

Gear up!

A cross-section of cycling products selected and reviewed by CTC staff, specialist journalists and CTC members

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ARMOURTEX FRAME RESPRAY

£64

Reviewed by CTC Campaigns Officer Adam Coffman

My 10-year-old steel frame was starting to look very shabby so I took it to a company called Armourtex in Hackney, East London to be powder coated. They had a large selection of colours and within 48 hours my old frame had been transformed into a shining beauty. There was none of the 'speckliness' that you sometimes with powder coating and the finish looks more like it has been enameled. I am delighted with the colour and the finish, and it has proven to be very chip resistant. It wasn't expensive either.

Details: <http://armourtex.tripod.com>, 0208 986 2028



DIATECH DOWN TUBE SHIFT LEVERS

£39.99

Reviewed by touring and commuting cyclist Michael Stenning



DiaTech's non-indexed 'power ratchet' friction levers offer compatibility with all derailleurs. Stamped left and right specific, they fit in a flash to braze-on bosses, although older mounts will require a band-on clamp. Replacing some early '70s Gran Sport levers, they breezed my Campagnolo derailleurs up

and down the six-speed block, changes at the front proving equally crisp – even under load. Replicating the test using an old tourer with a wide ratio triple had an equally pleasing outcome.

The price of £40 a pair sans cables may seem a little steep but is cheap in comparison with a new groupset and saves otherwise cherished components from the parts bin. Purists and those seeking complete authenticity may prefer to rummage at cycle jumbles but these are a great choice for keeping other old bikes in use. A bar-end version for cross and touring duties is available for the same price. Bike shops can order them for you from Ison.

Details: distributed by Ison Distribution, www.ison-distribution.com

CAMELBAK PODIUM CHILLJACKET

£12.99

Reviewed by Editor Dan Joyce

On those rare sunny days in the UK (or when you're abroad), the cold water in your bike's bottles soon becomes unappetisingly lukewarm. This double-wall plastic bottle – with thermal fabric in the gap – is meant to keep it cool. While it's not a Thermos, it does slow down the warming process for the first hour or so. After that, the water becomes as tepid as a standard bottle. Volume is smaller: 620ml rather than 750ml for a bottle that's the same outward size. What is excellent about this bidon is the lockable bite valve, which doesn't drip water or sugary energy drink over your bike but still lets you swig down a good mouthful when you want it. However, you get that with Camelbak's ordinary Podium, which is £3 cheaper and has a volume of 710ml. I'd buy that instead – and put a few ice cubes in on hot days.

Details: distributed by Zyro, www.zyro.co.uk, 01845 521700





BROOKS B17 IMPERIAL £79.99

Reviewed by expedition cyclist Cass Gilbert

Cutaway, pressure-relieving saddles have been around since 1890. The Imperial is based on that early Brooks design and I found it comfortable right from the off, with no discomfort at all on a two-week, mixed terrain tour around France. To tension the saddle as the leather began to give, I gave the nose bolt a couple of turns and also pulled in the sides with the laces provided. The occasional rub of Brooks Proofide should ensure the leather is protected for years to come. Like all Brooks saddles, the Imperial contours to your backside and wears in like your favourite leather boots, giving you individual comfort and your bike inimitable style. Finding the right perch is key to enjoying those long miles in the saddle, and the Imperial has impressed me enough to join me on a long tour south from Alaska. The dimensions are 280mm by 170mm, it weighs a somewhat hefty 530g, and there's a women's specific version available too.

Details: distributed by Extra, www.extrauk.co.uk

ENDURA ZYME 3/4

£39.99

Reviewed by Editor Dan Joyce & sons

When teens outgrow kids' cycle clothing you have to hunt around for suitable adult gear in S and XS sizes. These 3/4 length shorts are available in both, as well as in sizes up to XXL. They're not padded, although the double-thickness seat has the seams in the right places so won't chafe. And of course you could wear normal skinshorts underneath. The knees are articulated so don't ride up – perfect if it's chilly. They're meant for mountain biking but are fine for touring or general use, particularly if you pick the non-camo charcoal version. The only down-side is that there's not a great deal of adjustment at the waist, and a button would be better than a press-stud fastening. But they're good value and hard wearing.

Details: from www.endura.co.uk



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Digital mapping extras

RAM GARMIN ETREX COLOUR CRADLE £9.78, PLUS £6.84 FOR SWIVEL BASE

Reviewed by audax cyclist Sheila Simpson, editor of Arrivee

The Garmin eTrex is an excellent little GPS system and I wouldn't tour without one, but their cycle handlebar mount annoys me. Sooner or later it starts to rattle, which leads to the GPS switching off unexpectedly. RAM have solved the problem with a substantial cradle: the Garmin eTrex Colour Cradle, which fits the eTrex Legend C, eTrex Legend Cx, eTrex Venture Cx, eTrex Vista C, eTrex Vista Cx & eTrex Vista HCx.

RAM also produce a variety of mounts, to fit any type of vehicle, and cradles to suit other GPS models. We bought the RAM rail mount with a swivel base, which fits my partner's handlebars but he found the cradle and mount raised the GPS too close to his face. Friends with a more upright riding position have no problem with this and are full of praise for the cradle's solid performance whilst riding on the roughest of lanes. I find that the cradle looks intrusive on my bars and prefer the original Garmin cycle mount, packed with insulation tape to prevent it rattling.

