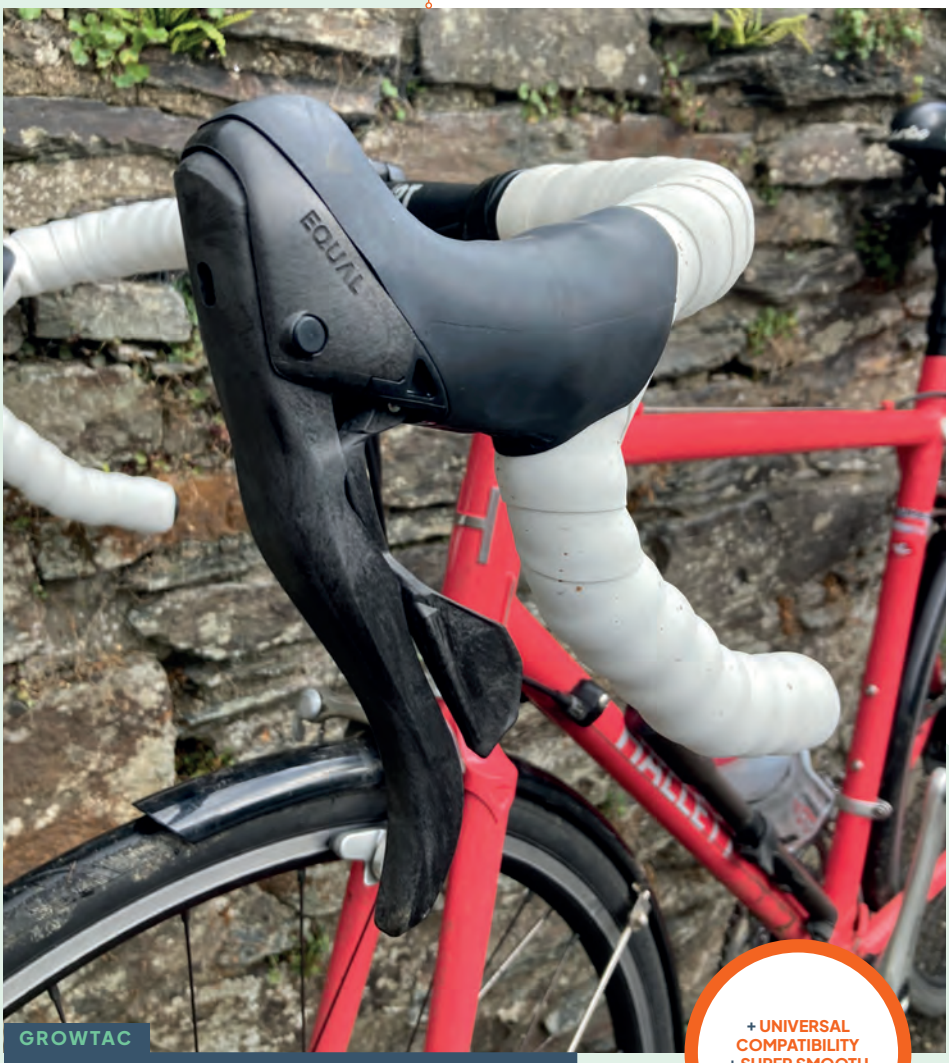
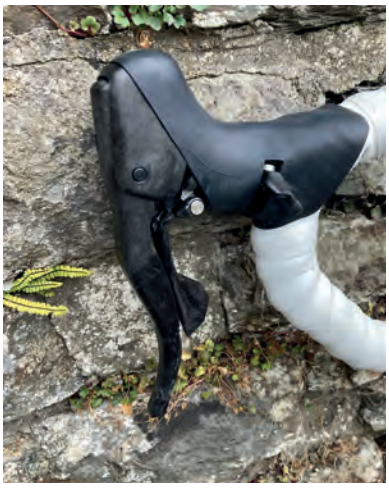
Friction shifting comes to integrated brake/gear levers





GROWTAC

Equal Control Levers

£400, veloduo.co.uk & growtac.com

+ UNIVERSAL COMPATIBILITY
+ SUPER SMOOTH
+ BUILD QUALITY

Rumours that friction shifting is enjoying something of a resurgence in popularity are true! For proof, note the arrival of Growtac's Equal Control Levers, which combine the now industry-standard dual-control lever functionality with good, old-fashioned, friction-secured, non-indexed gear selection.

The idea is genius and its execution near flawless. Depending on your standpoint, it's either the answer to your prayers or a complete irrelevance. While those cyclists who value the ease of use and reliability of indexed gear selection may scoff, owners of boxes of incompatible or obsolete-but-sound transmission components will immediately get the point. Which is that any derailleur gear mech can be used with any cassette or multiple freewheel, provided the mech has enough chain wrap and the geometry to ensure it won't foul a sprocket.

While mechanical (as distinct from electronic) indexed derailleur gear shifting is user friendly and ensures quick, reliable gear selection without much user engagement, it relies on a system of precisely matched parts. Front mechs are less sensitive but nevertheless work well only when used as part of an integrated system. That's fine until a component becomes obsolete and a replacement hard to find. Or the user wishes to upgrade a part without having to buy a complete new transmission. Or mix parts from different manufacturers. Or one of any number of scenarios that does not involve a dedicated groupset. Indeed, a whole cycling culture has grown up around the joys of getting non-matching parts to work together in something approaching harmony.

Relying on friction to hold the shift lever at any chosen position avoids all this fuss. Simple in operation and requiring little by way of precision parts, it was the operating mode for derailleurs until largely supplanted by indexing in the early 1990s. 'Retro-friction' levers, popular shortly before indexing arrived, used a clutch, providing frictionless movement in one direction. Each Equal Control Lever has two of them. In fact, the internals are impressively complex, given the supposed simplicity of regular friction shifting.

Executed in carbon-fibre-reinforced plastic, the levers are pleasantly ergonomic, with a contemporary shape that feels comfortable in my large hands. A bulge under the lever's rubber hood houses the cables as they exit, but isn't obtrusive. The layout follows the