

# DO IT ALL BIKES

Jacks of all trades or masters of one? Dan Joyce tests a Genesis Vapour 'cross bike and Ridgeback Voyage tourer to assess their versatility

**T**here is no bicycle that's best at everything: it's horses for courses. Bikes are cheap enough that on an average income you can own a *stable* of differently-specialised machines. But if money or storage space is tight, one bike that will do different jobs well is a sensible option. So which to get?

In cycling's Venn diagram, the touring bike and cyclo-cross bike both sit towards the middle – along with *some* hybrids and hardtail mountain bikes. Cyclo-cross bikes are meant for racers in muddy winter fields, yet they're increasingly being sold in Britain as do-it-all bikes to owners who will never pin on a race number.

The Genesis Vapour is described as: 'More rugged than a road bike plus useful frame fittings, the added comfort and cross-terrain ability means... this is a bike for roamers as well as racers.' Apart from the race bit that sounds like a tourer – the bike that some bike magazines and shops seem to have forgotten.

Madison haven't. They make 'cross bikes under their Genesis line and a range of tourers under their Ridgeback brand. We picked the entry-level Voyage to compare with the Vapour.

## Frame and fork

The Vapour has an aluminium frame and a carbon fork while the Voyage is all steel. Aluminium has been a cyclo-cross favourite since the Alan company pioneered its use in the early '70s. Aluminium is only about a third the weight of steel and so builds into lighter frames – a good thing for racing, especially when the bike will go on your shoulder. It's also about a third as stiff as steel and far less fatigue resistant, which is why those early Alans were rather flexible and failed where they flexed! To overcome this weakness, manufacturers use fatter tubes with thicker walls so that the frame won't flex and crack. Despite



Both bikes have drop bars, cantilever brakes and clearances for bigger tyres and/or mudguards

(Opposite) Bar top brake levers are newbie friendly but limit room on the tops. A compact double chainset lacks the range of triple

this extra metal, aluminium frames are usually lighter than steel ones. And so it is with the Vapour and Voyage – even discounting the latter's accessories.

Steel is the traditional choice for a touring bike. The extra weight doesn't matter when you attach a couple of panniers. It's true – but largely irrelevant for most owners – that steel is easier to repair in remote places than aluminium. Does it ride better? A steel fork can be designed with hint of springiness. Any 'vertical compliance' in the frame is more imagined than real because it's a triangulated structure, although you might detect some lateral movement via the pedals.

The material differences between the bikes are less significant than the differences in design, which are typical of the 'cross/tourer divide.

The Voyage has longer chain-stays, which means more heel room for panniers and slightly better comfort over rough roads, since you're not sitting 'on top of' the back wheel as much. The Vapour has a slightly higher

bottom bracket, which gives better pedal clearance over rough ground but makes it a bit harder to get a foot down while waiting at a road junction.

The Voyage is longer at the front end too, with a generous front-centres distance ensuring no toe overlap even with a mudguard. Its wheelbase is longer and its frame geometry slacker. The Vapour is roomy enough to avoid toe-overlap with average size feet but if you fit a mudguard it will fill that space.

The Vapour nails its 'not just a race bike' credentials to the mast by including frame fittings. There are eyelets for mudguards and a rear carrier (shared at the dropout). The Voyage gets separate mudguard eyelets, plus mounts for a low-load front carrier. The Voyage is *meant* to wear mudguards and luggage carriers, whereas the Vapour merely *can* – for either commuting or light touring.

