

Gear up!

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

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EXPOSURE FLARE £40

Reviewed by Editor Dan Joyce

Looking like an all-in-one Exposure Red Eye, the new Flare is another one that's so bright you can't miss it in daylight, and that will leave spots before your eyes if you look right at it.

It emits a claimed 75 lumens from its single P4-series LED. Some of that is visible from the side, as the transparent head is 10mm deep. Rotating the head turns the light off and on and toggles between constant and flashing. It should last nine hours on constant or 22 flashing. That's with the disposable Li-Ion battery it comes with. It will run off a rechargeable too – three hours constant or eight flashing – but it uses a stubby CR123A battery, so you'll need a charger that will accommodate

that. (Exposure's optional extra Spark Charger Pack comprises a charger and two CR123A rechargeable batteries and costs £20.)

The Flare is waterproof as it's completely sealed except for the screw-off head – and that's protected by an O-ring. It fits to your bike via a bracket that straps to your seatpost (any size) with a silicone gripper, pointing backwards like a stubby torch. While short (70mm) and light (45g), I found it could get knocked off alignment by riding over bumps. I'd like a more solid screw-threaded seatpost bracket with an adjustable angle, and maybe options to fit it to a seatstay or saddle rails.

It's a great little light nonetheless, eclipsed in brightness only by the likes of the expensive Dinnotte 400R (available to import from dinnotttelighting.com).

Details: exposurelights.com

LIGHT & MOTION VIS180 £99.99

Reviewed by Technical Editor Chris Juden

Light & Motion's Vis 180 is one of the brightest things you can put on the back of a bike. It's also very nicely designed and made, in Monterey California, which I mention to lessen the shock of the price. A hundred quid for just a rear lamp!? But it is extraordinarily bright. The single red LED claims to output 35 lumens in total, which computes to an intensity of 19 candela assuming a uniform 90° spread, whereas it's likely to be brighter in the middle. Car rearlamps by comparison are not allowed to exceed 12cd. The Vis180 even outshines the foglamps on my car, but it is an old car.

Side visibility is provided by a flashing amber LED, whilst the main red has high and low pulsating modes in addition to steady high. A fourth 'pace line' mode turns off the red friendly fire and runs only the amber sidelight.

An integral Li-Ion battery, recharged by

mini-USB lead from most phone chargers or any computer, lasts four hours in steady mode or eight in low pulse. And when that runs out there's a retro-reflective surface of about 18cm². The lamp has a die-cast alloy body, measures 80×25×30mm (H×W×D) and weighs 104g including bracket – which is really neat. A pivoting tang on the back of the lamp engages securely from above or below, with small plastic block that can be strapped to either seatpost or seatstay, or even a carrier leg. The tang locks at any suitable angle and will not release accidentally.

To conclude: this is a great little rear lamp for wealthy folks who cycle on very scary roads and are not too fussed about legal niceties.

Details: madison.co.uk,
tel: 0208 385 3385





VAVERT MEMORY FOAM COMFORT SADDLE £27.99

Reviewed by bike designer & engineer Mike Burrows

Saddles are a perennial (or perineal!) item for reinvention and 'improvement'. Hence materials as diverse as carbon fibre, cow hide and nylon, to which we can add air bags, foam or jelly! And now memory foam.

Most often found in bedding, memory foam is great in ¼-inch thick sheets for upholstering laid back bikes (i.e. recumbents) thanks to its ability to absorb vibration and shocks. Now upright cyclists can try it too. I've been using two Vavert saddles: the touring style one pictured and the kind of fat saddle I would not normally touch with a barge pole let alone my backside.

For commuting five miles each way, the latter is the best big saddle I have ever ridden. I wouldn't do 50 miles on it, but for those who don't get on with traditional saddles and don't do a lot of miles, it could be ideal. I look forward to grips, tape and even mitts using slow memory foam.

Slow memory foam works by damping. That is, absorbing energy. And you don't need three guesses to work out where that energy comes from. Every time you push down on the pedals you will rise slightly in the saddle and if the saddle does not spring back quickly, which by definition it will not, some energy will be lost; even the spring back effect on a bumpy road will be reduced. But the amount of energy that your body would normally have to absorb in this situation is also reduced so on balance you should come out ahead.

Details: fisheroutdoor.co.uk



Nikwax Tech-Wash & Wash-In Direct

£8 each (300ml)

Reviewed by Bike Club Development Officer Gavin Wood

Nikwax offer a comprehensive range of cleaning and weatherproofing products for your jackets, boots, etc. The products use a simple colour-coding system: green for cleaning products and purple for re-proofing. Their principal re-proofing product comes in two types, wash-in and spray-on. A 300ml bottle of either should treat about three garments. I washed three jackets: two Gore-Tex and one soft-shell using Tech-Wash as recommended. I then re-proofed the Gore-Tex using the Wash-In Direct and I used the Spray-On Direct on the soft-shell. All the products have worked well and my jackets are now fully weatherproof again, just in time for those wet off-season rides.

