

# 10 OF THE BEST SADDLES

**RATED** ROAD MODELS FOR MEN & WOMEN INSIDE **P76**

# CYCLING

**PLUS**

THE UK'S **BEST-SELLING** CYCLING MAGAZINE

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**RIDDEN & RATED**

## BEST STEEL BIKES

THE OLDEST BIKE MATERIAL PROVES IT STILL HAS A FUTURE **P36**

**IMMEDIATE MEDIA CO**

**NUTRITION**

## RIDE FASTER MEAT-FREE

How cutting down won't slow you down **P70**

## No.1 FOR NEW BIKES

Cervélo, Specialized, GT, Ribble, Devinci, Mason & more...

## FUEL WITH REAL FOOD

## PRO TIME TRIAL TIPS

## DO MARGINAL GAINS STILL MATTER?

**INSIDE** IS CYCLING AS GREEN AS WE THINK?



# WHEELS OF STEEL

Road bikes and road-biased all-rounders  
made of the oldest of bike-building  
materials... steel!

**PHOTOGRAPHY** ROBERT SMITH



**W**e're a fifth of the way through the 21st century, so why are we testing five road bikes made of steel, a material that's used in bikes dating back to the time of Queen Victoria?

Well, steel can be built into comfortable, long-lasting and repairable bikes that – in theory and avoiding catastrophic crashes – should outlast you and me. I gave my own 1984 steel Raleigh to a charity last year, and even with 40,000 miles on the clock it had loads of life left in it.

Our five test bikes are predominantly for the road but modern tastes are making their presence felt with disc brakes, tubeless tyres and room for wider tyres. The American company All-City calls its Zig Zag an “all-weather endurance road bike” and it comes with Shimano 105, hydraulic brakes

and tubeless tyres out of the box. The Vigorelli is a spin-off of Cinelli's single speed frame and, while made of steel, it has a bang-up-to-date SRAM 1x Apex groupset, albeit with rim brakes. Both the Cinelli and All-City look the part, too.

It's rim brakes again from Genesis in its very road-biased Shimano 105-equipped Volare, but the Volare's Reynolds 853 is one of the best steels out there. It's Reynolds 725 for Spa Cycles' all-black steel Elan, which I have in a twin chainring configuration with a wide range of gears to suit all riders, Shimano 105 disc brakes and

**Steel can be built into comfortable, long-lasting and repairable bikes that should outlast you and me**

Steel frames last a long time and can be recycled at end of life, so are better for the planet than you might think

tubeless tyres on handbuilt wheels. The Light Blue's Darwin Two Way Street is a steel frame/steel fork affair with Shimano 105 hydraulic disc brakes that The Light Blue describes as a road bike-cum-light tourer, or a “street sports machine”.

YOUR TESTER



**SIMON WITHERS**  
TECH WRITER

Simon reckons that the All-City and The Light Blue mean that he has tested bikes from 122 bike brands in over 20 years of testing. He commutes 34 miles daily and has ridden sportives, audax events, time trials, duathlons and has clocked up around 250,000 miles or so...



## THE BIKES ON TEST...

### CINELLI VIGORELLI £1499



▶▶ Cinelli's purple and chrome Vigorelli won't necessarily appeal to everyone but they'll certainly see you coming on this criterium-inspired bike. The Thron steel frame and full-carbon Futura fork are both from Cinelli's partner company Columbus, and the striking combination promises speed as well as style. This is only one of two of our steel bikes that has rim braking.

### SPA CYCLES ELAN 275 £1999

▶▶ The Reynolds steel Elan brings Shimano 105, hydraulic disc brakes and wheels built by Spa's in-house spokemeister already set up in tubeless mode. Schwalbe's G-One tyres should further ramp up the comfort and the chainset/cassette pairing provide a very impressive range of gears, both high and low. Gold details and Hope components nicely set off the predominantly black frame.



### THE LIGHT BLUE DARWIN TWO WAY STREET £2054.99



▶▶ The Reynolds 725 chromoly steel frame is paired with a chromoly steel fork decked out with all the mounts you could ever require. Shimano's 105 hydraulic groupset, Genetic cockpit, Halo White Line Disc wheels and Schwalbe's 32mm Durano tyres complete the kit line-up for what The Light Blue calls a "light, quick, steel street bike".

### GENESIS VOLARE 853 £2615

▶▶ The Reynolds 853 steel used on this carbon-forked beauty is the "smaller brother of the 931" and is designed to offer a similar racy performance at a fraction of the budget. It's available in disc- and rim-braked versions and I'm testing the latter for a more classic-looking steel bike. It comes as a frameset for £899.99 and I got Shimano 105, Shimano wheels and a Pro cockpit.



### ALL-CITY ZIG ZAG £2750



▶▶ My most expensive bike has the American company All-City's own ACE steel frame paired with a Whisky No 9 thru-axle fork. It's the third of my contenders to feature Shimano's seemingly all-conquering 105 hydraulic groupset. Here, it's joined by Halo's wide-rimmed Devaura wheels and 30mm Schwalbe Pro One tyres already set up as tubeless.