## Equipment

Light touring is probably as much as you'd want to do on the Vapour. As well



The Voyage is a bike for going places, either from A to B or between B&Bs

## TECH SPEC

Bike	Ridgeback Voyage
Price	£699.99
Weight	12.9kg (inc. accessories but not pedals)
Size	56cm
Sizes available	52, 54, 56, 58, 60cm
Frame and Fork	Reynolds 520 chrome-moly steel frame with fittings for three bottles, pump on the seat-stay, mudguard and rear carrier. Chrome-moly fork with fittings for low-load carrier and mudguard.
Wheels	Continental Contact 32-622 tyres, Alex ACE-19 rim, 36x3 pgss spokes, Shimano RM60 q/r hubs.
Transmission	Shimano Alivio square taper 175mm 48/38/28 chainset, HG50 chain, 11-32 8-speed cassette. Sora front and Deore rear mechs. Shimano 2200 STI shifters. 24-speed, 24-118 inches. Platform pedals with clips and straps supplied but not used.
Braking	Tektro Oryx cantilevers, 2200 levers with Tektro auxiliary bar top levers (with adjusters)
Seating	42cm 6061 aluminium Ergo Tour and 10cm stem. Anatomic Tour leather saddle on SL Aluminium 27.2mm seatpost.
Accessories	SKS chromoplastic mudguards. Blackburn EX2 rear carrier. Blackburn frame pump.
Contact	<a href="http://www.ridgeback.co.uk">www.ridgeback.co.uk</a>

as the reduced room for panniers, the gears don't go low enough for a heavy load. A compact double is fine for unladen riding on road and at race speeds off-road. For general meandering it would be nicer with a cassette that went to 27-teeth instead of 25, if not a triple chainset too.

By contrast, the 'trekking triple' of the Voyage gives more than enough gears. At the bottom end I never needed to get out of the saddle, while at the top I seldom used the big chainring – 38x11 yielding a big-enough 93-inch gear.

The Voyage's lower budget (£150 cheaper, despite added accessories) is evident in its spec. I'm quite happy with 8-speed but these days that also means 'entry level'. The drivetrain worked fine, though, except for a notchy bottom bracket bearing, a problem that your dealer would fix at point of purchase.

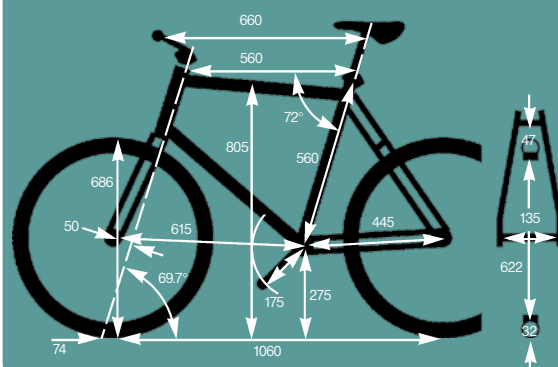
Both bikes use Tektro Oryx cantilevers with auxiliary bar top levers. While these give confidence to riders new to drop bars, I would have preferred more handlebar 'real estate' and more room to fit my hands comfortably on the bar tops. Braking performance is a bit better with the bar top levers but still pretty weedy.

Longer-arm Tektro CR520 cantilevers should be an immediate upgrade to either bike. On the plus side, I did like the Vapour's fork-crown-mounted 'uphanger'. It may have helped reduce brake judder and certainly gave a less congested cable run.

Both bikes have wheels that are well tensioned and true, with eyelets around the spoke holes to help prevent cracking there. The Voyage's have 36 spokes to the 32 of the Vapour, befitting the loads that the tourer will carry. The rim names are confusing: the Alex ACE-19 on the Voyage are 17mm, which is what you want for 32-37mm tyres, and the Alex DF-23 of the Vapour are 16mm, which is fine for its 35mm 'cross tyres or road tyres down to 28mm.

If the Vapour is to be an all-round bike, 28 or 32mm touring tyres like the Voyage's Continental Contact are what you want. The centre rolling strip offers better tarmac performance than buzzy 'cross tyres, which only make sense off-road, yet there's enough tread for bridleways.

The accessories on the Voyage aren't bargain basement stuff. The aluminium Blackburn EX2 is fine for medium loads, while the SKS guards (with breakaway clips for the front)





# BIKE TEST

are great. It's nice to get a frame-fit pump too. You'll need to budget another £70 or so if you want an equivalent carrier rack and guards for the Vapour.

## The ride

The Voyage would clearly be better for a two-week loaded tour than the Vapour, while the Vapour would obviously be the better bike in a race. So the focus of the test was more middle ground than that – the sort of tarmac and bridleway day rides and utility journeys, with and without luggage, that a do-it-all bike might be expected to tackle.

