



It's not just our mountain bike riding friends who enjoy the joys of off-road riding. In this country – and also in Europe and the US – cyclo-cross enjoys a popular following between September and February. It's unique in cycle sport in pitting mountain bikers and road cyclists together. It's also unique in being red-tape free. For most events (check with the organiser!) you can just turn up, enter on the day, and ride. If you're not a member of the British Cyclo-cross Association you'll need to ride as a 'day member' and pay a surcharge of £2, so if you're riding regularly it makes sense to have that BCCA membership card; to get one call Brian Furness on 01325 482052.

Races usually start at around 11am on a Sunday morning. Road riders frequently turn up on an old hack MTB, or tourer minus mudguards and rack, to 'have a go' and find that the bug bites, leading them to fit narrow MTB knobbies or even to buy a specialist 'cross bike.

A handbook listing fixtures and contacts for the forthcoming season is available from the BCCA and costs £4. There are prizes for regional series honours and these culminate in an inter-league event at the end of the winter, where top riders from each region compete.

We tested three bikes over a course based on a round of last year's national points series through the woods and over the fields at Ashton Court near Bristol. Suffolk based Elmy Cycles supplied their own brand Ippus 'cross bike frame made from Columbus Altec 2; we kitted this out with

proven 'cross components. The well established Paul Milnes company in West Yorkshire provided an aluminium 'cross bike, and Cycles Clement in Herefordshire the lesser known Italian-built Simoncini.

? Jargon

Shouldering the bike. Carried out correctly you will lose no time in this transition between riding and running. The rider steps off the bike and puts the foot in front of the one still on the pedal then twists his remaining foot out of the pedal and runs with the bike. In this instant the bike is lifted onto your right shoulder and the right hand clasps the end of the handlebar.

Steel or aluminium?

Sure, a section of steel frame tubing is easier to replace than a section of aluminium, but the number of 10 year old Alan aluminium cycles still in service is testament to the fact that frontal impacts (the ones that cause all the damage in a road race), are very rare in the sport of cyclo cross.

in terms of stiffness so it's ideal for larger-sized frames. Cyclo-cross tyres are narrow by design in order to cut through the mud and to minimise the build up of mud on the cycle parts, though the trend towards larger section tyres like the Michelin Cross and 34mm Planet-X tubulars has brought with it a need for greater clearance between the chainstays and the tyres. This issue is addressed on the Paul Milnes bike: both the chainstays and the fork blades have ample mud clearance. The thinking behind the continuous cable routing is that you can't snag your finger on this arrangement and the cables are essentially sealed from the elements, though in this case one of the guides popped out leaving the top tube open to muck and moisture. Taping it helped, however. We found the clearance around the fork crown was more than adequate, even for muddy courses.

The Ippus is named after a pagan king (whose name is

SIMONCINI £495 complete, (£285 frame and forks)



Left: Steel frames may seem passé but this is made to Simoncini's usual high standard
Far left: The Mavic T221 rims add considerably to the wheels' overall weight

'unmistakable Italian flair'

At a glance:

- FRAME 7
- HANDLING 7
- WHEELS 7
- GEARS 8
- EQUIPMENT 7
- OVERALL 7



IPPUS £475 inc. forks (£450 w/o forks)



Left: The Ippus boasts unpainted tubes clearly stating its status
Far left: The classic Weinmann cantilevers are not made today, but you may find them – if you're lucky

'The Ippus was king of speed'

At a glance:

- FRAME 7
- HANDLING 8
- WHEELS 8
- GEARS 9
- EQUIPMENT 8
- OVERALL 8

