off-road surfaces such as towpaths. Its V-brakes may have a historic air these days but they’re powerful, consistent, and pleasingly squeal-free. (A disc-braked Model 1E is an option.)

The drivetrain is smooth and quiet, the Shimano Deore gears shift easily, and the bike coped admirably with loaded panniers, with no discernible frame flex or brake rub. The taut, handbuilt wheels and supple Panaracer tyres are a great pairing for poor roads and towpaths, and the rims, frame and fork will all accommodate much wider rubber.

A single-ring setup does limit your gear range but Oxford offers chainrings from 34t to 40t or a triple, which I’d choose for extended touring. I’d also prefer Ergon GP3 bar ends or similar for the extra forward-facing handhold, but along with safety-release fittings for the front mudguard, those are the only changes I’d make. A ‘proper’, sonorous brass bell and a kickstand round out a well-considered package. With a threaded bottom bracket shell and external cabling, Oxford’s 1E is user-friendly for the home mechanic too.

Verdict

The Model 1E’s handbuilt frameset is paired with well-built wheels and sensibly chosen components for a comprehensive commuting and light-touring package. Throw in a comfortable ride, plus Oxford’s personal fitting service and comfort guarantee, and the value looks very decent.