



XTRACYCLE FREE RADICAL

£450 Give your bike a boot

IF YOU HAVE an old mountain bike frame languishing in the shed and dream of going car-free, then the Xtracycle could be just the thing for you. Think of it as a way of breathing new life into a favourite old steed, transforming it into a utility machine capable of carrying anything and everything, from bike boxes, to plants, to shelves and even people. A simple, easy to fit, bolt-on kit, it attaches to the dropouts of your donor bike (old steel frames work best, hydroformed ones can be a bit more complicated), effectively giving it a boot.

The heart of the system is what's known as the FreeRadical, a subframe onto which various modular loading bays, seats, kickstands and panniers can be attached. The basic kit includes all you need to get you carrying – the frame, a well finished, skateboard-style seat, a kickstand, an extra length of KMC chain and two roomy, adjustable side pouches that can hold your weekly shop. On top of this, there's an ever-growing range of extras, including nifty passenger foot platforms (£50) that plug in as and when they're needed. And that's one of the things we really like about this system – you only need to buy what's relevant to

you. The downside is that all these extras seem ridiculously pricey for what they are, given their simplicity. Luckily, the folks at Xtracycle are a broad-minded bunch, and actively encourage you to make your own accessories, to the point of even open-sourcing their design.

In use, your bike still feels surprisingly bike-like; you'll need to take corners wider and there's a little give in the frame, but it's nothing to worry about. If you're planning to haul heavy cargo regularly, you'll want to invest in a 36-hole touring wheel, otherwise you'll be fine. Although the kit can't be quickly detached like a trailer, it feels more compact around town and is better suited to long objects.

At first, the Xtracycle takes time and experimentation to figure out the best way of loading it up, but that's part of the fun! The benefit is a warm, fuzzy feeling, not just from rejuvenating an old bike, but realising that the vast majority of chores around town don't need to involve a car. www.xtracycle.com

Brilliant. It's just a shame the accessories are so pricey **8**

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SWISSSTOP BLUE PADS

£25.99 Carbon rim stoppers
If you're running ceramic rims, or Rigida's excellent CSS rims with tungsten carbide braking surfaces, you'll find that in harsh conditions normal brake pads wear through rapidly. Slotting neatly into normal V brake cartridge-style shoes, these Swissstop pads are the longest lasting pads we've come across and unlike some ceramic-specific pads, they offer good braking in the wet. The only downside is the initial ear-bleeding squeals, though this dies down as they bed in. Teamed with suitable rims, they're the best combination we've found for long distance, wear-free touring. www.extracuk.co.uk

Not cheap, but superb, long-lasting performance **8**

BAGABOO HOLSTER £17.95

This large wallet, which has belt hoops and a wraparound Velcro holster for a lock, is made of Cordura and is padded on the hip side. It's designed for smaller locks, but because of the massive area of Velcro, we had no trouble carrying a 6x30in Abus. It's brilliant for when you don't want to carry a bag and you'd rather not fit ugly lock mounts to your frame. The wallet section has a storm zip for waterproofing. www.urbanhunter.biz

9

SIMONCINI CORSA STRADA

£2000 complete £1729 frame only Rock steady steel machine

VENERABLE ITALIAN FRAME builder Simoncini knows a thing or two about getting the most out of steel, having forged its own genesis out of the ashes of post-war reconstruction. Working with what's arguably the most advanced ferrous tubing yet developed (along with Reynolds 953), this beautifully handcrafted frame uses seamless triple-butted, cold-drawn stainless Hinox tubing, produced exclusively for Columbus by Trafittubi.

Though respectable, its frame weight of 1548g puts it at a slight disadvantage compared to some of the aluminium and carbon products on the market, which average 1200-1400g. But the £1729 price is in line with the norm for handbuilt frames made from this exotic material.

Once astride, although a loping canter turned to gallop with ease, the Simoncini felt like it was held back a bit by a fairly portly Campagnolo Veloce groupset/ Khamsin wheels, specced primarily for hitting the £2000 mark; it's a pricing exercise that doesn't entirely do it justice. The Corsa Strada's laid-back head angle of about 70.5 degrees was closer to mountain bike territory, producing rock steady handling, useful at high speeds, but less

exciting when cruising at a leisurely pace. Unruffled in all conditions, the self-centring steering even prevented an unwanted plunge into the river when one tester's grip slipped. A brief change to light wheels and sensitive rubber greatly enhanced the ride, capturing the essence of steel and delivering smooth and muscular performance.

The highly worked fillet-brazed tubing is capped off with exquisitely sculpted stainless steel dropouts. Tube diameters are oversized with restraint, and subtly ovalised in the head and bottom bracket areas, where extra rigidity is required; you'll need a fair bit of muscle and body weight to fully tap into its potential though.

With an overall weight of just 9.09kg, this rare steed is poised to leap to new heights. Just let go of the reins and cut it free by fitting some high-end kit and you certainly won't be disappointed. www.cyclesclements.co.uk

Finely crafted Italian exotic, with a price to match **7**



A lighter set of wheels and tyres help this steed speed



PEDRO'S TRIXIE £16.99

This nifty multi-tool for fixed gear bikes features a locking hook, 8, 9 and 10mm spanner ends, a 5mm Allen key and 15mm spanner, plus a bottle opener. Aside from a tyre lever, it's pretty much all you need for roadside repairs. The 'sandy' finish grips well and wingnut bolts mean it can be fitted to your frame. It's neat, it works and has a lifetime warranty, though it isn't cheap for what is a fairly simple tool. www.pedros.com

7



POLARIS FARRON

£37.99 Women's cycle shirt

SOMETIMES YOU PULL on a cycling top and it just feels right, and that's the case with the Farron. Perhaps it's the colour, the flattering, semi-fitted cut, or the length – not too short and not too long. Or maybe it's the Airbase fabric that wicks so well. Despite having numerous seams, some of which are flat-stitched, the top is comfortable against the skin. There's also a zipped rear pocket for your valuables and a short zip opener at the front. The Farron comes with a reflective strip and logo on the rear for added safety, and is available in sizes 8-16, in lime sherbert (shown) and cerise/magenta. www.polaris-apparel.co.uk

Good price, fine features and a rather fetching colour **8**



Tube diameters are very slightly oversized



Exquisitely sculpted stainless steel dropouts

comfortable classic **9**