



Baggy shorts aren't just for
mountain biking

Casual shorts

Skin-tight Lycra isn't the only option for summer cycling. Dan Joyce and Jaz Morse test six pairs of baggy shorts: three men's, three women's

Padded Lycra shorts are primarily designed for racers. They're more aerodynamic and they can improve undercarriage comfort on longer or faster rides. But they're not obligatory and they also have disadvantages: no pockets (usually); worse ventilation; and a revealing appearance.

Baggy shorts are a normal-looking alternative for non-racers that can double as everyday clothing off the bike. They work well for mountain biking, gravel riding, touring, commuting – even road riding. They can be worn with or without padding. If you do want cushioning, choose a pair that comes with, or will accommodate, removable undershorts – or invest in padded underwear (cyclinguk.org/group-test-padded-pants). Most baggies fit fine over Lycra shorts, too.

Casual shorts for cycling differ from high-street fashions in that the fabric typically incorporates elastane (which

may be listed as Lycra or Spandex). The stretchiness from this creates more freedom of movement for pedalling. They're usually cut lower at the waist so it won't dig in and higher at the back to prevent exposed skin. To reduce pressure or chafing while cycling, the seat will have an extra, diamond-shaped panel (or gusset) or will use less obtrusive seams.

Most baggy cycling shorts have three or more pockets. Zipped ones are obviously best for valuables, especially when riding a mountain bike or recumbent. Other common features include: an adjustable or elasticated waist; belt loops; a zipped fly; and a water-repellant coating to help shrug off showers. Some have prominent logos, which make the shorts look more 'bikey'.

As ever, sizing and fit varies. Try before you buy if possible, particularly if you're a woman buying unisex shorts.

What to look for

Leg length

Shorts ride up a little when pedalling, so most cycling shorts reach at least mid thigh to prevent skin rubbing on the saddle. Many finish at or just above the knee. (We're not looking at three-quarter-length shorts here.)

Seat

A gusset prevents uncomfortable seams between the saddle and your soft bits. Flat seams in lighter-weight stretch fabrics can still be comfortable, however. Some shorts have a reinforced seat for wear resistance.

Pad compatibility

Few baggies have a stitched-in seat pad because the looser fit means it wouldn't sit snugly against your body. If you want padding and the shorts don't come with an inner, try them for fit with your preferred padded underwear or Lycra shorts. Mountain bikers may also want knee-pad compatibility.

Fastening

Press-studs are convenient but can pop open while riding. One or two buttons at the waist makes for a more secure fastening. Ideally, the shorts will fit well without a belt. If you need to use one, lightweight walking-trouser belts work best.

Pockets

When trying on shorts, take with you whatever you expect to put in your pockets so that you can be sure your phone/keys/snacks will fit securely and comfortably. Inner pockets are often the first part of shorts to wear through.