

# GEAR UP

Components, kit, and books reviewed by specialist journalists and CTC staff.

**This issue:** A winter top, big cassette, & more

## REVIEW REQUESTS

Is there a product that you would like Cycle to review? Let us know and we'll consider it.

**WRITE TO:** Gear Up,  
PO Box 313, Scarborough,  
YO12 6WZ

**EMAIL:** [editor@ctc.org.uk](mailto:editor@ctc.org.uk)



- PROS**
- + Snug, stretch fit
  - + Effective UK weather protection
- CONS**
- Cool-wash only

**Lusso**

## AQUA REPEL **£129.99**

[lusso.bike](http://lusso.bike)

A **STRETCHY SOFTSHELL** rather than crinkly hardshell, the Lusso Aqua Repel blurs the line between jersey and jacket. It looks and feels like a winter cycling jersey with a full-length front zip but it's much more weatherproof. It's made from Windtex Storm Shield Fabric, which as well as being windproof is waterproof to 10,000mm. That means the fabric will support a 10,000mm column of water in a 1x1in tube before it leaks through. In practice, especially given that the seams are stitched, it's *waterproof enough* in light to moderate rain. I got rather damp when I wore it for a two-hour ride in persistent heavy rain, but even then I was reasonably comfortable.

I wore the Aqua Repel over a long-sleeve base layer, adding a gilet in temperatures below 5 or 6 degrees. For while it is windproof, it is also thin; the small size is 330g and will just about stuff into another jersey's pocket. It's not as warm as my Endura Premium Windtex jacket, which is thicker and heavier. But it resists rain better and you can ride harder in it without overheating. I'd be happy using it in spring or autumn too.

I picked the small size, being borderline between small and medium. The close-cut fit is excellent. It didn't ride up and didn't feel

constricting. The four-way stretch of the material means it hugs the body without bunching. I could've worn another jacket over the top, if I'd needed to, though would have struggled to get more than a baselayer underneath.

There are no dangling drawcords or velcro tabs. Cuffs and collar are long and close to keep out draughts, while the long-at-the-rear hem is elasticated. Breathable panels under the arms remove the need for zipped vents. There are three generous rear pockets, one with a zipped pocket in its outer face. Each pocket has a strip of mesh across the bottom, presumably to stop it filling up with water in heavy rain. There's a broad reflective stripe across the centre pocket and reflective details on the shoulders and arms.

The sky-blue colour looks good and contrasts nicely against any UK background, including our grey skies; it's also available in ninja black. Sizes are S-XXL. The women's equivalent, the Layla Aqua Repel, is available in S-XL in blue only.

The Lusso Aqua Repel became my first-choice winter jacket for club rides on road and off. It's probably the most expensive jacket that I would buy with my own money.

*Dan Joyce*



## Other options



### 1) CASTELLI GABBA 2 LONG SLEEVE **£165**

The latest version of the jacket that popularised the close-fitting winter softshell. It's available in more colour options but is £35 dearer. [castelli-cycling.com](http://castelli-cycling.com)



### 2) ALTURA VARIUM **£149.99**

According to the numbers, the fabric is more breathable than the Aqua Repel's but not as waterproof. The reflective detailing is good. [altura.co.uk](http://altura.co.uk)

» **Praxis Works**

# WIDE RANGE CASSETTE

£99.99

[upgradebikes.co.uk](http://upgradebikes.co.uk)

**TWENTY-TWO INCHES** in old money: that's currently the size of the bottom gear ratio on my 650B all-roads bike, despite the fact that it is running a bog-standard 50-34 'compact' double road chainset. This remarkably accommodating gear has been made possible by the fitment of a Praxis Works wide-ratio 10-speed MTB cassette – and by 'wide', Praxis means really wide.

Running 11 to 40 teeth, the cassette can be used to replace a 10-speed 11-36 original and is primarily aimed at mountain bikers keen to sample the simple delights of the increasingly popular single or double chainring formats, without forking out for an 11-speed transmission. A typical set-up might combine the cassette with a 34T single chainring to give ratios, depending on wheel size, of 80in through 22in. The cassette requires a Sram or Shimano long- or mid-cage 10-speed rear mech, ideally with an anti-chainslap clutch to prevent derailment if there's no front mech.

Very low gears are, of course, potentially of interest to touring and leisure cyclists too, and the ready availability of a 10-speed cassette with a 40T largest sprocket makes it possible to acquire them without having to resort to a



very small chainring. This is a good idea: bigger sprocket combinations tend to wear the chain more slowly, and there's less likelihood of breaking the chain – the smaller the ring, the greater the chain tension for a given force applied at the pedal. This is also why small chainrings can give a 'spongy' feel to the transmission.

