



Three get over-excited: a trio of sturdy steeds get ready for the test

ENDURANCE BIKES

If you want a cycle that's comfortable mile after mile, an endurance bike should be your go-to ride. We tested three of the best around...

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ON TEST



MASON DEFINITION ULTEGRA HYDRO
£2,995



GIANT DEFY ADVANCED PRO 1
£2,799



SPECIALIZED ROUBAIX EXPERT
£3,200



Bikes are split into endless categories and niches, giving us a bewildering array of choice. While endurance bikes are aimed broadly at those looking to tackle bigger rides such as sportives, they tend not to be used by the pros, with the exception of a few events.

The biggest difference with a pro racing bike is the geometry, with endurance bikes having a taller head tube and slacker head angle, for a more stable and less aggressive ride. For most of us, the low position of a race bike can be uncomfortable on long rides, but pros are used to this and their superior flexibility

enables them to get in the most aerodynamic position possible.

For the rest of us, comfort is more important than pure speed, and our three bikes are all made with that in mind. The British-designed Mason Definition aims to show that alloy bikes can provide all-day comfort when designed well, while the Giant Defy opts for full carbon for its vibration-absorbing qualities. The Specialized Roubaix, meanwhile, is a new take on an old favourite, with a few interesting tricks up its sleeve. We took the trio out into the Chiltern Hills to put their credentials to the test...



BikesEtc's Craig out of the saddle and pushing hard. On a 1% climb.

↓
**SEE
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FOR OUR
TEST RIDE
REPORT!**

The old 'last one to the coffee stop pays' trick worked a treat



Why tyres are getting wider

One of the biggest current trends in road cycling is the move to wider tyres – 25c is now common, while the Mason Definition featured here comes with 28c tyres, and the Trek Domane SLR we tested recently (see *BikesEtc* issue 26) is fitted with huge 32c tyres as standard.

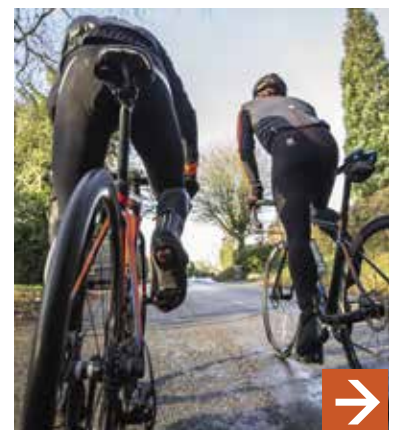
For endurance bikes such as these, this makes a lot of sense. Wider tyres are a major factor in comfort, since you can run them at lower pressure without

the risk of 'bottoming out' and causing pinch punctures.

But will wider tyres slow you down? Traditional thinking is that wider tyres increase rolling resistance and have higher drag (due to greater surface area). In fact, various studies have debunked both of these ideas. Wider tyres and rims can be more aerodynamic, while the greater volume allows them to deform more easily around imperfections in the road – so

save those high-pressure skinny tyres for the perfectly smooth surface of the velodrome.

Another innovation gaining ground in road cycling is tubeless tyres. Again, these promise lower rolling resistance and greater comfort, as well as superior puncture protection. Luckily, 'tubeless-ready' wheels are increasingly common on endurance bikes, minimising the extra spend should you wish to try them for yourself.



MASON Definition Ultegra Hydro

£2,995

British-designed, Italian-crafted frame ideal for every season

Upon the first close-up look of the Mason Definition, the thought and quality that has gone into the design is clear to see. Designed in southern England and made in Italy by tubing experts Dedacciai, the Definition is designed to conquer all four seasons.

The paint finish and subtle graphics are fantastic, with little touches like the embossed head tube badge. Cable routing is very neat with a multiport internal cable routing that can accept all cables, including electronics.

The out-of-sight, front derailleur cable routing is designed to keep water and grime out and shows the commitment made to ensure this bike is perfect for year-round riding. Even with 28mm tyres fitted there's still masses of clearance front and back, for possibly even larger tyres or mudguards, with neat, almost-hidden, eyelet mounts giving a clean look when not fitted.

The level of comfort is fantastic and one of the first things you'll notice when riding is that it almost feels like the tarmac is being muted: although this does mean you lose some of the 'road feel' you get from a more race-oriented machine. This won't suit more aggressive riders but that's not what this bike is about. The cockpit components are superb, with Deda stem and bars giving a great position and Fabric bar tape and saddle that are some of the most comfortable we have ever used. The Ultegra groupset is what we'd expect on a bike of this quality and price, and it doesn't disappoint – the brakes in particular are fantastic.

