



Bike test

Adventure bikes

Gravel bikes aren't the only option for on/off-road bikepacking. **Sean Fishpool** tests two flat-bar alternatives, the Surly Bridge Club and the Spa Cycles Rove



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Sean is Cycling UK's digital product owner and a keen bikepacker

You don't have to own the right bike to have an adventure. But if you're buying one for bikepacking, it's worth considering a comfortable, luggage-friendly, flat-bar adventure bike like the two on test.

Bikepacking routes like Cycling UK's Marcher Castles Way combine bridleways, quiet tarmac, glorious views, solitude and tea shops. More than half your time will likely be off road, often on fairly good surfaces like forestry tracks, but sometimes on stony, rutted or steep trails that might cause a less confident rider to walk in places.

You can enjoy such routes on a gravel bike but my experience is that the bigger tyres, lower gears and more relaxed riding position of a mountain-style bike are ideal for most bikepacking, and will help you ride more comfortably and on more of the tricky bits.

The Rove, from Harrogate touring specialist Spa Cycles, and the Bridge Club, from independently minded US brand Surly, are both steel-framed adventure bikes. They're like mountain bikes but with geometries that

try to balance good off-road manners and all-day comfort. They have mounts for racks, mudguards and bikepacking luggage. And instead of front suspension they have rigid forks that reflect their less technical intent.

The £1,599 Bridge Club 27.5 Whipped Butter has a lower front end and 27.5in wheels, with space for tyres up to 2.8in wide. The £1,695 Rove 725 2x10spd Deore Hydraulic has faster-rolling 29in wheels and a more upright position. Our test bike came with a few upgrades, principally a carbon fork (£80 extra). As Spa Cycles also sent the standard steel fork, I tried it with that as well.

My first impressions were that the Bridge Club was a more practical version of a regular MTB, whereas the Rove was a faster cross between a mountain bike and a hybrid.

Frame & fork

The Rove and the Bridge Club are both made from double-buttressed chrome-moly steel, with an emphasis on comfort and durability. Both have a useful but not crazy amount of braze-