Against this, there's a small weight penalty to having the larger rings and a longer chain to wrap them. But then, road chainsets with 34T inner rings are almost ubiquitous today; the Praxis cassette offers the option of that wonderfully low bottom gear without having to hunt around for an unusual chainset and matching short-cage front mech.

The cassette is directly compatible with Shimano and Sram 10-speed hubs. Mine slid on to an XT hub without a murmur, the installation offering a chance to admire the excellent finish of the various parts. In heat-treated, hard-anodised 7075 aluminium, the two largest sprockets are riveted to an aluminium spider. The remainder are steel, the largest three again sitting on a spider. The sprockets run 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 24, 28, 34, 40T for a nice, even spread of ratios. Weighing 320g, the cassette feels lighter than it looks and compares well with an 11-36 Deore XT 10-speed cassette.

Compatible with a 10-speed Shimano MTB rear mech it may well be, but the Praxis cassette's 40T sprocket is too big for the 9-speed XT model I have been using with 10-speed road shifters, the lower teeth fouling the mech's upper jockey wheel. So I pressed into action the Lindarets x Wolf Tooth RoadLink tested in Cycle Dec 2015/Jan 2016. There was no need to lengthen the chain but the cassette sat a little further inboard than the Shimano model it replaced, necessitating a quick tweak of the 'low' throw screw and indexing adjuster.

In use, shifting is crisp and trouble-free, the one noticeable difference from the previous 11-34T cassette being that ludicrously low bottom gear. Ludicrous, that is, until I try riding up the extremely steep hill behind my house.

*Richard Hallett*



**PROS**

- + Very low gearing easily installed
- + Excellent shifting performance

**CONS**

- 10-speed MTB rear mech usually required

## Other options



**1) MIDDLEBURN INCY 110/58 SPIDER £61.99**

Fits Middleburn cranks and takes inner chainring as small as 22T. See Cycle April/May 2014 for review. [middleburn.co.uk](http://middleburn.co.uk), available from [sjscycles.co.uk](http://sjscycles.co.uk)



**2) HOPE 40T-REX EXPANDER SPROCKET £60**

Inexpensive route to a massive rear sprocket but the 10-speed cassette must lose one from the middle (17T recommended) to make way. [hopetech.com](http://hopetech.com)



## Selle Italia DIVA GEL FLOW SADDLE

£79.99

[chickencycles.co.uk](http://chickencycles.co.uk)

SOMEBODY ONCE wrote an entertaining blog pointing out that women-specific cycling products all tended to be called something like Diva (OED definition: 'a great woman singer or a prima donna'). I'm not quite sure the relevance this has to cycling but some saddles might not have you singing arias à la Katherine Jenkins. This one, however, is extremely comfortable, even when I used it for a fairly long mountain bike ride across flattish terrain, meaning that I didn't change my sitting position much.

But I'm lucky: I don't generally have a problem in that area, except for one memorable ride on the back of a tandem with the hardest saddle in existence! Saddles are very much a question of horses for courses. It's not just the width of the saddle needing to match your 'sit bones', but the shape of the top, the presence and size of any cutouts or

channels, the upper material itself, and the amount and type of any padding. In short, what works well for one rider might have another in pain after just a few miles.

The Diva comes in black with pink and white trim or white with a black and pink trim. The 152mm-wide shell is made partly from a carbon composite, and the black version I tested is topped with a breathable leather with gel inserts. The rails are manganese steel tubing. The centre of the saddle has a cut-out section, so it's not only lighter (255g) but has fewer pressure points. While the cutout might prevent trouser seams from pressing, I'm not sure I would use this saddle for everyday riding; I have a much wider, more comfortable one for that. But for long-distance road or off-road riding, it not only looks good but feels good too.

*Julie Rand*

- PROS**
- + Long-ride comfort
  - + Suits off-road use too
- CONS**
- A bit heavy for weight weenies?