The rougher the roads, the more rewarding the Definition seems to be, shrugging off the very worst potholes with incredible confidence. Downhill, it has precision and stability, making it feel safe to ride as fast as you dare. The overall bike weight is heavier than the others on test, and on longer or steeper climbs it doesn't have the acceleration or zip that lighter, more responsive bikes manage, which is also noticeable when sprinting. While the wheels are laterally stiff and feel bomb-proof, they're heavy-ish, and the main reason why this one tips the scales a little.

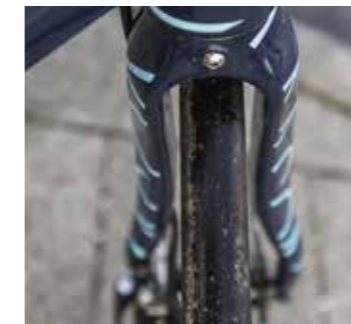


The Mason boasts a great riding position, ideal for taking on long journeys



GOOD

- **Frame design** Superb design and attention to detail.
- **Brand appeal** The British pedigree gives it prestige.
- **Components** From the comfy saddle to the well-shaped bars, everything is just right.



NOT SO GOOD

- **Wheels** Hunt wheels are sturdy enough but heavy.
- **Weight** Higher overall, noticeable on steep gradients.
- **Responsiveness** Lacks the immediacy the others achieve when sprinting or climbing.



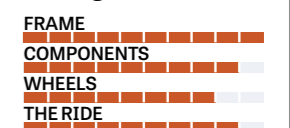
PRICE: £2,995
WEIGHT: 9.05kg (size 54)
FRAME: Dedacciai performance Aluminium, full carbon Thru-Axle fork
GROUPSET: Shimano Ultegra 11-speed
BRAKES: Shimano Hydraulic Disc
CHAINSET: Shimano Ultegra 6800, 50/34
CASSETTE: Shimano Ultegra 6800, 11-28
BAR: Deda RHM02
STEM: Deda Zero2
SADDLE: Fabric Scoop Pro
SEATPOST: Mason Penta microadjust post
WHEELS: HUNT disc specific
TYRES: Continental Grand Sport Extra, 28c
CONTACT: masoncycles.cc



CONCLUSION

The Mason Definition has a beautifully crafted frame that helps it stand out from the crowd. It offers a supremely comfortable ride and feels unstoppable, especially on downhills. A little heavier than the others, it's got a solid, comfortable ride quality that make it a year-round winner. 🚴

Rating



OVERALL
9.0

GIANT Defy Advanced Pro 1

£2,799

Light, fast endurance bike that has more than enough zip

The Giant Defy is a bike that's become one of the mainstays of sportive events. For riders who want a more comfortable cycle that's easy to use when tackling bigger rides, this is one of the obvious choices.

The frame is unchanged for 2017, other than its colour scheme, with the Advanced Pro 1 boasting a Shimano Ultegra groupset which is impossible to fault, giving a clean, smooth shift every time.

The 11-32 cassette is a nice touch, giving the extra gear at the lowest end for even the biggest, steepest of hills you'll encounter on any sportive. The components are mostly Giant's own-brand, and mostly excellent, although we found the handlebar shape isn't the most comfortable and does seem to pass more vibration than others through to your hands. That's something to bear in mind.

Giant uses compact geometry, with a low-slung top tube giving extra clearance, meaning a lot of seatpost will be on display. This has a positive effect on rear-end comfort with the extra length of seatpost giving a little flex that helps smooths out the bumps.

The front end can't quite match the level of comfort, but the tubeless-ready wheels and tyres are a big plus, giving the potential for slightly lower pressures with less risk of those pesky punctures.

First impressions when riding are very positive, with the bike accelerating instantly with no feeling of lag or flex through the frame or wheels. Uphill, the low weight is noticeable and it feels like you're able to climb a gear higher than most other bikes. The wide ratio cassette means that you can stay in the big ring for longer, giving you a little extra motivation to keep the pace up.

Downhill, the handling is very typical of Giant bikes. It is neutral and stable and this is an easy bike to descend on, but it doesn't change direction as quickly as others and lacks a little excitement as a result.

Overall, the Defy feels fast enough, and for those looking for a bike with a little extra comfort but no loss of speed the Defy could be perfect. Definitely worth a spin.



Tough build and great gearing make this a decent all-rounder



GOOD

- **Wheels** Light, fast and tubeless-ready. They ride superbly.
- **Handling** Neutral and stable: ideal to ride downhill.
- **Brakes** Excellent Shimano disc brakes for descents.



