

GROUP TEST

CASUAL SHOES

Shoes for transport cycling or touring have additional criteria: ease of walking and unobtrusive looks. **Seamus Kelly** tests four pairs

CLIPLESS PEDALS are fine for transport or touring, but you probably don't want garish shoes that look like something from the professional peloton or protruding cleats that make you walk like a duck. You want shoes you can walk in; shoes that can be worn at work, around town, or while exploring on foot on tour without compromising comfort or appearance. And they still need to be comfortable on the bike too.

That means a compromise between bike use, where you want a rigid sole to transfer power and prevent pressure points when pedalling, and off-bike use, where you want flexibility, grip, and foot support for walking. Casual cycling shoes strike a reasonable balance between the two. They give the clipless-pedal-using transport cyclist the same get-on-and-go convenience of flat pedals, and give the touring cyclist the liberty to leave that spare pair of shoes at home.

CLEAT

All of these shoes are designed for recessed two-bolt cleats, such as Shimano's SPD. You can also use Time Atac, Crank Brothers, and Speedplay Frog cleats. On many casual shoes, you cut away part of the sole to permanently expose the cleat fittings. The Quoc Pham and Giro shoes have removable inserts that can be reattached.

SOLE

This needs to be stiff enough around the cleat for comfortable pedalling but flexible enough that you don't walk like a Thunderbird puppet. The sole needs to be fairly deep so that the cleat doesn't sit proud, which will cause wear and may damage flooring, but (if you use pedals with a surrounding cage or platform) not so thick that it's a struggle to engage or disengage the cleat.

FASTENING

Laces allow for lots of adjustment for comfort and fit. They also look normal off the bike. However, laces can get grimy on exposed chains or snag on chainring teeth (a disaster on fixed wheel). Apart from the Exustar Stelvios, all these shoes have elasticated loops to secure the laces.

UPPER

Trainer-style shoes with fabric sections are great in dry weather but offer relatively little rain or spray resistance when it's wet. While water repellent coatings help, overshoes or waterproof socks will keep your feet drier. Leather and faux-leather shoes stand up to rain and showers better.

FIT

Try before you buy if possible. Casual cycling shoes are less likely to have the narrow widths of some racing shoes, which can squash broad North European feet, but one manufacturer's size 43 can be different from another's. Note that you can buy separate insoles if, for example, you need more arch support.



YOUR THOUGHTS?

WRITE TO US: Cycle Letters, CTC, Parklands, Railton Road, Guildford GU2 9JX

EMAIL US:
cycleletters@ctc.org.uk

JOIN IN ONLINE:
forum.ctc.org.uk



1

1) EXUSTAR STELVIO 705

£79.99 exustar.co.uk

A CTC favourite that we've enthused about before, Stelvios have traditional leather uppers with extra strengthening panels, and a sporty but unobtrusive look. Leather with a PU-coating resists both cold and wet weather well; I was comfortable riding these shoes at 5°C without overshoes. A little stiffness around the Achilles area softened nicely after the first day, as I'd expect from good leather shoes. On flat pedals, the soles felt suitably rigid and gripped securely. They worked equally well with cleats. Fitting cleats was slightly trickier than for the other shoes, taking a few minutes' work with a craft knife and an Allen key. The soles were a little rigid for walking, causing some rubbing around the heel that reduced as the leather became more compliant. Weight: 847g (size 43). Sizes: 38-48,

● **Excellent shoes for commuting or touring that includes short spells of walking. Could be worn at work**



2

2) GIRO RUMBLE VR

£69.99 zyro.co.uk

The newly-released 2015 version of the Rumble is a trainer-style shoe with a Vibram sole. The shoes are quite light and breathable: great for summer but a bit too cool for winter cycling. Grip on flat pedals was good, and with some flex in the forefoot area, the pedals can be felt through the sole. Riding for an hour or so when commuting, this was not an issue but I wouldn't choose this style of shoe for long and hilly rides. Fitting cleats was very easy, and once fitted the cleats engaged easily. The flexibility at the forefoot and cushioning at the heel made these shoes both comfortable and grippy off the bike. The reasonable tread pattern means they're good for slightly rougher paths too. Weight: 732g (size 43). Sizes 41-47

● **Decent casual sports shoes off the bike. Better suited to shorter journeys on the bike**



3

3) QUOC PHAM URBANITE LOW TOP

£169 quocpham.com

These shoes are handmade in leather, with traditional tops and a fairly heavy rubber outsole. They were very comfortable from the start, and looked good on or off the bike. On flat pedals, they were rigid enough for climbing and didn't slip. Cleats were easily added by unbolting the rubber covers to reveal the SPD fittings. The cleats fitted deeper in the soles than most but engaged effectively even on the tricky SPD/platform pedals on my touring bike. Used with cleats, the shoes isolated the soles of the feet from the pedals and they were comfortable even for long rides. When walking, the rigid soles felt similar to lightweight walking shoes, and provided excellent grip on wet pavements. They have reflective panels on the heels, for cycling conspicuity at night. Weight 953g (size 43), Sizes: 41-47.

● **Expensive but superbly comfortable: wearing them all day at work, I'd forget they were cycling shoes**



4

4) SPECIALIZED CADET

£69.99 specialized.co.uk

The Cadets are lightweight trainer-style shoes with a fairly flexible forefoot and cushioned heel, making them comfortable for walking. The soles provided good grip on wet pavements, and the tread pattern was effective on rougher paths. Without cleats, the shoes gripped reasonably well on flat pedals, but the pedals could be felt through the soles. That was not improved when using cleats, but they engaged pedals with ease. Being lightweight and with good air flow, they didn't get sweaty when worn all day like some trainers can, but they didn't offer much protection from cold or wet weather. They have reflective panels on the heels. The women's version of this shoe, the Cadette, comes in sizes 35-43. Weight 675g (size 43). Sizes 38-50.

● **Good for short trips by bike, and comfortable and versatile off the bike**