

Gear up!

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

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**CTC SHOP
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CATEYE EL020 HYBRID £49.99

Reviewed by Technical Editor Chris Juden

It's a neat idea (that's been tried before) to capture sunlight and store it for lighting our way at night. And thanks to the latest improvements in solar cell and LED efficiency it finally works! CatEye combine one of their opticube LED lamps with 6 cm² of solar panels, two batteries and some electrictrickery in a neat lamp 10cm long and weighing 124g. They call it the Hybrid because it'll run off either the integral solar-charged NiMH cell or a disposable AA alkaline.

You might think this lamp uses chemical power only when solar runs out, but it's not quite that clever. There's a switch on the side (not mentioned in the instructions), which must be slid toward a little dot for green power, away for grey. Turn on the lamp and its top

glows blue or red respectively.

For several months the sun doesn't rise more than halfway up the sky in Britain or Japan, which is perhaps why CatEye designed their little star-ship to beach on its side. By placing it thus on the office balcony and adjusting its position every hour or two, I harvested enough power from a sunny November day to light the first 35 minutes of my ride home. Just leaving it inside a south-facing window on a typical day yielded only 3½ minutes.

On flash mode it'll last three times longer, but I need a steady light for unlit lanes. And although the beam centre is only 400 candles, that's as bright as the Never-Readies we used to get by with 30 years ago, so I got by. One AA does what

two hulking D cells used to do: that's progress! This lamp is possibly bright enough to meet British Standards, but it's made for the world market so should really be used in Little Blighty only in addition to one that is so approved.

The Flex-Tight bracket really does hold tight by the way, but is so easy to fit and remove that theft may be a worry. Parking your bike in the sun will more likely lose the lamp than charge it.

So here's a lamp that will run on solar power, but unless you live in the tropics you'll have to work at it. It would be best for summertime tours: spending all day on your bars it should catch enough light for an evening ride to the pub. Details: www.cateye.com, available from Zyro dealers (www.zyro.co.uk)

KOOLSTOP DUAL COMPOUND BRAKE BLOCKS

FROM £7.50/PAIR

Reviewed by Technical Editor Chris Juden

Ask how to improve rim brakes in any forum and someone will suggest Koolstop salmon brake pads. These are optimised for severe, i.e. wet conditions, which is usually the problem. But by co-moulding with a chunk of dry-condition black compound Koolstop give us the Dual – and possibly the best of both worlds.

I used Koolstop Dual front and rear on my last two tours, which were mostly dry except for a Biblical downpour. I rode 45 hilly miles in that and the brakes still worked. In normal rain they worked almost as well as when dry. Another



advantage claimed for the Dual is less noise or judder, the harder-wearing black being positioned so as to maintain toe-in. The rear brake was smooth, but my Hewitt's judder-prone front cantilever showed little improvement.

Koolstop Dual come with integral threaded or plain studs, as replacement slip-in pads for mountain or road, or as shown with excellent alloy holders (double the pad-only price).

Details: www.koolstop.com. Threaded pads and replacement slip-in pads are available from www.ctcshop.com



CTS Chariot Cougar 2

£730

Reviewed by CTC members Ali and Darrell High

Our Chariot has done 2,000 miles over the last three years, in conditions from -2 degrees to over 30. It shows minimal wear. Construction is excellent with quality materials throughout. Connection to the bike is via a ball and socket joint fixed on the axle quick release, giving little effect on bike handling. Price is high but resale values are too.

This model has suspension, which is simple yet still helpful. There's enough space behind the seat(s) for tools, lunch, and essentials for the baby. A sun cover, rain cover and fly screen options allow rides in all weathers. This model can take two children at a squeeze, one in comfort. It can be converted into a 'jogger' style pushchair with an optional front wheel. Our daughter Heather enjoys rides in it she's comfortable, can sleep and has a choice of toys and books inside. Recommended.

Details: Weighs 12.5kg, packed size 110 x 60 x 50cm. Distributed by Amba Marketing, www.amba-marketing.com, tel: 01392 829903

The Hungry Cyclist by Tom Kevill-Davies

£7.99

Reviewed by Chris Juden

Tom Kevill-Davies knows his food and on his apparently random and rumbustious, hyper-fuelled pedalling progress through the Americas, he never misses another feast. His accounts of places and people are pretty good too. Great fun, it's the essence of cycle-touring. Read it and be awed by this man's guts! ISBN 978-0-00-727884-8, Collins



THE ECD SEAT £49.99

Reviewed by Dan Joyce

I say, I say, my saddle has no nose. Really, how does it ride? Well, it does remove any pressure from your perineum. But losing the nose also gives a very real sense of detachment from the saddle. Even after a week's use, I felt insecure taking a hand off the bars to signal. With both hands on



the bars it felt awkward but adequate, though no more comfortable than sit-bone-supporting saddles like the Rido or Selle Royal Ergogel.

www.ecdsports.com



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EXAL LX17 RIM £18

Reviewed by Technical Editor Chris Juden

Touring cyclists could always count on the Belgian Alesa factory for rims that answered their needs – until it closed. So it's fitting that this new company, founded in 2002 by ex-Alesa staff, should fill the touring gap.

