



£1000 TOURING BIKE

Oxford Bike Works Model 1

A made-to-order flat-bar touring bike with 26-inch wheels, ridden by CTC member **Marion Guy** and reviewed by Technical Editor **Chris Juden**

RICHARD DELACOUR saw a gap in the market and started a micro-business specialising in flat-bar 26in-wheel touring and expedition bikes. He makes to measure by assembling different components on a standard frame. Very few people are such an unusual shape they need a custom-built frame, but up to 50% of women are simply too small for the male-biased range of sizes offered by many brands of touring bike.

I've long been aware of cycling's female exclusion problem and in 1992 made a comprehensive review of available bikes, having recruited a panel of petite cycletourists (to play musical saddles for a week in the Peak District). They labelled themselves the Shortcranks and still meet up every year! So my attention was caught by Oxford Bike Works' unusually small smallest size – and I knew exactly where to look for someone to test it!

Frame, fit and wheels

Marion owns several touring bikes, including a Thorn which is very similar to Oxford's Model 1. And although (at 152cm) she's one of the shorter Shortcranks, the second smallest size was quite small enough. Richard prefers customers to visit Oxford for a fitting, which wasn't convenient for us so we sent measurements, and he sent a selection of stems with the bike. After changing a nine to 10cm extension, Marion found the position 'really comfortable... the balance between hands, feet and saddle was as good as my own bespoke touring bike.' And after a month in which Marion 'really enjoyed' logging 537 miles on this bike, she observed that: 'it handles really well on tarmac and rough-stuff. The stand-over height is good and there is no toe overlap – a problem I often have as my feet are not so small!'

1 Since it has 26-inch wheels, smaller frame sizes are not a problem. This is a 16-inch frame. There's also a 14-inch

Clearance is one of several small-persons' bike design problems that are solved by choosing 559 wheels, i.e. the 26in MTB size – but 25in when fitted with 32mm touring tyres. The frame and fork nevertheless leave room for fatter rubber, with mudguards fitted via neat spacer blocks. And although

Also consider



1) Thorn Sherpa £1319

With flat or drop bars and lots of à la carte options, this 26in-wheel chromoly steel tourer is also available in lots of sizes. thorncycles.co.uk



2) Surly Long Haul Trucker £1149

In the 26in-wheel option, it comes in sizes down to 42cm. Cro-mo frame, drop bar, bar ends, 27-speed Tiagra/LX. ison-distribution.com



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smaller wheels may not roll *quite* as easily, all else being equal: all else is rarely equal! Kenda tyres have a *less* equal reputation, but Marion had no complaints. When I accompanied her on a circuit of the local lanes, I noticed that Oxford Model 1 rolled down the hills comparatively well, and by her own account: 'I held my own' on a ride with friend Claire 'on full carbon and racing wheels!'

Marion didn't actually go on a tour in Nov/Dec, but we have no reason to suppose any problems with panniers, given the frame tube sizes and specification. The chainstays are short for a tourer, but I've toured with shorter. It's a matter of choosing well-designed panniers and/or a long enough rack – like the one fitted. I'd nevertheless recommend a few more centimetres on the larger frame sizes, assuming longer cranks and feet too.

Componentry

Although Marion tolerated the 165mm cranks fitted, she goes better on 160mm; and this chainset can be supplied, to order, with cranks any length from 152 to 175mm. She found gear changing 'a delight, slick and light' and with so many ratios 'there was always one to suit the terrain and gradient.' Marion also reckoned 'the

brakes were easy to reach and worked well, even in the mud!'

Marion hadn't tried a saddle with a dip in the middle before but soon 'forgot it was there'. For example: 'At the end of today's long (60-mile) ride, I had completely forgotten about the saddle, which must be a good thing!'

The handlebars she also found comfortable, and liked the rubber grips but found the integral end-pieces too small and slippery, since full-size bar ends provide one of her favourite hand positions.

The one omission is pump pegs, noted by husband Phil rather than Marion, who popped a mini-pump in her rackbag. Personally I'd find another set of bottle bosses more useful, to mount a 'Morph' pump and perhaps a lock. Marion did get a puncture, and gratefully found the tyre no trouble to remove and refit.

Conclusion

This is a very competent touring bike – or trekking bike, as it's designed with flat bars. As Marion observes: 'for long distances, it would be a good choice'. She was quite reluctant to give it back, but couldn't justify another bike so similar to her Thorn. She nevertheless remembered to buy the forgettable saddle!

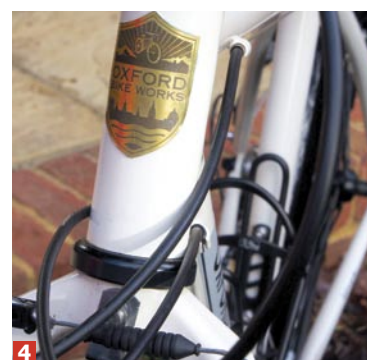
2 Marion found the bike equally good on tarmac and rough surfaces

3 Neat spacer blocks put the mudguards well under the V-brakes and near enough the tyres. They could be removed to fit fatter tyres

4 Assembled in Oxford, the bike can be fitted to you when you go to the workshop to pick it up

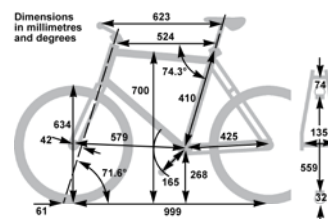


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Tech specs



OXFORD BIKE WORKS MODEL 1

Price: £995

Weight: 12.0kg

Sizes: XS (14), S(16) tested, M(18), L(20), XL(21)

Frame and fork: Reynolds 525 butted steel frame & fork. Fittings for: guards & carriers, 2 bottles

Wheels: Kenda Kwick Roller 32-559 tyres on Ryde Zac2000 rims, 32×3 2.0mm spokes, Deore hubs

Transmission: 30-speed, 23–109in. Shimano M530 pedals, Sugino XD 165mm 28-38-48T chainset, Shimano HG94 chain, 11-30T 10-speed cassette, XT mechs, Deore shifters

Braking: Shimano Deore V-brakes & levers

Steering and seating: Deda stem, ITM handlebar, DH-Sports grips & extensions. Velo ladies saddle on BBB post

Equipment: SKS guards, Racktime Fold-it carrier, 2 bottle cages, bell

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