



● SPA TI ADVENTURE

## BIKE TEST

# ROUGH, TOUGH TOURERS

Want to travel off the beaten track without tip-toeing along? Editor **Dan Joyce** tests a Spa Cycles Ti Adventure and Surly Disc Trucker

**ANY TOURING BIKE** will tackle dirt roads and bridleways. On a durable roughstuff touring bike with wider tyres, it's more fun. You don't have to ride so cautiously, you won't get shaken about so much, and the bike is less likely to break down. Rocky restricted byways in the UK or gravelly South American *ripio* might make a touring cyclist on 32mm tyres dismount; on a roughstuff tourer, you can keep riding.

How wide you want your tyres will depend on how and where you ride, and on where you want to compromise between road and off-road performance. One size doesn't fit all. At York Rally this year, Colin Thomson (531colin from the CTC Forum) surprised me by saying his own Spa Cycles Ti Roughstuff has 35mm tyres; I'd pick 50mm or more, given a suitable frame.

Both of the test bikes will take big tyres. The Spa Cycles Ti Adventure, as distinct from Spa's Ti Roughstuff, is a 'go anywhere' bike in a similar mould to the Salsa Fargo. It's available with a flat or drop bar. The Surly Disc Trucker is a conventional tourer that happens to accommodate bigger tyres; the

chainstays declare 'fatties fit fine'. The Disc Trucker comes with either 700C or 26in wheels, and in 9- or 10-speed.

## FRAME AND FORK

As its name says, and despite its modest price, the Ti Adventure has a titanium frame. It's straight gauge tubing, so while it's strong and dent-resistant (and of course corrosion-resistant), it's not especially light; the smaller-wheeled steel Surly is lighter overall.

Along with the frame features you'd expect of any tourer – rack and mudguard mounts, bottle mounts, threaded bottom bracket, external headset – the Ti Adventure has some extras. There are mounts for a cantilever or V-brake pivots as well as a disc calliper; there's a third bottle cage; and the lower rack eyelets take stronger 6mm bolts. Rear triangle clearances are large. A 42mm tyre gives a big gap to the mudguard and 47mm would fit fine. With the guard removed – something I didn't want to do – a two-inch 29er tyre went in with mud room.

The fork bristles with fittings too: it'll take a disc or rim brake (canti/V); a low-rider or



● (Above) Fork clearance is huge on the Ti Adventure, so the mudguard needs spacing down. A 54-57mm tyre will fit in underneath the mudguard. With the mudguard removed, it's possible to fit a 3in 29+ tyre – on a wider rim, of course



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● (Above) The 26in-wheel Disc Trucker will take 2in tyres plus mudguards but comes with skinny 37mm tyres that actually measure 33mm. Bigger tyres would suit roughstuff and expedition tourers alike

porteur rack; a mudguard; and two more bottle cages or Salsa Anything Cages. It's a Surly Ogre fork and it's huge. A 57mm 29er tyre went in under the mudguard. Removing the guard, a 29+ wheel fitted with clearance, once I'd eased the 3in Knard tyre past the brake mounts.

Unless you *will* use a bigger front tyre than the 42mm Marathon Mondial fitted, I think the fork is too big and burly for the bike. There's little give in fork legs that are

nearly an inch diameter at the tips, so a fatter, softer tyre would win back some bump absorption. The fork need not be this tall either. At 468mm axle-to-crown, it's suspension corrected for an 80 or 100mm fork. (My own bike's 100mm-travel 29er fork is just over 470mm when sagged.) Suspension corrected is useful only if you want to fit a suspension fork. On this bike, I wouldn't. If you would, be aware that the head tube is 1 1/8in; modern suspension forks tend to have tapered steerers. I'd prefer a shorter fork instead, around 445mm axle-to-crown. That would still clear a big tyre and a mudguard, but could be made of thinner-gauge tubes without failing CEN tests. So it would be lighter and more resilient. A 445mm fork in this particular frame would steepen the head angle by about 1 degree – although upsizing to a 54mm front tyre would keep trail about the same.

