

GROUPTEST

CYCLING JOURNALIST **GUY KESTEVEN** REVIEWS LYCRA SHORTS

Bib shorts

Padded Lycra shorts improve cycling comfort – and none more so than bib shorts. Cycling journalist **Guy Kesteven** explains what to look for

IF YOU'VE NEVER tried bib shorts before, the difference in comfort compared to conventional 'stop at the waistband' shorts is revolutionary. Admittedly they're a bit more awkward if you need the loo but on the bike they're brilliant. No more fighting with a waistband that's okay stood up, but digs in when you're pedalling. No exposed lower back to get cold, cramped or sunburnt. No more sweaty belt line or drawstrings tickling your tum, just pressure-free extended coverage for supremely comfortable long-haul mileage. Don't think you need to display your delights like a ballet dancer either, as bibs work just as well under a pair of baggy shorts as they do on their own.

If you're already a convert, then the features and fit offered by the latest cost-effective bibs might still come as a surprise, as this quartet of high quality, low to mid price shorts proves.

1 Panels

Bib shorts used to be sold entirely on the number of panels they had in them. The more panels, the better the fit and the higher the cost. That's all changed now as more advanced, stretchier fabrics have taken the place of carefully fitted seams.

2 Fabric

You can spend a fortune on ultra light racing shorts that look more like a layer of paint than a piece of clothing. That's great for scorching days on athletic figures, but a few turns round the washing machine, life under baggy shorts or just a butty break on a dry stone wall can all spell disaster for these fragile fabrics. That's why we've concentrated on more durable and less disturbingly revealing shorts here.

3 Bibs

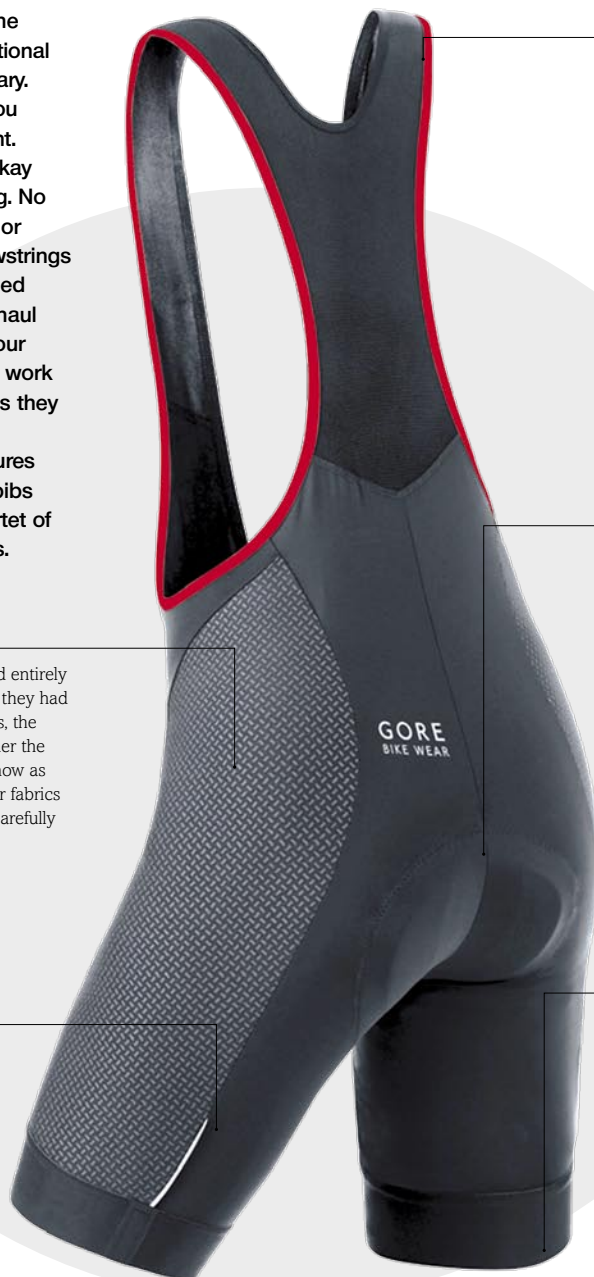
The shoulder straps are what makes a short a bib short, keeping it snug up your back and belly without the need for a waistband that can dig in. Basic shorts use an extension of the normal fabric. More expensive shorts use lighter weight, more breathable, less chafe prone materials. Check the strap length and how far up the front the short comes, to be sure it suits your shape and preferences.

4 Pad

Shorts pads have changed radically from the old chamois leather inserts of the down-tube shifter days. There's now a wide range of different thicknesses, shapes, coverages and synthetic fabric and padding technologies available claiming to offer nirvana for your nether regions. There are specific ladies' versions for wider-pelvis pleasure as well.

