



Vulpine Women's Gravel Shorts

£70, vulpine.cc

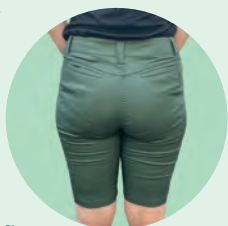
Vulpine's take on women's baggies leans towards the smarter, more understated end of the spectrum. The cotton/elastane fabric is noticeably thicker than others on test, which makes them a great option for cooler spring rides where the extra warmth is welcome. That added heft doesn't feel restrictive, however, and they strike a good balance between durability and comfort on the bike. The stiffer fabric gave me that slight gap at the back you find when wearing men's shorts, although I can't say I noticed them moving around too much while riding.

The cut is slightly more tailored than traditional MTB shorts, avoiding the ultra-baggy look without veering into anything too snug. Length is well judged, sitting comfortably over knee pads, making them a solid option for trail riding. However, I am a big fan of the humble zipped pocket for rough MTB riding, and unfortunately these only provide a small one for keys. Off the bike, the clean styling gives them a versatility that works just as well for a café stop or short commute.

Colours: moss, sandstone, blue.

Sizes: XS-XL (M tested); men's S-XXL.

★ Smart, versatile shorts with excellent coverage for cooler rides



Rapha Women's Trail Lightweight Shorts

£130, rapha.cc

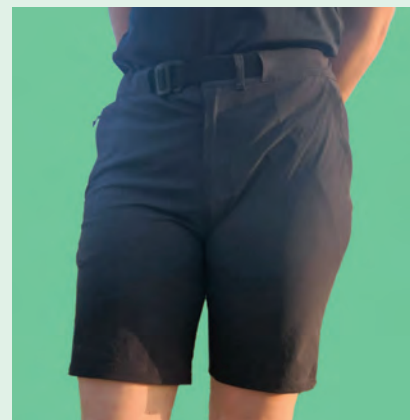
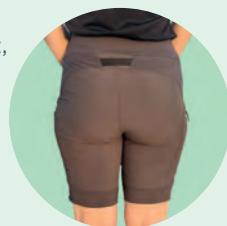
These shorts arrived with the brand's usual attention to detail, right down to instructions on how to open the packaging! On the bike, I found they deliver a close, 'race-inspired' fit that feels more akin to their road cycling roots than traditional MTB baggies; I'd size up if you're looking for a more relaxed fit. Sitting just above the hip with a slightly elasticated waistband, these felt like they were designed with women in mind, rather than being a smaller pair of men's shorts.

The lightweight fabric is a highlight, keeping things cool and comfortable on longer rides or warmer days. However, the streamlined cut and minimal excess material mean they're best suited to gravel or touring rather than more technical trail use. I found them slightly over-engineered with features that won't necessarily appeal to riders looking for simplicity, though on a multi-day tour I think you'd begin to appreciate the light feel and adjustments available.

Colours: dark grey.

Sizes: XXS-XL (M tested); men's XS-XXL.

★ Lightweight and refined, but best for gravel and road-leaning rides



Madison Roam Women's Stretch Shorts

madison.cc, £49.99

The fit from Madison's shorts is noticeably more relaxed than the others here, providing plenty of freedom of movement without feeling bulky or ill-shaped. Similar to the Rapha pair, these felt designed with a woman in mind as they sit comfortably above the hip without any awkward bunching when pedalling. The generous length also meant they worked easily with knee pads, with no gap.

While they may not have the premium feel or standout styling of the others on test, they deliver where it matters most for mountain biking and have become a staple for me as the weather has been warming up. They cinch nicely around the waistband, and the mid-weight fabric inspires confidence with a traditional rip-stop feel.

On longer gravel rides, I did find the metal buckle hook began to dig after a while, so these wouldn't be ideal for longer tours or cross-country epics. Zipped pockets all round does make these a firm favourite for me, though. At time of writing, they were on sale for less than half price: £19.99.

Colours: black, sand.

Sizes: 8-16 (12 tested); men's S-XXL.

★ A reliable, well-fitting all-rounder that nails the MTB brief

