



## THORN CLUB TOUR

The traditional touring bike remains one of the most versatile bikes around.

Chris Juden reviews one that's advertised as 'a benchmark'

**T**horn is the brand of St John Street Cycles in Bridgwater, Somerset, a bike shop that's grown into a nationally significant mail-order supplier of bikes and bits. From the beginning in 1983, proprietor Robin Thorn astutely concentrated on a market sector largely ignored by the major retail players, i.e. touring, and launched his own brand of touring cycles in 1995. The Thorn Club Tour is his take on the traditional British general-purpose touring bicycle, competing with the likes of the Dawes Galaxy or Galaxy-Plus.

Few of the major manufacturers nowadays offer any kind of tourer, and even fewer provide the optimum combination of road and mountain bike properties. Apart from Dawes and Ridgeback, most of Thorn's competitors are small businesses, assembling bikes locally rather than importing them ready-made from abroad. It's one reason touring bikes tend to be a bit more expensive.

### Frame & fork

One reason to choose a Thorn Club Tour is the greater choice of frame

sizes: ten in total, instead of the usual three or four. Thorn have developed a sizing system that may well provide a better fit between man and machine, especially when that man is not of average build – or actually a woman. In addition to different heights of frame, Thorn offer a choice of lengths. The seven short ones will fit most who desire the usual touring (a bit more upright than racing) position with dropped handlebars, whilst the three L sizes are mainly for use with flat bars or by people who want to be more stretched out. Unlike a more mass-produced brand (but like Hewitt, Byercycles or a custom builder) Thorn will fine-tune the fit for you by selecting different lengths of handlebar stem.

We tested the 533S with a 110mm stem, which suited both Mark and I okay even though we have quite different builds. I just put the saddle up a few cm to suit my long legs. With long arms to match, I didn't need to raise the bars, but Thorn give more adjustment than most in that department by providing several cm of spacers on a long fork steerer tube and a stem that's designed to be flipped. But given the choice, I'd have preferred a longer frame with a

(Right) The frame lacks a second set of eyelets so rack and mudguard must share. It's not ideal

(Right, below) The fork, by contrast, has all the frame fittings you could want

shorter stem, as the front centres on this one are rather short and I found the resulting overlap between my toes and the front mudguard slightly annoying. (I don't accept what Thorn write about short stems and shimmy.)

The frame is made abroad like most other brands, in Reynolds 725 tubing throughout (no cheap heavy stays here) and with a 531 fork – a material that has yet to be bettered for this safety-critical component.

All the usual fittings are provided, plus some unusual ones, with one rather glaring omission: single rear eyes rather than double, requiring the carrier and mudguard stays to share a screw. The usual 5mm size is borderline too small to support a luggage carrier anyway, but will do provided its leg is snug against the frame. To keep it there, with a mudguard stay on the same screw, requires a bit of bending of the stay. So it's easier to put the carrier on the outside, like I found it here, where a heavy load will exert more leverage upon and gradually loosen that screw. It's easily avoided with the double rear eyes that are nowadays a standard feature of touring bikes, some of which use a 6mm carrier fixing.

Am I nit-picking? Possibly,

## SECOND OPINION: Mark Waters



**I've always been a great admirer of Thorn bikes and at last I had a chance to ride one around the Isle of Thanet. They come with an excellent reputation and I was most impressed with the part of SJS's website which dealt with ordering a bike from them. I liked the degree of control any prospective buyer has over every aspect of his/her purchase. The bike itself is a sturdy little number in a rather unobtrusive green colour, guaranteed not to stand out in a crowd – this is probably what you want these days. Flashy it is not! For a touring cyclist, it had every bell and whistle you might want.**

**Riding it was an enjoyable experience. Touring in Kent (see page 36), I had the chance to try it out on a few tracks, but mainly I rode tarmac and concrete 'promenade' and it handled everything predictably and felt stable. The gears worked perfectly and it braked well. It could also have been made for me. For day rides, I'd prefer a lighter weight audax bike but I think if I only had one bike, this would make a good choice. It did seem expensive, however.**

but to market a bike as 'the benchmark, the ultimate' does invite a fine-tooth comb. The catalogue pictures show double eyes, and this omission is surprising compared to the thought that has gone into providing separate eyes for everything on the fork, including mudguard stays in a raised position so that safety-release fittings should not be needed.