Details: from www.gpsw.co.uk, 020 8893 9393

BOXIT 5.1 WATERPROOF MOBILE PHONE CASE

£18.99

Reviewed by CTC Senior Cycle Development Officer Dan Cook

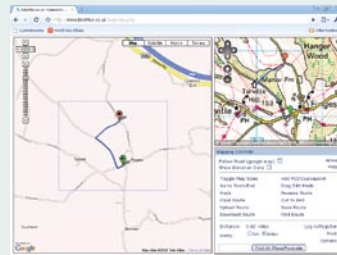
Let's face it: it rains. Quite hard sometimes, as I found when riding down thunderstorm-filled tracks that had turned into rivers this year. It doesn't matter so much when we get wet, but what about your mobile phone or PDA, which might have cost hundreds of pounds and which might also be your navigation device? The Boxit case is waterproof, resisting full immersion for up to a minute, and dustproof. It's also shock resistant. The case is firm yet flexible, with a clip-over lid. You can still talk on the mobile and operate most keypads while the phone is inside. CTC Mountain Bike Leader Award tutors have been using Boxits for over a year, including on Scotland's wet west coast. Internal dimensions are 118x56x28mm. There's a taller lid available for long phones, although clamshell phones, PDAs and those with screen-based operation will likely be unusable while protected. A handlebar mount (£8.99), neck strap (£6.99) and arm strap (£6.99) are also available.

Details: distributed in the UK by ULC, www.ulc.co.uk, 01189 262 491



BIKEHIKE.CO.UK £FREE

Reviewed by CTC member Dr Harjinder S Obhi



This is a superb browser-based application for creating routes and viewing elevation profiles. It utilises simultaneous Google Maps and Ordnance Survey displays, including satellite views. Some of the features are indispensable for cycling and running activities. A tick-box option forces routes to follow roads; switching this off enables off-road paths to be drawn. A mouse click switches from OS map to elevation profile. Click on the profile – for example, the top of a climb – and an arrow appears on the map showing the location. Garmin and other GPS users can upload routes to the system. Routes can be saved, printed and shared – a helpful soul had already uploaded an audax route that I was interested in. It's UK only but free of charge, donations optional. Do not be put off by the basic looking homepage. Click on Course Creator and use the Help page to explore this incredibly useful application.

Details: www.bikehike.co.uk

THE ULTIMATE UK CYCLE ROUTE PLANNER £7.95

Reviewed by Mark Waters of CTC's Touring Department

Sometimes a book (or in this case a map) comes along and you kick yourself for not thinking of the idea yourself. It's such an obvious one and such an excellent one, as Richard Peace's publishing house's name suggests. The double-sided map, which is on a scale of 1" to 10 miles, states that it depicts 16,500-plus miles of signed leisure routes. It also depicts railway lines, which unfortunately stand out rather better than some of the cycle routes. This is a minor niggle to what is an ideal map for planning cycle trips when you would rather use signed cycle routes. Used in conjunction with CTC's Cycle a-Way, which tells you where you can obtain further information on every designated cycle route in the country, it's a very useful tool. It looks good on the wall as well.

Details: from Excellent Books, ISBN 978-1-901464-21-4, www.excellentbooks.co.uk, 01900 825 462



Shop window

New products that have caught our eye.

ISLABIKES LUATH 24 £349.99

Isla Rowntree's drop-bar Luath is now out in a 24-inch (507) wheel size for children aged eight or so and as a larger Luath 700 (£449.99) for lankier 13-14 year olds. All sizes have cantilever brakes and clearance and fittings for mudguards and a rear rack. Out: now.

www.islabikes.co.uk, 01746 710835



TRUVATIV HAMMERSCHMIDT £572.99

On display at bike shows last autumn, the HammerSchmidt should be on some stock 2010 bikes. It's a two-speed epicyclic gear built into the crankset, giving ratios of 1:1 and 1:1.6, which is roughly equivalent to a 22/36 chainset but with the benefit of a constant chainline. It's designed for mountain bikes and there's been some gushing at its novelty in the MTB press, where the similarity to the much cheaper Schlumpf Speed Drive (£275, upshift of 1:1.65 – or a downshift of 2.5:1 for the alternative Mountain Drive) has been overlooked. Time will tell if it'll cope with being caked with front wheel spray in soggy Britain. Out: now. www.sram.com



SRAM XX £TBA

10-speed for mountain bikes has arrived, whether you want it or not, in the form of Sram's new 2x10 race groupset, XX. Chain life remains to be seen, but won't be a major concern for its intended users – cross-country racers – who will be happy that it's about 15% lighter than Shimano XTR. Chainring options are: 26/39, 28/42 or 30/45 – a bit high for recreational mountain biking but potentially useful for road touring, especially with the groupset's 11-36T cassette. Out: imminently. www.sram.com



THE PAPER BICYCLE £700+

We've seen prototypes of the Paper Bicycle before. The finished article was at York Cycle Show. It's a utility bike with a step-through frame and a structural chaincase, whose outer panel is designed to carry a logo. Cables to the hub gear (3 or 8-speed) and drum brakes run through the frame. Out: now. www.paper-bicycle.com, 01560 600 369



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