Details: nikwax.com

SLICKS SUIT25 BACKPACK £126

Reviewed by Editor Dan Joyce



How do you commute by bike with a suit, shirt, shoes and laptop, and still look presentable on arrival? This compartmentalised 25-litre backpack is one answer.

There are others, like leaving clothes at work and taking in a shirt each day, or cycling slowly in work clothes on a suitable bike. Panniers that don't taper can work too: I use a Carradice Brompton bag, with suit folded and rolled and the bagged shoes

at the bottom. A briefcase pannier should also do the job.

The Slicks Suit25 is primarily for *pannierless* commuters. Its unique feature is a foldout suit bag, complete with coat-hanger. There are four stiffened panels, so that the suit bag can be folded in half, then in half again. Then it's clipped in place in the backpack. In the same main compartment, there's a mesh pocket for a folded shirt. There's also a padded laptop pocket, plus an outer pocket for shoes and some smaller organiser pockets. The backpack straps can be tucked behind the bag's back panel off the bike; a handle on the 'side' means you can then carry the bag like a briefcase.

On the bike, the bag feels big but stable, thanks to waist and sternum straps, plus compression straps to stop the contents jumping about. The PU-coated nylon fabric is showerproof and there's a hidden rain-cover for wetter rides. There's even some reflective detailing.

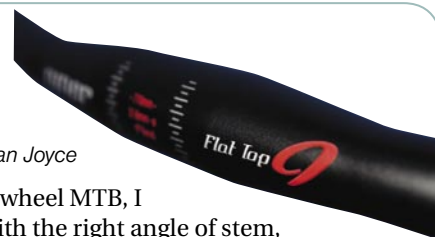
At journey's end my suit and shirt inevitably had a few creases but were uncrumpled; they looked at least as good as they did post-Brompton bag. I still feel the bike is a better place for the load, but if it must go on your back then this cleverly-designed pack is an effective solution.

Details: slicks.cc

NINER FLAT TOP HANDLEBAR

£49

Reviewed by Editor Dan Joyce



Even on a 26-inch wheel MTB, I prefer a flat bar. With the right angle of stem, you get the same grip height as riser bars but with small weight and stiffness advantages. On a 29er, a flat bar is key to keeping the front end low. At 710mm across, with trim marks for cutting, this one is very wide for a flat bar. A wider bar gives more steering leverage for technical riding, and helps overcome the extra inertia that a bigger, heavier wheel always has *and* the increased trail that bigger-wheeled bikes tend to have. I like it: it's fairly light (~260g), it's stiff (due to its 31.8mm diameter), and the 9-degree sweep is comfy on the grips and with bar ends.

Details: jungleproducts.co.uk



ELECTRON TERRA-2 HEADLIGHT SET £99.99

Reviewed by Technical Editor Chris Juden

The Electron Terra 2 gives you two 120 lumen LED lights, wide plus spot, and a Li-Ion battery that'll run them both on high power for five hours (or one on low for up to 40), complete with charger, for a very reasonable price.

You can easily pay twice as much for lighting like this, but there's nothing shoddy about the Electron system. Finned alloy housings keep the LEDs cool, lateral lenses provide side conspicuity, switches are positive and the battery connection – often a weakness in cheap lights – is secure. At 360g, neither is this a heavy piece of kit. Each light unit simply clamps to the handlebar (thin bars will need more packing) can be swivelled up to 15° sideways and has its own switch with high, low and flashing modes. The battery can easily be strapped to the stem or any convenient part of the frame up to 1.5m away from the handlebar.

Sure there are brighter lights, but I don't think many people should need them. The spot alone seemed perfectly adequate for road use, should last all night if switched to low part of the time and is available as the Terra 1 system for £75. Why pay more?

Details: madison.co.uk, 0208 385 3385.

HOPE VISION ONE LED LIGHT £90

Reviewed by CTC member Tim Hogan

I bought this 240-lumen light two years ago replace a Light & Motion Vega that had expired. I'd anticipated using this one as a back up, but it turned out to give a much better and brighter beam than the old Vega. It's excellent as a commuter light (I ride about ten miles on unlit country roads) and even quite useful for night riding in the woods!

The beam is quite narrow, so I wouldn't recommend it on its own except on trails or roads you're familiar with. Off-road I also use a cheapo head torch, which fills in the gaps nicely. A reasonable back up unit is a good idea, since (the one con) this little chap doesn't warn you when he's running low! Having

said that, I get about two hours on full power from one set of 2500mAh NiMh batteries.

The other really good thing is, this uses standard AAs so it's easy to carry spares. Being self contained with no separate battery box or trailing cables, it's a breeze to swap between bikes too. It comes with a handlebar mount which enables you to adjust both X and Y axis, so you can bias the kerb or white line if you choose. Also supplied is a Velcro strap for helmet use, although if I were going down that route I think I'd buy the newer 'Adventure' version which has a separate battery box and lamp head. But all in all, a good value light.