The touring gap: where's that? It's the chasm in almost every other manufacturer's range between 13mm racing rims (for tyres up to 25mm) and 19mm trekking rims (good for 37mm plus). For a combination of easy speed on road with a bit of rough-stuff capability, tourists and commuters choose 700C tyres of 28 or 32mm

section. Those can go on something narrower or broader, but will not perform optimally unless fitted to a rim of 15 or 17mm internal width.

For some years there has been only one 17mm rim on the market (DRC's confusingly named ST19), so I was relieved to hear that Spa Cycles have found another: the Exal LX17. They sent me a pair to test: silver anodised and weighing only 565g each with 36 double-eyeleted holes.

A young friend was in need of new rims and it was an easy job to swap on the Exals, thanks to their being

true hoops to start with and the same height as his worn-out Mavics. In addition to a bit of touring, Jim's been working as a courier this summer, and the re-rimmed wheels had rolled a couple of thousand tough miles by the time he called in to report progress. They were still running true and the wear indicators showed that the machined brake tracks hadn't lost much of their initial, albeit rather slender thickness.

Details: available from Spa Cycles, www.spacycles.co.uk, tel: 01423 887003. See Spa Cycles' advert for details of wheel builds.

Minoura BH-95X cage holder £6.99

Reviewed by Cass Gilbert

If you're touring in a hot climate, carrying enough water can be an issue. This bottle cage adaptor from Minoura allows you to carry an extra bottle on your seat post. Or if you're not running a bar bag, you could fit two to your handlebars. The angle is adjustable and while it's not as solid as frame braze-on, mine's survived the rough and corrugated tracks of New Mexico. Price doesn't include bottle cage. Details: www.zyro.co.uk



Genetic Epidermis bar wrap £7.50

Reviewed by Michael Stenning

Made from polyurethane, impregnated with sweat resistant methyl formamide and available in four colours, this bar wrap combines lasting comfort and all-weather grip in gloved or bare hands. The leatherette texture and frugal adhesive are tolerant of frequent repositioning. There's enough tape for dressing broad 46cm flared drops – even with generous overlap – and it absorbs vibration like the proverbial sponge. However, dirt shows up more readily than on some tape. Details: www.ison-distribution.com



OSPREY RAPTOR 14 £85

Reviewed by CTC Senior Cycle Development Officer Dan Cook

A revolution in bag design? We've heard that before, but Osprey's new range of 'hydraulics' backpacks do have some great user-friendly innovations. The rigid panel in bag and reservoir maintains the bag's comfortable shape and prevents it squashing up while riding, while the mouthpiece is both accessible and out of the way as it's magnetic and sticks to the sternum strap.

The 14-litre Raptor is plenty large enough for full winter day rides. Smaller loads can be kept tight with lock down straps, while it's two main storage areas are full of good sized pockets. I thought the Lidlock helmet-retaining clip an excellent idea, though the elastic was rather taut.

I've used Osprey bags by preference for the last four years and the Raptor only extends my enthusiasm for them. Raptors are available with 6-, 10- and



18-litre luggage capacities as well 14, and with 2- or 3-litre reservoirs.

Details: www.ospreypacks.com, tel: 01202 413920 for stockists

Cycle shorts

Wool Buff®

£21

Like the synthetic Buffs, this is a useful stretchy tube you can wear as hat, scarf, etc. It's made of merino wool and comes in eight colours.

It's longer than other Buffs, giving a more awkward fit under a helmet and a pixie-hat look without one. It's a great scarf, though. www.buffwear.co.uk



Ana Nichoola Military Ruffle jacket

£129

Reviewed by CTC Campaigns Officer Debra Rolfe

Ana Nichoola's Military Ruffle jacket stands out amongst the increasing options for 'look smart' bike wear. Made of heather-coloured microfibre, it doesn't have that tell-tale shiny bike jacket look, yet is both water- and wind-resistant. Strategic reflective piping gives it visibility at night and venting across the back helps prevent overheating. The unique features are a whimsical ruffle down the front and a 'duck's tail' redesign of the jacket's rear mud flap that is chic and sensible at the same time. It succeeds in being cycling-specific but not looking it. I imagine that some would prefer sleeves that could be cinched up against the elements or armpit zips, but I like that the jacket is equally about looking good and being practical. Details: www.ananichoola.co.uk, tel: 07922 911213



The Man Who Cycled the World by Mark Beaumont

£13.99

Although Mark's fastest circumnavigation of the world by bike has recently been beaten twice, this gripping account will leave you awestruck at his physical and mental strength. He rode an average of 100 miles a day for six months for the record, despite many setbacks. ISBN 978-0593062333, Bantam Press

