Biketest

Affordable adventure bikes

You can't buy a touring bike for £500 these days but there are gravel bikes at that price. Are they any good as all-rounders? **Guy Kesteven** finds out

GUY KESTEVEN

Guy has been a bike tester for 25 years. He's a freelance technical editor for paper and online media and talks to himself while riding bikes at **YouTube/ GuyKesTV**

As the cost of living continues to rise to ever more painful levels it's taking the prices of bikes and holidays with it. So can you still get an enjoyable and capable adventure bike at a remotely affordable price and rescue the idea of a touring/exploring/ bikepacking trip as an economical escape? I tested couple of £500ish gravel bikes from Schwinn and Voodoo to find out.

There's no traditional touring bike in this test because there aren't any at this price. The Dawes Galaxy is now a flat-bar hybrid and frame-only touring bike options from specialists like Spa Cycles and St John Street Cycles are the same price as the complete bikes featured here: a Voodoo Limba from Halfords and a Schwinn Scree from Decathlon.

Frame and fork

Like many budget brands, both bikes only come in small, medium and large sizes. The main separator between the test bikes is the riding position and handling balance. The Limba looks and feels like a conventional gravel bike, with a 410mm fork, short head tube, and the stem fitted flat to give a relatively low handlebar height. In contrast the Scree has a 430mm fork and a 30mm longer head tube, so even when I switched the headset spacers out the bar was still significantly higher. The top tube slopes down dramatically like a mountain bike's so there's lots more seatpost exposed for a given saddle height.

In terms of tubing both bikes have aluminium frames but the Voodoo is chunkier in nearly every dimension, with a kinked down tube and an angular cross-section top tube. While cable guides are external it gets a neat pipe chainstay bridge and a shaped head tube with an actual physical head tube badge for a high-quality feel. Practical wins include