### Other options



**1) SPECIALIZED WOMEN'S LITHIA COMP GEL £60**

Available in three widths – 143, 155, 168mm – all with the anatomic cutout. Saddle rails are hollow chrome-moly to keep weight down. [specialized.com](http://specialized.com)



**2) CHARGE LADLE £24.99**

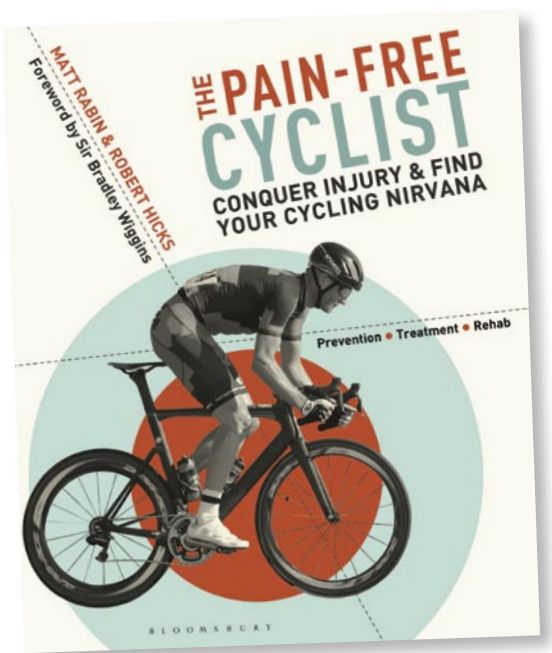
Budget saddle with chrome-moly rails and a synthetic leather top. Has a 'pressure relief channel' rather than a cutout. [chargebikes.com](http://chargebikes.com)



REVIEWS

# BOOKS

*A round-up of the latest cycling-related reads*



**Matt Rabin & Robert Hicks**  
**THE PAIN-FREE CYCLIST**  
 £16.99

[bloomsbury.com/uk/](http://bloomsbury.com/uk/)

MANY OF US who have cycled for years have picked up the odd niggling injury or issue along the way. This book looks at the most common ones experienced by cyclists, from back and neck pain through to road rash and fractures. It explores what they are, why you get them, and what you can do to avoid or recover from them. It's easy to digest as there are lots of illustrations and photos, mainly of pro riders; co-author Matt Rabin worked with a number of pro racers and teams, including Cannondale-Garmin.

This book isn't a training manual, nutrition guide or bike-fit manual, but it does cover these topics. There are good chapters on rehabilitation and how to get back to full health as quickly as possible. It's not a substitute for medical advice from a professional, but does provide more understanding about what's going on inside our bodies, and suggests ways to reduce or prevent injuries. This knowledge should be particularly helpful for new riders who have begun riding longer distances – novice sportive cyclists, for example.

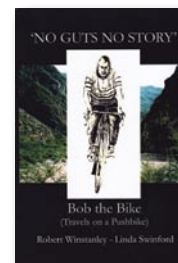
*Jon Sharpe*

**Robert Winstanley**  
**NO GUTS, NO STORY – BOB THE BIKE**

£11.99 (Kindle £2.99)

[arkpublishing.co.uk](http://arkpublishing.co.uk)

AGED 62 and grieving the premature death of his wife, Robert Winstanley cycled the world. Over four years, he rode 40,000 miles through 32 countries. Bob tells the tale of his travels through South America and Asia with honesty, humour, and simple but moving descriptive power. He coped with unbearable heat, freezing cold, deserts, mountains, ankle-deep mud and rock-strewn tracks. He was threatened and even had his bike stolen. But what shines through are the laughs and friendships Bob formed along the way. *No Buts, Some Story.* **Tony Upfold**



**Richard Peace**  
**THE ULTIMATE SCOTTISH C2C GUIDE** £11.95

[bikeridemaps.co.uk](http://bikeridemaps.co.uk)

AFTER CYCLING various Sustrans routes, I'd say there are several key requirements for a guide. It needs to include: type of bike needed; options for on and off-road sections; the severity of those sections; cheap accommodation details; and the tea rooms en route. This has all of those and more; the 'what to see and do' sections are also excellent. It's pocket-sized and spiral-bound, and it includes easy-to-read route maps of town centres, as well as maps of the Southern Uplands countryside. It's shorter than some guides I have read but better for it. **Duncan Dollimore**

**Peter Cox**  
**CYCLING CULTURES** £13.99

[chester.ac.uk/university-press](http://chester.ac.uk/university-press)

Peter Cox has assembled a diverse collection of chapter-length essays that offers important insights into the wider social questions around cycling. Its stated aim is to provide 'a series of conversations at the bridging point of academia, activism and public policy'. It certainly delivers on this promise. I found three chapters particularly fascinating: one that confronts the problem of successive UK governments promising to promote cycling and failing to deliver; one on training immigrant women to cycle in the Netherlands; and one entitled Mapping Everyday Cycling in London. **Robin Lovelace**