When I rode the bike I was conscious of slightly floppy steering at low speed. It centred up nicely as we got under way and nipped easily around corners, so there's nothing to worry about. But I wasn't surprised to find, when I measured it, a shallow head angle and a generous amount of trail. Mark didn't notice anything unusual and it may only be because I've ridden so many different bikes that I did. This one might handle even better with a little more rake on the fork. That would also improve toe clearance.

### Wheels

I find tyres make more difference to the feel of a bike than anything



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## solidlights



The new Solidlights XB2 features brighter LEDs and an improved beam pattern for a light output of up to 340 Lumens. It's designed to get the most from modern hub dynamos and is perfect for commuting, touring or Audax riding.

Weighing just 158g and housed in a compact, super-tough aluminium alloy casing, it's versatile, too. There's a choice of fork-crown mounting or a convenient quick-release handlebar mount. Professionally-made cables are included for easy installation and a neat, robust finish. The XB2 will run from Schmidt and Shimano hub dynamos, and an optional Lithium Ion battery pack is available. It has a flashing mode for maximum visibility in town and includes a standlight to give you a few minutes of light even after the bike has stopped.

The unique Solidlights modular design means that existing 1203D and 1203DR owners can have their lights upgraded to XB2 specification for just £70. More light without changing any wiring or mounting brackets protects your investment in Solidlights.

The Solidlights XB2 is purpose-designed to light your way on unlit country roads so there's no need to compromise your riding after dark this season.

The XB2 is available direct from Solidlights for £160 plus postage and packing.

For more information see our website at

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email [info@solidlights.co.uk](mailto:info@solidlights.co.uk)

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else – even the frame – and Thorn fit really nice ones. These Panaracers are slightly vulnerable to sidewall cuts, but provided you don't encounter too many sharp-edged stones you'll enjoy a smooth and easy ride – like I did.

Apart from that, the wheels are a bit disappointing. Where I'd hope for a 17mm internal rim, better to fit the slightly slimmer touring tyres used by many UK tourists, there's the usual Mavic 19mm that's more at home with something wider. Plus I expect to find a more sophisticated build than plain gauge spokes in the wheels of the 'finest traditional 700C touring bike available anywhere, at any price'!

### Transmission

Mountain-bike gearing is the defining feature that separates a road touring bike from road bikes with touring pretensions. If you want dropped bars with that it's off menu. But Shimano still has a couple of 9-speed road groups from which a canny bike-chef can take the STI levers plus front mech, that'll compliment a mountain rear mech plus a trekking style (48T outer) chainset. Tiagra is the better one of those two groups, and goes just fine with Deore (or XT).

Thus the standard specification provides a low enough gear for most, but if you'd like to get under 20in: for a tenner Thorn will reduce the inner chainring to 22T. (17in would be possible with the new 12-36 cassette.)

### Brakes

Shimano Alivio are ordinary low-profile cantilevers. They're workable with STI levers, powerful even, but only when adjusted within a hair's breadth of the rim, a position from which it is impossible to release the cable when you want to get the wheel out. Thorn trumpet their provision of brake adjusters, which is well and

good, but without an easy means of releasing these brakes, the job is only half done. In addition to solving such niggles, I'd expect a benchmark tourer to fit the latest wide profile cantilevers that make better partners for STI levers.

### Steering & Seating

I like the San Marco Rolls saddle (your mileage may vary) and I think the handlebars are a reasonable shape of touring drop – not too deep or far forward. The seatpost is tall. I've already mentioned lots of spacers for stem adjustment.

