



Routes without streetlights require a front light that throws a decent beam

Main photo: Joolze Dymond

Commuter light sets

With the nights drawing in, it's time to fit your lights or buy new ones. Emma Silversides tests six battery sets for urban commuters

Bike lights are a practical and legal requirement whenever you're cycling at night. If you're riding on country roads or trails, you'll need a front lamp with a beam bright enough to light your way. In urban areas where there are streetlights, however, the main role of bike lights is to make you visible to other road users. Because of this, urban commuter lights tend to be cheaper, smaller, lighter and less powerful (fewer lumens) than those designed for use in pitch dark.

While be-seen lights may not illuminate the road ahead, they must alert others to your presence – from as many directions as possible and ideally from a considerable distance. Some will also offer sufficient lumens to ride in full darkness. Runtimes on be-seen lights tend to be long as

they require much less battery power than powerful headlights.

Note that you're required to use your lights between dusk and dawn, not just when it's full dark. It makes sense to use them when visibility is limited by poor weather conditions or overcast conditions, although that's not a legal requirement. Some cyclists also use be-seen lights during daytime, especially on roads with a lot of traffic.

For more details on lighting requirements, visit cyclinguk.org/lighting-regulations.

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What to look for

Charge and run time
Consider how long the lights last on a single charge, especially the mode you will use most, and how long recharging takes. Charging will usually take longer via a PC's USB port than a wall socket. Check that charging cables are provided or that you have one (often USB-C) that fits.

Attachment/mount
Make sure it's secure. A screw-on bracket is ideal if you have only one bike. Stretchy O-ring mounts offer easy swappability. Check compatibility with bar dimensions/shape. Consider the bar/post space you have free.

On/off button
Accessibility and responsiveness are important, especially with gloves. A firm button press limits accidental activation.

Output
For be-seen front lights, 50 to 200 lumens in urban areas is fine, more for suburban. For the rear, 10 to 80 lumens is sufficient. Different modes can improve visibility in different conditions but too many options can be frustrating when toggling through them.

Water resistance
Look for a secure, robust charging port cover. The IP (ingress protection) rating should be at least 4 ('water splashes'). It's not unusual for a light to be missing an IP rating against solids. For more on IP ratings see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IP_code.