Ragley Carnegie's handlebar

£39.99

'A less dramatically swept On-One Mary bar, but oversize' was how designer Brant Richards described this 685mm, 300g mountain bike aluminium riser bar. The 25-degree back sweep is less cruiser-like than the Mary's 40 but is still pronounced. It put my hands in a good position for pottering but didn't feel as comfortable or efficient – especially climbing – as using Cane Creek Ergo bar ends on a Niner Flat Top bar. But worth trying if you don't use bar ends. www.ragleybikes.com



SKINS BIB SHORTS

£127.20

These bib shorts incorporate the same (ahem) BioAcceleration Technology as Skins' compression garments, which do for blood circulation what flight socks do for your lower legs. I can't say I noticed any difference post ride, but while sitting on the saddle these close-fitting shorts were the most comfortable I've ever worn – as you'd hope at this price! Women's, non-bib versions, and longs are also available. Sizes XS-XXL. Reviewed by Dan Joyce. Info: www.skins.net



HEAD TO HEAD TOUCHSCREEN GPS WITH OS MAPS

Chris Juden compares two new GPS units with OS mapping

Ever since OS maps were available on a PC it's been possible to view them on a GPS-enabled Pocket PC or smartphone too, and the Satmap Active-10 GPS also uses OS mapping. These options were reviewed in *Cycle* Aug/Sep 2009. The Memorymap Adventurer 2800 provides a more weatherproof alternative to the Pocket PC/smartphone method of displaying your PC maps on the move, while the Oregon range is market-leader Garmin's answer to Satmap.

Both these devices lack buttons, using touch-sensitive screens instead. It's not ideal for cycling. You can't work it by

A touch screen isn't ideal for cycling. You can't work it by feel but must look at it

feel, but must look at the screen to see where to press, which diverts attention for longer than to glance at the map after poking a button. To be fair, the large on-screen buttons of the Garmin Oregon can be poked while wearing gloves. Not so the M-M Adventurer, which needs its stylus to hit the tiny symbols and work its fiddly menus.

The Garmin's screen is dim however you look at it: reflective or backlit the touch-sensitive layer absorbs light, making it difficult to read except in really dull conditions. The Memory-Map is even darker without backlight, but is crystal clear with it turned on – even in bright sun. The backlight consumes a lot of power on either device, but will turn off after a few seconds of inactivity. A tap on the screen brings it back.

The Garmin Oregon runs on a pair

of AAs and I got a long day and a half touring on 2700mAh rechargeables. The M-M Adventurer's built-in L-ion also lasted a day, but with less to spare. As this sort of battery loses capacity with age, the unit could become useful only for short rides after a year or two.

I chose to test the top model Oregon 400t, because it comes pre-loaded with topographic data for the whole of Europe, which I was able to check out in Bavaria. The 100m contour interval is too coarse for cycling, and I was disappointed that it got no closer when zoomed in, since the hill shading reveals finer detail in the underlying data. But at least the Alps looked nice and pointy! Back home, the OS maps don't reveal more detail when you zoom in. Where a village name etc. obscures road detail, it still does that writ large! I nevertheless appreciated how Garmin combine OS mapping with vector data for roads. This enables the Oregon's satnav features and annotates the map with street names.

Garmin now offer all of GB on OS Landranger, on three SD cards totalling £360. Satmap bundle GB for £200, which still seems a lot for maps you can only peer at through the tiny window of a mobile device – given that Memory-Map charges slightly less for maps you can also view as big as you like on a PC and even print on paper!

I took the Adventurer-2800 on the Peak District ride described in this magazine, after loading it with maps of the area from the Memory-Map OS Landranger I already have on my PC. It worked very well for that ride, but would

not have been any use in Bavaria, where Memory-Map don't yet have cycle-friendly mapping for sale.

A fully featured GPS should make the bike computer redundant. The Oregon does that, although its Trip Computer doesn't offer all the options of my Etrex. The Adventurer doesn't even try. But it has a vacant button, rather obviously waiting for some such application. IPX7 waterproofing is another Oregon advantage. The Adventurer claims merely to be water resistant.

CONCLUSION

The Adventurer-2800 is an interesting GPS if you already have Memory-Map on your PC or would like to get it. If you've already invested in some other mapping software it could be worth waiting a while for something similar tied to Tracklogs, Anquet or Quo.

The Oregon is a more versatile GPS, but is expensive and let down by a dim screen. Garmin's related Dakota models look better value, but their OS maps are far too expensive for software you cannot use elsewhere. If you're going to stick to cost-effective vector mapping, other Garmin units, with buttons, perform better on a bike.

For a more complete version of this review, see: <http://forum.ctc.org.uk/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=32964>

Basic statistics

GARMIN OREGON: from £200 to £400 depending on model, 210g, bike mount £14 and 18g. More information: www.garmin.co.uk

MEMORY-MAP ADVENTURER 2800: £250, 136g, bike mount £20 and 56g. More information: www.memory-map.co.uk