The Ti Adventure comes in three sizes, with the smallest getting 26in wheels. The bike pictured is the 53cm large, which is what was available; normally I'd ride the medium. Nevertheless, I achieved a comfortable fit on the test bike.

The Surly Disc Trucker is a kilo lighter than the Ti Adventure, despite being steel. That's the missing mudguards, smaller wheels and fork rather than the frame per se. The frame is chromoly and the tubes in the main triangle are butted. The fittings are essentially the same as the Ti Adventure's, except that the Disc Trucker is disc-specific,

uses only 5mm lower rack eyelets, and also has a neat spoke mount on one seatstay.

The Disc Trucker is available in a vast range of sizes and with either 26in or 700C wheels, but 700C is only an option for frames 56cm or larger. That neatly sidesteps the problems of fitting 700C wheels and wide tyres into smaller frames, and it enables Surly to use the same 45mm fork offset throughout the range. I can ride the 56cm 700C (I've tested a Long Haul Trucker in that size) but fit a 54cm better, so felt aggrieved, at 5ft 10in, to be grouped with the short riders and to have no real choice but 26in.

The frame looks bigger than it is because the top tube is almost horizontal, and because the wheels are small. One benefit of this for roughstuff is bigger frame clearances: the 26in version can run two-inch tyres plus mudguards, while the 700C version is limited to 42mm plus guards.

The tapered, raked fork of the Disc Trucker is nicer than the sturdier, heavier fork of the Ti Adventure. It helped make the bike tolerable off-road despite narrow tyres and smaller diameter wheels.

#### COMPONENTS

There's a good argument for 26in wheels if you're a world traveller carrying heavy loads over unsurfaced roads. Spares are easy to find and 26in wheels are stronger than 700C, other things being equal. Here they're not. While there's nothing wrong with the Disc Trucker's wheels, which have XT hubs, »



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● (Left) The Shimano Sora rear shifter works perfectly with any 9-speed Shimano MTB derailleur but the front restricts you to a road derailleur and thus bigger chainrings (Top) Even on smoother bridleways, the Ogre fork feels rather harsh with a 42mm tyre (Bottom) A Spa Nidd saddle is a classic touch but can be changed if you don't like leather

## Other options



### 1) DAWES COAST 2 COAST 26" £999.99

Remember the Sardar? Dawes return to 26in wheels with this chromoly tourer, which has 9-speed Alivio gearing, bar-end shifters and BR-R517 cable discs. [dawescycles.com](http://dawescycles.com)



### 2) SALSA FARGO 3 £1699

Big-wheeled chromoly bikepacker with 10-speed Sram road/off-road gearing (Apex/X5 & X7), Avid BB7s and 29x2.25 off-road tyres. [salsacycles.com](http://salsacycles.com)

» 36 spokes, and eyeletted rims, the wheels of the Ti Adventure are better tensioned. Built in house by Spa, they use stronger spokes on the rear drive side. I'd expect these wheels to last at least as long as the Surly's.

Both bikes could usefully be fitted with the wider tyres. The reduction in road speed on climbs would be paid back in spades on rough surfaces. The Disc Trucker's 26x1.5in Continental Tour Ride tyres are particularly narrow, just 33mm wide according to my Vernier calliper. The bigger-framed 26in

is a 96in gear with these wheels. At the rear, a cassette bigger than 32 would be an improvement; 12-36 is an option in 9-speed.

The gear range is better on the Surly, and I didn't find the bar-end shifters any less convenient for casual riding. The front is friction-only so will operate any front mech. The rear is indexed for Shimano 10-speed mountain bike derailleurs but can be set to run friction mid-tour. It's worth noting that Spa's bikes can be specified to suit you, so bar-end shifters etc are possible on the

