



## Grouptest

# Balance bikes

A pedal-less bike is an ideal introduction to cycling and a great Christmas present. **Sam Jones** and his son (aged two and a half) test four



### SAM JONES

As a keen bikepacker, Sam has already fitted a small handlebar roll to his son's own balance bike. "He carries his toy cars, acorns, pine cones, stones and so on."

**F**or riders who learned to cycle more than 20 years ago, stabilisers, their removal and the inevitable stumbles were an awkward and often painful rite of passage into cycling life. The next generation won't have to go through this thanks to balance bikes.

Balance bikes, which are essentially bikes without pedals, teach young riders balance and steering – skills we take for granted as older riders – but not pedalling. Stabilisers, by contrast, allow riders to learn to pedal but with unnatural turning motions and minimal balance skills. When it's time to remove the stabilisers, these latter skills have to be unlearned and can make the transition to independent cycling harder.

For balance bike graduates, the only skill they have to learn is pedalling as they will already have mastered balance and begun developing a more natural steering style. Balance bikes are also better suited for the youngest of riders, with some more adventurous toddlers able to ride almost as soon as they can walk.

For more about teaching your child to ride, visit the website [cyclinguk.org/ditching-stabilisers](http://cyclinguk.org/ditching-stabilisers). If you'd like to hire a balance bike rather than buying one, Cycling UK members get their first month free with a Bike Club subscription. See [cyclinguk.org/bike-club](http://cyclinguk.org/bike-club).

## Details

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

#### 1 Steering lock

A handy safety feature on modern balance bikes (present on the Frog and Boardman), this prevents oversteering and bigger falls.

#### 2 Hand grips

Horror stories abound of the damage handlebar ends can do when landed on. Sturdy grips prevent this, and disc-like ends can protect small hands when riding close to walls.

#### 3 Brake

You can adjust the reach of most balance bike brake levers to suit smaller hands. Teaching your child to use the brake is another matter, but it will come in useful as they gain confidence and ride faster.

#### 4 Adjustability

Look for a bike with growing room and easy-to-adjust components. Quick releases and Allen keys are your friends, especially for trailside adjustments and fixes.

#### 5 Weight

Proportionately a balance bike will be heavier for a child than most bikes for an adult. Get the lightest bike you can afford. Your child will enjoy it more and it'll be easier for you to carry home.

#### 6 Wheelbase

A longer wheelbase bike will have a less cramped reach. The bike will also be more stable, especially on downhill and bumpier tracks. The bikes on test all had a long wheelbase.



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