5 Hem

The leg end of the shorts has a big effect on fit and comfort. Luckily leg grippers are no longer the tight elastic bands or little rubber worms that used to peel off after a couple of washes. There's still a big range of leg lengths and leg ends though, ranging from a simple soft turn back to the latest sticky synthetic stretch fabrics.



Altura's Spark Baggy shorts are good for casual junior cycling. Altura also make kids' Lycra shorts

TAKE CARE

Because your bib shorts are worn next to the sweatiest bits of a cycling anatomy, you're going to have to wash them a lot. That means a bit of love at laundry time goes a long way. Firstly choose your powder/tablets etc. carefully. Using conditioner might make them smell nice and feel soft, but it clogs the fibres and pores that wick sweat away from your skin to evaporate. Lycra and other stretchy synthetic fabric can also be frayed and fluffed up by Velcro. If your bibs are sharing a wash with mitts, baggy shorts or anything else with Velcro on, make sure the tabs are fastened together.



GORE BIKE WEAR ALP-X BIBTIGHTS SHORT+ £129.99

Having tried top-end road race shorts from Assos, Castelli, Endura, Gore and RHH, it's the extra durability of these MTB-focused Gore shorts that makes them our premium pick. The 'ALP-X Man' pad is a slim but very comfortable '3D multi-density' seamless piece. It's performance oriented and impressively sweat- and chafe-free, even on long rough-stuff days. They dry quickly if they get wet too. They're just about wide enough to cope with the broadest saddles and most upright ride positions too. There's a 'Lady' version with different pad and a really clever twin zip system for what Gore call 'bio breaks'. Deep silicone keeps the legs in place, there are reflective details on the front and rear, and even a small change/key pocket on the thigh. A tall back and front keep out draughts and the mesh back and bibs are sweat-free. It's the tough textured outer panels that make them a great long term investment, though.

gorebikewear.co.uk

Great performance shorts with some nice touring details and good longevity.



LUSSO PRO GEL BIB SHORTS £59.99

Manchester bike clothing firm Lusso have always produced cost-effective favourites, and they've introduced the new Pro Gel short for this year. As you might expect, the Gel name comes from the thick gel foam under your buttocks and front centre, which is obvious when you're riding. This is great for those who like extra padding and the front part extends up a good way for modesty and mopping up too. If your stern is made of sterner stuff and you find big pads slightly nappyish, then have a look at the £49.99 Pro Core bibs with a slimmer pad. The 'Cooltech' fabric is light but durable enough to survive under baggy shorts. The seams use a contrast flatlock stitch for reduced chafe and extended life too. The very broad 'Coolmesh' bib straps wick sweat very effectively and reduce the chance of digging in and redness. Non-bib women's alternatives are available.

lusso-clothing.co.uk

Lightweight but well-padded shorts for those who prefer a plusher ride.



CORINNE DENNIS MEN'S DOUBLE PERFORMANCE BIB SHORTS £49.99

These Corinne Dennis DP bibs display the attention to detail that gives the brand a loyal following among CTC members. The seamless shaped pad is typical of the price point, but manages a good balance of padding and flexibility that works equally well on a battle-hardened Brooks or a broad gel saddle. Corinne adds a broad Terry towelling border from the buttocks forward to soak up sweat and provide a bit of modesty up front. This makes them feel slightly 'full' between the legs, but even on hot or rainy rides they never felt soggy. Despite initial fears, the double seams never rubbed even on my longest test days. Front and rear are high for support and warmth, while the mesh bib straps stop sweatiness over shoulders and back. Reflective stripes and an embroidered CD monogram are nice details for the price too. Non-bib women's alternatives are available.

corinneedennis.co.uk

Well-made shorts with Terry towelling comfort backup on an already good pad.



DHB AERON BIB SHORT £39.99

Wiggle clothing own-brand DHB features no fewer than four different bib shorts, as well as women's variants of each one. The Race LT pad is fairly broad, but the pre-moulded double density design meant it never felt overly bulky between the legs. DHB's revised slimmer fit is now good enough to stop it drooping and getting baggy if you're in and out of the saddle on a climb too. I did find sweat built up more noticeably than the other shorts though, so I'd recommend stumping up the extra £20 for the more ventilated and aptly named Aeron Race short if you're likely to be getting a head of steam on. Otherwise the 190g Italian 'Ceylon' fabric rides, washes and lasts well for the price and the lack of mesh on the bibs didn't prove a problem. Tighter overall fit for this year is worth noting if you were on the cusp of DHB sizing before. There are black, red and blue colour options too (as well as white for the really brave).

ctcshop.org.uk

Slightly sweaty, but otherwise a really good value pair of basic bibs.