### THE RATINGS EXPLAINED

★★★★★  
**EXCEPTIONAL**  
A GENUINE CLASS LEADER

★★★★  
**VERY GOOD**  
ONE OF THE BEST YOU CAN BUY

★★★  
**GOOD**  
IT'LL DO THE JOB VERY WELL

★★  
**BELOW AVERAGE**  
FLAWED IN SOME WAY

★  
**POOR**  
SIMPLY PUT, DON'T BOTHER



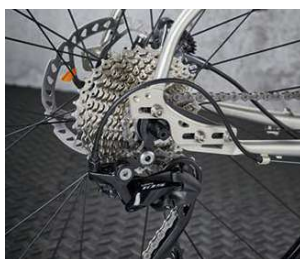
**WE SAY...**  
*It's light, it's quick,  
 it's plush, it's versatile,  
 it's a commuter, tourer  
 or even a bikepacker*

# THE LIGHT BLUE DARWIN TWO WAY STREET

**£2054.99** ▶ Steel-framed, steel-forked, do-anything all-rounder

**A**h, college quads, the Footlights, cricket at Fenners... all things Cambridge, where The Light Blue bikes were first produced in 1895. Fast forward to 2020 and they're designed in the city by the founder's grandson. Back in Victoria's time, they would have been made with lugged steel, rather than in this tidily TIG welded guise. As for the Darwin's hydraulic brakes and 22 Shimano STI gears – 21 more than in 1895 – these would have been but a laudanum-induced dream, or perhaps a special delivery from HG Wells's *The Time Machine*.

The Light Blue describes the Darwin as a "light, quick, steel street bike" that can encompass commuting, tackling towpaths and even lightweight touring. The standard black version starts at £1574.99 with Shimano 105 and TRP Spyre mechanical disc brakes, but I upgraded to a galvanised frame with a full Shimano 105 hydraulic disc groupset, taking the cost up to £2054.99 (£1904.99 for black). Shimano 105 – to nobody's great surprise – worked as well



**TOP** The Darwin's chromoly steel fork has loads of tyre clearance  
**ABOVE** The sliding rear dropout lets you use it fixed, geared or belt driven

as ever, the wide-ranging gears offering slick, efficient changes and the brakes delivering easy, minimal-effort stopping.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**Weight** 10.81kg (S/M)

**Frame** Reynolds 725

**Fork** Chromoly Shimano 105 50/34, 11-34

**Gears** Shimano 105 hydraulic discs

**Wheels** Halo White Line Disc

**Finishing kit** Genetic bar, stem and 27.2mm seatpost, Passport saddle, 32mm Schwalbe Durano tyres

**Brakes** Shimano 105 hydraulic discs

**Wheels** Halo White Line Disc

**Finishing kit** Genetic bar, stem and 27.2mm seatpost, Passport saddle, 32mm Schwalbe Durano tyres

**Brakes** Shimano 105 hydraulic discs

The frame material befits a brand with such an iconic British name, coming in the form of Reynolds chromoly 725 steel. This is essentially a spin-off of Reynolds 531, the material that, even today, has more Tour de France victories to its name than any other. It's a heat-treated steel, which means it can be made with narrower wall diameters, and the tubes are butted – thicker at the ends where more strength is required (1).

This 'traditional' frame material is paired here with a chromoly steel fork complete with lugged bottle-cage mounts and mudguard fittings. Both the frame and fork have quick-

It's best as a day-long rouleur, spinning you through country lanes at whatever speed you're fit enough to achieve



The Light Blue can be run with derailleur, single speed and hub gear setups

release axles, rather than thru-axles, but this didn't seem to have any deleterious effect on the bike's braking.

The Light Blue ups the Darwin's versatility further with sliding rear dropouts, which allow the bike to be run with derailleur, single speed and hub gear setups. It lets you tension the chain, and there's a split in the right seatstay that allows you to fit long-lasting belts (2) such as the Gates Carbon belt drive. Both the frame and fork have room for 45mm tyres for gravel and off-road riding, or even pretty chunky 35mm tyres with mudguards for year-round riding on poor roads.

The result is a bike that in many ways is a successor to that much-loved 1984 Raleigh Clubman 531. But the Darwin's better in just about every respect – evolution, I suppose, which is very apposite considering the Darwin name.

The newer Light Blue bike is a fair bit lighter – and that's even with its not-exactly-light 2100g frame and 1050g fork. It's also more comfortable, and has stratospherically better braking. Anybody criticising today's hydraulic discs wasn't brought up on sidepull rim brakes that were 'brakes' in name only, especially in rain. Loads more gears and a much wider overall range provide both a higher top gear and lower bottom. The list goes on. It's light, it's quick, it's plush, it's versatile. It's a long-distance commuter, a light tourer for weekends or longer away, or even a

## HIGHS

Great comfort, good versatility and a quality hydraulic groupset

## LOWS

Quick-release rather than thru-axles and a slightly over-padded saddle

## BUY IF...

You want a versatile and comfortable cruiser that'll last a lifetime

padded for my taste but it was actually better than I expected.

It may not be quite a first-class degree for this Light Blue but its Darwin Two Way Street is an excellent all-round road machine with a wide-ranging appeal.

sometime bikepacker with its 32mm tyres. It's steel, so it'll last a lifetime.

The one-to-one ratio bottom gear keeps you in the saddle on steeper climbs and I found this felt at home wherever I took it. It's probably best as a day-long rouleur, spinning you through country lanes at whatever speed you're fit enough to achieve. The flared handlebar comes into its own on towpaths and the like, and its very deep drop (3) means you can get down low if you want to crank it up. The Passport saddle is a little too deeply

## THE VERDICT

Comfortable, versatile, all-day cruiser-cum-credit card tourer



ALSO CONSIDER...



### FOR A LITTLE LESS DARWIN ONE BY £1749.99

Save yourself £300 and you'll still get 1x SRAM Rival and TRP Spyre mechanical disc brakes for what The Light Blue calls a 'sport-touring' SUV. Numerous options include a flat bar, dynamo lighting and an upgrade to hydraulic brakes.



### FOR A LITTLE MORE KINGS POTENZA £2199.99

For just a little extra, the Kings Potenza has a Reynolds 853 frame with a classic horizontal top tube, curved chromoly fork. The retro look is furthered by 11-speed Campagnolo Potenza with rim brakes,