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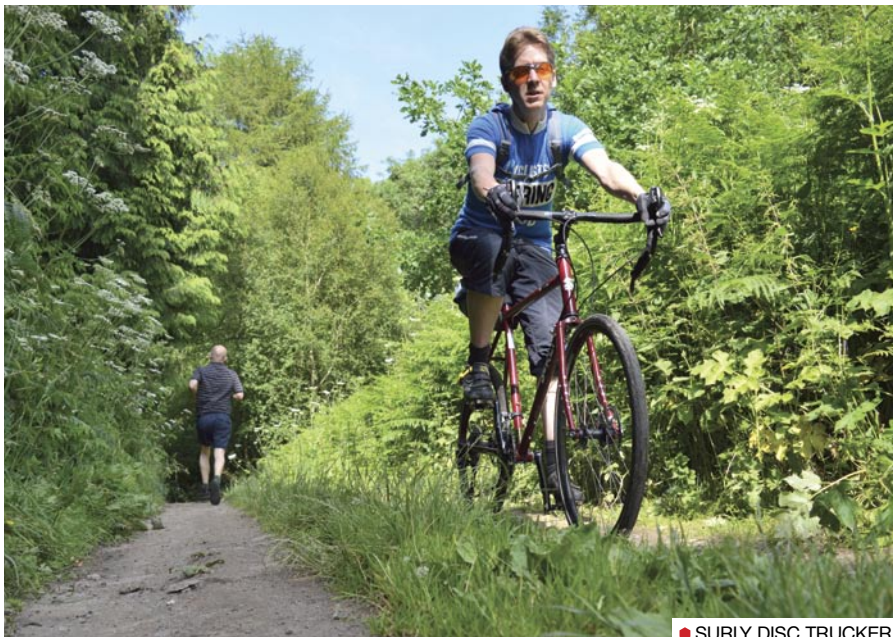
Disc Truckers get 1.75in tyres, giving heavier riders more support. For mixed-surface riding, I'd fit 50mm or wider touring tyres.

Being sensible tourers, both bikes have triple chainsets on square taper bottom brackets. Spa marry Sora STI to Sora/Deore derailleurs, while Surly take the traditional route with bar-end shifters from Microshift. Both setups worked fine but I found the Ti Adventure over-geared. While the optional Spa Zical chainrings are very nice (and add £30 to the bike's cost over a stock model), they're large for roughstuff. I wanted a bottom gear lower than 24in and had little use for the 48T chainring, given that 38/11

Ti Adventure too. The price might go up or down a bit, depending on what you wanted.

Both bikes have disc brakes, which I prefer on any bike with fat enough tyres. There's nothing to choose in outright stopping performance between these Shimano and Avid mechanical brakes. The Avid BB7s of the Disc Trucker have advantages. They're the MTN version, paired with linear-pull Tektro levers, and the longer cable pull translates into better modulation. They're easier to set up and maintain too, since both pistons can be adjusted.

The Ti Adventure comes with SKS mudguards and a couple of bottle cages, »



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» which would add about 700g and £35 to the spartan Surly. Spa also sent a Tubus Logo rear rack, which I used on both bikes but haven't factored into prices or weights.

**RIDE**

I rode the bikes on a mix of tarmac roads, rough bridleways and gravel forest roads, with and without luggage – luggage being variously two small rear panniers and an Apidura bikepacking seat bag. Tyre pressure is a compromise on mixed surfaces like these. Weighing a little over 10 stone, I settled on 40-45psi front and 50-55psi rear. With fatter tyres, I'd go lower.

Both bikes ride like the tourers they are. On road, there's little to choose between them. On rough surfaces, the Ti Adventure's wider 700C tyres and longer trail figure provide unperturbed progress over ruts, small rocks and tussocks that require concentration on the sharper-steering, smaller-wheeled Surly. On the other hand, the Surly is if anything more comfortable, probably because of the fork differences.

I'd use a wider drop bar on either bike to improve steering leverage. A flared drop like a Salsa Woodchipper would work well, at the cost of making bar-end shifters stick out. Saddles are personal: I found the Disc Trucker's okay but have never liked leather ones so would swap the Spa Nidd.

