

Carrera Subway 1

How much do you have to spend to get a proper bike these days? Less than £350, Dan Joyce concludes, if you shop at Halfords



Even entry-level hybrids aren't cheap these days. From big-name brands, they start at around £500. Many would-be cyclists won't or can't pay that much. Hence the market for bicycle-shaped objects that are swiftly abandoned.

While the best option on a tight budget is to buy secondhand (see cyclinguk.org/buy-secondhand), there are some sub-£500 new bikes worth considering, mostly from the likes of Decathlon and Halfords. This £345 Carrera Subway 1 is an urban mountain bike: a hybrid with an MTB-style frame, fittings for essential equipment and chunky street tyres.

Frame and fork

Carrera Subways have been around for years; I tested one in the Oct/Nov 2004 issue. They now have 650B (ISO 584) wheels rather than 26in (559) but haven't otherwise changed much in terms of frame geometry or design. They remain noughties aluminium hardtails with steel forks.

And that's fine. The Subway frameset is a versatile chassis. It has the rack and mudguard fittings you need for commuting or recreational riding, and it takes tyres that are wide enough for comfort and control on bad roads and better-quality tracks.

It's good to see a rigid steel fork. Suspension forks at this price tend

to use basic coil springs with no rebound damping (like pogo sticks) and minimal adjustability (preload only). A rigid fork is lighter, tracks predictably and won't flex or bob.

The only small downside to the frame is how closely it sticks to its cross-country MTB roots. As a casual cyclist's runaround, it would benefit from a taller head tube to give a more upright and relaxed riding position. A bottom bracket 2–3cm lower, meanwhile, would make it easier to get a foot down at the lights.

Components

Equipment first: there isn't any. This is unfortunate because, when you buy mudguards, a rack and lights separately, you'll spend more overall than if the bike came fitted with them. If you can stretch to £485, the Subway All-Weather Edition does have mudguards, as well as better brakes and gears. Otherwise, budget for some SKS Bluemels (around £30).

The drivetrain is 2x8 Shimano Tourney, which shifts reliably if not crisply. Its 11–34 Megarange cassette gives a usefully lower bottom gear than the 11–28 of many cheap bikes. There's a big jump between second gear and first, but it's not a problem.

The 46–30 Prowheel chainset is too large. There's no need for a 46/11 gear (114in) on a bike like this.

Other options



ELOPS CITY BIKE 120 LOW FRAME £249.99

A town bike with mudguards, rack, kickstand and sidewall-dynamo lighting. V-brakes are fine, 6-speed derailleur gearing a bit clunky. decathlon.co.uk



6KU FIXIE & SINGLESPEED BIKE - BARCELONA £399

This hi-ten steel singlespeed has 46/16 gearing and a legal complement of brakes. Only takes narrow tyres, and mudguards will be a bodge. bricklanebikes.co.uk