The Voyage offers good straight line stability with a bit of wheel flop at slow speed. I'd have preferred even more fork offset – 55mm, like Dawes use for their Galaxy family – to reduce the trail. While tourers don't need to be as responsive to steering input as road bikes, the longer wheelbase, heavier and fatter-tyred wheels, and panniers (particularly front ones) all slow the steering down anyway. That's a small point, however, and the Voyage does give a steady and comfortable ride.

The Vapour feels like a road bike with fatter tyres – which it is, essentially. It's light and sprightly. With a tyre change to, say, Continental Ultra Gatorskins, you could easily use it as a sportive bike. Off-road it was fun on bridleways and grass and coped well with snow, but isn't a substitute for even a rigid mountain bike, let alone one with suspension. Unless it's to be only a summer fun-bike or race bike, you'll definitely want mudguards; it was grim in winter without them. I

wouldn't bother with a carrier rack but would use a decent-sized saddlebag instead, to eliminate heel clearance issues and prevent the temptation to overload the bike.

One point to note with both bikes is that I adapted them to fit me better by using stems that were 2cm shorter. (More on bike fit on page 42.) So you'll need to add that to find the reach for off-the-peg versions.

## Summary

These are both good quality bikes that compare well with rival tourers and 'cross bikes. The Voyage meets two broad requirements: touring (including day rides) and commuting – which is to say, travel and transport. If you'll be carrying one or more panniers more often than not, or if your recreational riding doesn't involve working up a sweat, this is the better option. It's a bike for going places, either from A to B or between B&Bs.

For all that it will tackle bridleways and the like (as the Voyage will), the Vapour is really a versatile *road* bike. It's like a sportive bike with bigger clearances and cantilever brakes. You could use it as a winter trainer, a fast commuter, a summer's day mile-eater, or even a light tourer – as well as the cyclo-cross it's intended for. It's a bike for having a blast on, relatively unencumbered. I enjoyed it because of that, and would be happy to own just this and live with its limitations. But don't be persuaded to buy any 'cross bike if what you want or need is a tourer like the Voyage – a bike that ultimately sits closer to the centre of cycling's Venn diagram.

It will tackle bridleways, but the Vapour is really a versatile road bike

## TECH SPEC

Bike	GENESIS VAPOUR
Price	£849.99
Weight	9.4kg
Size	56cm
Sizes available	52, 54, 56, 58, 60cm
Frame and Fork	6069 ALX-9 T6 butted aluminium frame with fittings for two bottles, down-tube 'crud guard', and rear carrier/mudguard (single eyelets). Carbon bladed fork with aluminium steerer, with mudguard eyelets.
Wheels	Continental Speed King 35-622 tyres, Alex DF-23 rims, 32x3 pgss spokes, Shimano Tiagra q/r hubs.
Transmission	Shimano PD-520 clipless pedals with platform insert, Shimano Sora compact 170mm 50/34 chainset, external bearing bottom bracket, HG53 chain, 12-25 9-speed cassette. Sora front and 105 rear mechs. Tiagra STI shifters. 18-speed, 37-113in.
Braking	Tektro Oryx cantilevers, Tiagra levers with Tektro auxiliary bar top levers (with adjusters)
Seating	42cm Genesis 6061 shallow drop oversize handlebar and 9cm 31.8mm clamp stem. Genesis road saddle on Genesis 6061 27.2mm seatpost.
Accessories	None
Contact	www.genesisbikes.co.uk

## Other options



**Dawes Horizon**  
£TBC for 2010

Tourer with similar Reynolds 520 frame and chrome-moly fork to the Voyage, with Tektro Oryx cantilevers and 24-speed Shimano 2200 and Alivio gears. Likely to be a bit dearer.  
www.dawescycles.com



**Kona Jake**  
£750

Aluminium frame and steel forked 'cross bike, with fittings for mudguards and rear carrier. 27-speed Tiagra gearing, using 50/39/30 road triple. Large range of sizes available.  
www.konaworld.com



**Specialized Tricross Sport**  
£850

Aluminium framed, carbon forked 'cross bike with 27-speed gearing, mixing 50/39/30 triple and Tiagra levers with 11-32 cassette and Deore LX rear mech for a good gear range.  
www.specialized.com