### Accessories

All you get is a nice loud bell, excellent mudguards and a rear carrier that was the best design 25 years ago. The omission of pedals has a reason, but it seems a bit mean for the price not to include a bottle cage or two – and a pump to fit the unusually located pegs.

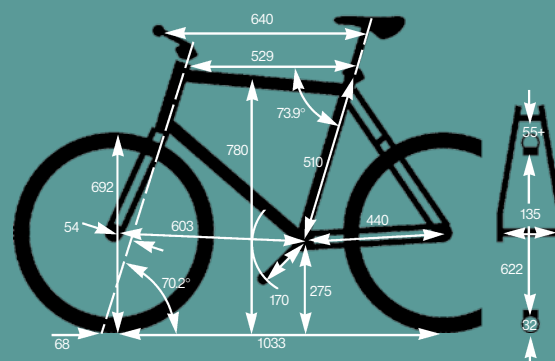
### Conclusion

The price seems expensive compared to other tourers recently reviewed, but a fallen £ and rising oil price have inflated the price of a nice bike by 30% or more in a year. Last March we tested a 2007 Dawes Super Galaxy for £1,000. The 2009 model is listed at £1,500! The Thorn is cheaper and, allowing for the missing pedals, weighs a pound less.

Although Thorn's description of their Club Tour is overblown, it is a nice bike and I think you're unlikely to regret buying one. Thorn's website and general trading procedures make the purchase of the bike you want a very safe and predictable process, which has to be worth quite a bit. It will arrive in a box, but comes almost fully assembled and perfectly adjusted.

## TECH SPEC

Bike	Thorn Club Tour
Price	£1299
Weight	12.6kg (without pedals)
Size	small/medium
Frame and Fork	Reynolds 725 steel frame with fittings for 3 bottles, pump on seat-stay and rear carrier (shared with mudguard). Reynolds 531 fork with fittings for custom low-load carrier, mudguard and dynamo.
Wheels	Panaracer Pasela Tourguard 32-622 tyre, Mavic A319 rim, 36x3 2.0mm pgss spokes, Shimano Deore q.r. hubs.
Transmission	Shimano Deore Hollowtech-II 170mm 26,36,48T chainset, HG53 chain, 11-32T 9spd cassette. Tiagra front & Deore rear mechs. Tiagra STI shifters. 27-speed, 22–119 inches.
Braking	Shimano Alivio low profile cantilever brakes, adjusters on hangers, no q.r.
Steering & Seating	Pro LT 42cm handlebar and 110mm ±6° stem. Selle San Marco Rolls saddle on Thorn 27.2 seatpost.
Accessories	SKS 47mm black Chromoplastic mudguards, Blackburn MTN rear carrier, Bell.
Contact	www.thorncycles.co.uk, 01278 441 500



## The Rivals

### Dawes Galaxy Plus

Same list price (but might be found cheaper) for a frame in not-quite-as-good 631 tubing and only three sizes, but a much better rear carrier. The otherwise nearly identical specification includes pedals and a bottle cage.

### Ridgeback World Panorama

Save £100 (or more), for a similar frame and level of componentry, plus additional accessories. It comes in six sizes, but with only a Cro-Mo fork and less attention to such details as brake adjusters.

### Cannondale Touring Classic

Combines mountain bike wheels with road gears and costs £180 more. It's not 'classic' in the traditional sense (steel frame, 27in wheels) nor the quality sense (Cannondale make a better Ultra model).

### Hewitt Cheviot SE

Pay an extra £100 for better components (generally Deore XT) on an even nicer frame (in my opinion) with a similar custom fitting service. The down-side is a far less inviting and informative website than Thorn's.

### Surly Longhaul Trucker

Mainly sold as a frame only in UK. It's only Cro-Mo, plus the fork (which has the same rake regardless of head angle), but it can be built up by your local shop using similar or better components than Thorn for about the same money.

### Kona Sutra

Combines luggage with disc brakes but not very well. Extended rack screws are used so that the carrier clears the calliper. The problem is that the screws will work loose, due to the leverage exerted by the loaded rack.