Details: hopetech.com



Continental Top Contact £44.99

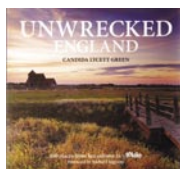
Reviewed by Technical Editor Chris Juden

Continental say their Top Contact picks up where Top Touring of old left off. I took a pair sized 700x28C on tour in the Alps. I was surprised to find them slightly heavier than the Top Tourings but weight weenies have the option of a Kevlar-beaded folding version in all five 700C sizes from 28 to 47mm, plus 26x1.75. The new tyre is guaranteed puncture-free for a year thanks to two layers of Vectran under the tread and utilises the latest polymers to minimise drag and maximise grip, whereas the Original simply had very hard rubber that sometimes slipped in the wet. I found the Top Contacts rolled easily and gripped well, although their separate tread blocks squealed in corners – like the Top Touring 2000. On hairpin descents I'd rather have the Original's wrap-around tread, but in most other conditions the new Top Contact provides an excellent combination of speed and grip. Top quality means a high price, but that includes an innertube and nothing does more to improve a bike than really good tyres.

Details: conti-tyres.co.uk

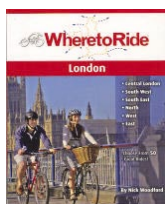


Cycle shorts



Unwrecked England
£25 HARDBACK
£14.99 PAPERBACK
Reviewed by
Chris Juden

Whilst I don't agree that most of England is wrecked, Candida Lycett Green has found some of my favourite places – and a lot of other interesting places for a bike ride. Each of the 100 locations is described by a page of evocative prose and a lovely photo. Just the thing for a cycle-tourist's stocking, to inspire plans for the year ahead. To order with free P&P, call 01795 592893 quoting 'CTC'



Where to Ride London
£14.99
Reviewed by
Adam Coffman
This is the fourth book/ebook

about leisure cycling in London I've seen this year. The 'Where to Ride' series is popular in Australia and the USA and the lack of local knowledge shows in photo captions. Yet the 50 illustrated routes offer something for everyone and the book is well put together – ring bound, with a card cover that can be folded back on itself. wheretoridelondon.co.uk



Ultimate Guide to Bicycle Maintenance
£9.99
Reviewed by
Dan Joyce

I don't know about 'ultimate', but this 184p paperback is a decent guide with clear instructions and excellent photography. Coverage of modern road and mountain bikes is good, but it has nothing on e.g. tourers, town bikes, non-derailleur drivetrains, cantilever brakes, or any accessories. It's perfect bound so doesn't lie flat. ISBN 1907232362, magbooks.com

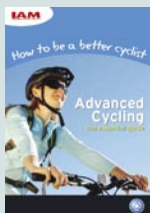


CARRADICE LOWSADDLE LONGFLAP SADDLEBAG & BAGMAN QUICK RELEASE SPORT
£54.95 & £37.95

Reviewed by CTC Volunteer
Development Officer Grace Wong

Need a saddlebag large enough for a commute but compact enough to fit under the saddle on a small-sized frame with limited saddle-to-wheel clearance? A Lowsaddle Longflap bag and Bagman Quick Release Sport is the answer. I'm overjoyed with sweaty-backpack-free rides! The cotton duck waterproof fabric and leather straps are strong and durable and capacity is a roomy 15L. The front flap extends for larger loads, which are drawcorded internally. Side pockets carry tools etc. The quick release Bagman holds the bag securely above the wheel. While the bag can sometimes sag a little through the open loop, it's nothing a rigid plastic insert hasn't resolved. Ideal for commutes, long rides and light touring.

Details: carradice.co.uk, 01282 615886



How to be a better cyclist £9.99
Reviewed by CTC Councillor & Bikeability trainer Arthur Spurr

If you need to brush up your skills for cycling in traffic John Franklin's book for the Institute of Advanced Motorists will enable you to do so. The writing is accessible and is supported by good photographs and diagrams. Everything that's essential for cyclists to consider is here skillfully communicated. My only regret is that it misses the opportunity to speak to motorists and address their behaviour relating to cyclists. Hopefully that's the next IAM publication?

Details: 94 pages, iam.org.uk



TUDOR SPORTS COOLMAX SOCKS £7.99

Reviewed by Editor Dan Joyce

These sports socks are designed for cycling, having a supported arch and a flat toe seam. They're made from a breathable Coolmax/polyamide mix. Winter warmth isn't up there with dearer Merino wool socks, but they're fairly snug, don't get clammy, and they're comfortable. The fluo yellow ones even help daytime visibility.

Details: black or yellow, sizes M (6-8) or L (9-11), tudorsports.co.uk

MADISON TEMPEST WATERPROOF SHORTS
£49.99

Reviewed by Editor Dan Joyce

Not shorts but *overshorts*, these are most comfortable on top of lycra and will fit over close-cut MTB baggies. They don't ride down and even the non-3/4 ones are long in the leg. Although rainproof, their real benefit is keeping wheel-spray off you on cold, wet rides. A pity one of the waist press-studs fell off on day one.

Details: size S-XXL, madison.co.uk

