

Bikefinder

Which bike should I buy?

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BELT-DRIVE BIKEPACKING BIKE



For: Henriette Harmse, age 53, from Great Chesterford. **Bike needs:** bikepacking/touring bike, primarily for dirt roads and off road. I considered e-bikes but they're heavy for any hike-a-bike and make it more difficult to take trains and planes. **Must have:** Belt drive. Low gears. Suitable for my 163cm height. Step-through or mid-step frame. Front and rear racks. Comfort handlebar. Mudguards. Lights. Puncture-resistant tyres. **Must not have:** Derailleurs and chain. **Budget:** £5,000 but could be flexible

HANNAH COLLINGRIDGE

This is quite a specific request so I feel the best way forward is a custom build, especially considering the step-through frame that you want. Thorn's Nomad Mk3 (from £3,300, thorncycles.co.uk) is available as a step-through and looks a good place to start for a capable bikepacking bike.

It can be built up with a Gates belt drive – CDX would be the best choice here for toughness. A Rohloff hub on the back would then take care of the low gearing requirements. The frame also has myriad fastening points for guards, racks, panniers, lights and anything else you may want to carry. A custom build would also cover choice of handlebar and riding position.

You can put various sizes of wheel in this frame. The larger you go, the narrower the tyre has to be, so I'd suggest 650B; tyres up 2.35in wide will fit in that diameter. That would leave plenty of choice for tubed or tubeless tyres, with a range of treads depending on the terrain. The extra volume compared to 700x40C tyres would also help with cushioning off road on a laden bike. You can opt for a dynamo hub if required.

This is not going to be a lightweight build but it will be tough. It will come with cable discs by default. Upgrading to hydraulic brakes would add cost and stopping power, although cable brakes can be more easily maintained in the middle of nowhere.

Thorn Nomad Mk3
£3,300+



Stanforth Pamira Rohloff with Gates Belt
£5,200+



DAN JOYCE

Gearing is the big issue here. Most hub gears won't yield low enough ratios for you. Even a nominally wide-range hub like Shimano's Alfine 11 will only give a bottom gear of around 27 inches, assuming you're using 27.5in wheels and a belt-ring that's at least 1.9 times the size of the sprocket – something Shimano recommends. To get a genuinely low gear (under 20in), you'll want a bike with a 14-speed Rohloff Speedhub or a Pinion P1.12 or P1.18 bottom bracket gearbox; they're 12-speed and 18-speed respectively.

You can buy off-the-peg bikes with these gears, but I can't think of any that meet your other requirements: belt-drive compatible; not too heavy; low- or mid-step frame; off-road ready. So I agree with Hannah that you're looking at a custom or semi-custom build, where you're tweaking an existing model.

For the Pinion option, the Sonder Broken Road Ti Pinion (from £4,249, alpkit.com) is almost what you're after, once equipped with a suitable rigid fork and an alternative flat bar (see cyclinguk.org/alt-bars). The stumbling block is the step-through frame, built for the smaller (27.5in, ISO 584) wheels that would suit your height. Such a frame is not a stock option, so you'd need a fully custom build – something Sonder offers (alpkit.com/pages/sonder-custom-titanium-frames).

The Rohloff option is more straightforward. The Stanforth Pamira Rohloff with Gates Belt (from £5,200, stanforthbikes.co.uk) is basically the bike you've described, right down to the comfort bar and puncture resistant Schwalbe Marathon Plus MTB tyres. It can be built with the step-over frame that you want, along with dynamo lighting, racks and mudguards. It won't be light as such, but it'll be lighter than a comparable e-bike.