



KATHERINE MOORE

Katherine is a keen bikepacker and off-road rider who created the East Devon Trail (eastdevontrail.com). She is 165cm tall (5ft 5in)

Gravel bikes

You can get a very capable on/off-road all-rounder for £2,000-plus. **Katherine Moore** tests the Specialized Diverge Comp E5 and Whyte Friston

Entry-level gravel bikes from big-name brands tend to cost between £1,000 and £1,500. Spending £1,000 more buys you a lighter-weight, bikepacking-ready bike with significant upgrades. Instead of mechanical disc brakes you can expect hydraulics. The groupset will be higher tier. Wheels and tyres are more likely to be tubeless ready. You may also get technology that doesn't appear on less expensive gravel bikes, such as the dropper seatpost of the Whyte Friston or the proprietary fork-steerer suspension that the Specialized Diverge Comp E5 has.

'Gravel' is a broad category. At one end of the spectrum are fatter-tyred adventure bikes (cyclinguk.org/adventure-bikes) that will tackle the kind of terrain you'd otherwise use a hardtail mountain bike for. At the other end are all-roads bikes that are better suited to tarmac and the sort of unsurfaced tracks that a car would cope with.

Our test bikes have significant differences in scope. The one that appeals to you most may depend on your cycling background. Are you coming to the world of drop-bar, off-road

riding from the discipline of road cycling or mountain biking?

Frame and fork

Both the Specialized Diverge and Whyte Friston have aluminium gravel frames, paired with carbon forks and compatible with modern 12mm thru-axes and threaded bottom brackets. Built for adventure, both bikes' forks feature cargo cage mounts. The Friston frameset is 1x-specific. While the Diverge is also built with a single chainring setup, you can opt to run a double chainring on it.

The two bikes share some similar geometry figures, with 70.5- (Specialized) and 70-degree (Whyte) head tube angles, and almost identical wheelbases. The head tube is considerably longer (130mm) on the Whyte Friston than the Specialized Diverge (104mm).

The Diverge is built with Specialized's Future Shock 1.5 suspension, giving 20mm of fork steerer travel. An internal spring enables the handlebar (and stem) to move up and down, giving much the same effect as a suspension stem; it's not like a conventional suspension fork, or even Cannondale's Headshok, where