**SUMMARY**

The Spa Cycles Ti Adventure is a versatile, heavy-duty tourer that's great value, given that it's titanium and has à la carte options for components. Its monster fork demands a fatter front tyre for comfort, but bikepackers on 29er tyres may also want a tapered head tube for an easier suspension fork upgrade, plus a tad more room in the rear triangle. Traditional roughstuff riders, meanwhile,

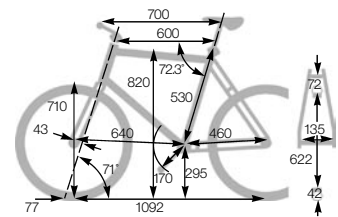
● (Above) On non-technical terrain, bar-end shifters are fine, and they enable linear-pull brakes and a wider gear range to be used (Below) The Disc Trucker carries spare spokes for the benefit of long-distance travellers



may want a more forgiving fork to take the sting out of bad surfaces on medium-width rubber. This is not quite a Salsa Fargo and it's not a Spa Cycles Ti Roughstuff either, but rather something in between the two.

The Surly Disc Trucker is a sturdy all-round load-lugger with good clearances and sensible component choices. If you don't fancy 10-speed or discs, a 9-speed Long Haul Trucker is £250 less. For anything but tarmac-only touring (or commuting), the 26in Disc Trucker would benefit from much wider tyres. Better yet, I'd prefer easier-rolling 700C wheels to be an option for at least the 54cm frame. That would require geometry changes, which doesn't seem likely. But if you're happy on 26in or fit the 700C sizes better than I do, you're unlikely to be disappointed by this workhorse tourer. ●

**Tech Specs**



**SPA CYCLES TI ADVENTURE**

**PRICE:** £1,530 (as spec'd), f&f £1,000

**SIZES:** S (43cm), M (48cm), L (53cm)

**WEIGHT:** 13.28kg (no pedals)

**FRAME & FORK:** 3Al/2.5V titanium frame with fittings for disc & V-brakes, rear rack, mudguard, 3 bottles. Chromoly Surly Ogre fork

**WHEELS:** 42-622 Schwalbe Marathon Mondial tyres, Exal DC19 rims, 36×3 Sapim Race/Strong spokes, Shimano Deore M525 hubs

**TRANSMISSION:** no pedals, TD2 170mm chainset, 48-38-28

Spa Zicral chainrings, Stronglight JP400 bb, KMC X9 chain, Shimano HG50 11-32 cassette. Sora STI shifters, Sora front & Deore rear mechs. 27 ratios, 24-122in

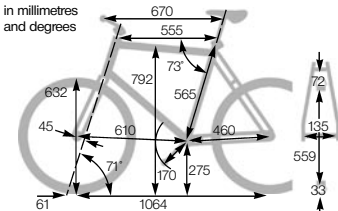
**BRAKING:** Shimano BR517 discs, 160mm rotors, Sora levers

**STEERING & SEATING:** cork tape, 420×31.8mm FSA Wing Compact bar, 90mm×6° FSA OS168 stem, Tange Seiki Terious 1 1/8in headset. Spa Nidd saddle, FSA SL280 27.2mm seatpost

**EQUIPMENT:** SKS guards, 3 bottle cages

[spacycles.co.uk](http://spacycles.co.uk)

Dimensions in millimetres and degrees



**SURLY DISC TRUCKER 10-SPEED**

**PRICE:** £1,299.99, f&f £399.99

**SIZES:** 26in: 42, 46, 50-62cm (54 tested). 700C: 56-64cm

**WEIGHT:** 12.18kg (no pedals)

**FRAME & FORK:** Chromoly steel frame and fork with fittings for: disc brakes; rear, low-rider and porteur racks; mudguards; and 3 bottles

**WHEELS:** 37-559 Continental Tour Ride tyres, Alex Rims DH19, 36×3 DT Swiss Champion 14g spokes, Shimano XT M756 hubs

**TRANSMISSION:** no

pedals, Andel RSC6 170mm chainset, 48-36-26 chainrings, Shimano UN55 bb, KMC X10 chain, Shimano HG50 11-36 cassette. Microshift BS-M10 shifters, Shimano Sora front mech and XT rear. 30 ratios, 18-109in

**BRAKING:** Avid BB7 MTN discs, 160mm rotors, Tektro RL520 levers

**STEERING & SEATING:** cork tape, 420×26mm PMT bar, 100mm×17° stem, Cane Creek Forty 1 1/8in headset. Unbranded saddle, 27.2×300mm Kallay SP-248D seatpost

[ison-distribution.com](http://ison-distribution.com)