



**Biketest**



**DAN JOYCE**

Dan's own best bike is a custom-built titanium hardtail (which cracked and was repaired)

# Reilly Gradient

Carbon fibre dominates the higher-end bicycle market but there's still a place for titanium. **Dan Joyce** tests a £4,000 gravel bike from Reilly

**I**f you've been to the Bespoked show lately you'll have seen the shiny titanium road and gravel bikes of Reilly Cycleworks. Co-founder Mark Reilly was a framebuilder (he passed away in 2021) but the company's frames are made in Taiwan and China to his designs rather than TIG welded here in the UK.

They're not custom built as such; they come in off-the-peg sizes. But you can customise your bike with a range of à la carte component options and upgrades. I chose a narrower bar, shorter stem and shorter cranks, and road rather than gravel tyres. The Gradient is pitched as a do-it-all bike for road, audax, touring and commuting as well as gravel and cyclocross. For most of those categories, road tyres are better.

## Frame and fork

Like other Ti bikes, the Gradient's frame tubes are titanium alloyed with aluminium (3%) and vanadium (2.5%) – hence 3AL 2.5V. Broadly speaking this is half the weight of chrome-moly steel, just as strong and similarly resilient (springy), which accounts for its reputation for comfort and its sometime nickname: 'old man's carbon fibre'. It's not as fatigue resistant as steel, however, something any owner who has found a crack in their 'bike for life' can attest to.

So it's reassuring that the Gradient, like other Reilly frames, comes with a lifetime warranty for the original owner. That in itself is a vote of confidence in its durability. Moreover, it is a well-made frame, with sufficiently chunky,

hydroformed tubes neatly welded together. Stronger 6AL-4V titanium is used for bits like the cowed dropouts.

The bottom bracket is threaded rather than press-fit, and the straight 44mm head tube looks better than a truncated cone while still accommodating a tapered fork steerer. Although the rear brake hose runs through the down tube, the gear cables are external. That's an unusual mix but in maintenance terms it makes sense: you seldom mess with hydraulic hoses. There are plenty of frame fittings, including for a rear rack.

The geometry numbers are more endurance road bike than extreme off-road adventure bike. It still has a taller head tube, bigger tyre clearances and longer front centres than your typical road bike – although bear in mind that this is a Large; Medium is recommended for my 177cm height. I'd fit that too but it has a 20mm shorter head tube and 11mm less toe room.

The fork is full carbon and has mounts for luggage/bottle cages and a mudguard, as well as internal routing for a dynamo cable.

## Components

The Gradient takes tyres up to around 43mm wide – or 47mm if you downsize to 650B (ISO 584) wheels. By default they'll be Panaracer GravelKing SK. I asked for fast-rolling road tyres instead. The 32mm Continental GP5000S TR tyres supplied are great. If I were buying a Gradient, however, I'd likely choose the AS version, which is tougher and comes in a 35mm width.

## Other options



**SPA CYCLES ELAN TI MK1 105 11-SPEED HYDRAULIC £2,340**

The Mk1 version of Spa's keenly priced all-rounder has post-mount brakes and is slightly cheaper than the flat-mount Mk2. Not the lightest but a tall head tube and slacker seat angle boost comfort. [spacycles.co.uk](http://spacycles.co.uk)



**KINESIS TRIPSTER ATR FRAMESET £2,400**

The latest version of Kinesis's 'adventure, tour, race' bike that we reviewed in April/May 2015 now has longer front centres, more tyre room (up to 45-622 or 50-584) and tweaks to the tubing. [kinesisbikes.co.uk](http://kinesisbikes.co.uk)