NOT SO GOOD

- **Comfort** The least comfy on test, though still well ahead of most road-race bikes.
- **Handlebars** We found the shape slightly awkward.
- **Response** Slower cornering lacks a little excitement.

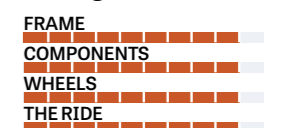


CONCLUSION

The Defy is one of the most popular bikes in the country and it's easy to see why. The Advanced Pro 1 feels light and fast, encouraging you to push harder and go faster, but with a little more comfort than most standard racing bikes. We'd say it offers the best of all worlds – a cracker. 🚴

- PRICE:** £2,799
- WEIGHT:** 7.85kg (size S)
- FRAME:** Advanced Grade Composite frame and fork
- GROUPSET:** Shimano Ultegra 11 speed
- BRAKES:** Shimano RS805 Hydraulic callipers
- CHAINSET:** Shimano Ultegra, 50/34
- CASSETTE:** Shimano Ultegra, 11-32
- BAR:** Giant Contact SL
- STEM:** Giant Contact SL
- SADDLE:** Giant Contact SL Neutral
- SEATPOST:** Giant D-Fuse SL Composite
- WHEELS:** Giant SLR 1
- TYRES:** Giant Gavia SL Tubeless, 25mm
- CONTACT:** giant-bicycles.com

Rating



OVERALL
9.0
10

SPECIALIZED Roubaix Expert

£3,200

New design with unique Future Shock technology

The Roubaix has been part of the Specialized line up for many years, winning the event from which it takes its name no fewer than five times (2008-10, 2012, 2014). But for 2017 it's undergone a dramatic and fundamental design change.

That change is the new 'Future Shock', a spring-based unit that allows 20mm of suspension at the front and is positioned just below the stem.

While the Future Shock will be what most people want to know about, the remainder of the bike has a great component specification. The choice of the Hover handlebars, which have 15mm rise, won't suit those who prefer a low position, but the Roubaix isn't aimed at racers. The DT wheels are a good match with the wide rims giving the 26mm Turbo tyres a nice, rounded shape. A full Shimano Ultegra groupset is faultless and cable routing is neat and well thought out. The SWAT box, visible behind the front derailleur, is a storage box that will fit a tube and the majority of the tools you're likely to need on a ride. Although it's removable, it is neat and well designed.

From the first ride, the Future Shock is immediately noticeable. The smoothness and lack of friction is impressive, making it very responsive over smaller bumps. Out of the saddle, for sprints or climbs, the suspension does react, but it doesn't have a noticeable effect and certainly no detectable 'bobbing' while riding.

All Roubaix models come with three spring options. We went for the Medium for the majority of the test but also tried the Firm. The softest spring may feel *too* soft for all but the lightest riders and while the choice of three should suit almost everyone, an even harder spring would be welcome.

Set-up is simple enough, but it's a different process to the normal stem/steerer tube set-up, so you really need to read through the instructions. The inclusion of two different height headset caps and the option of spacers mean the riding position can be made high, great if you're after comfort.

It doesn't take long after the first ride to completely forget that the Future Shock is there, but the difference in comfort is fantastic.



The new suspension in the bars makes this one of the comfiest rides around



GOOD

- **Comfort** The Future Shock works brilliantly.
- **Brakes** Shimano Ultegra disc brakes are fantastic, with exceptional control and power.
- **Speed** Fast and reasonably light up and down hills.



NOT SO GOOD

- **High front end** The suspension is clever but does still add height.
- **Cockpit setup** Complicated.
- **Reduced front end feel** Grip is fine but there's less feel coming from the front tyre.



PRICE: £3,200
WEIGHT: 8.44kg (size 54)
FRAME: FACT 10r Carbon, Roubaix Disc FACT 11r fork, 12mm thru-axle
GROUPSET: Shimano Ultegra, 11 speed
BRAKES: Shimano Ultegra hydraulic disc
CHAINSET: Shimano Ultegra Compact, 50/34
CASSETTE: Shimano Ultegra, 11-32
BAR: Specialized Hover Expert Alloy, 15mm rise
STEM: Specialized Pro SL
SADDLE: Specialized Phenom Expert GT
SEATPOST: Specialized CG-R, FACT carbon
WHEELS: DT R470 Disc Pro
TYRES: Specialized Turbo Pro, 26mm
CONTACT: specialized.com



CONCLUSION

It's rare that a new bike or design wows as much as the Roubaix. The Future Shock front suspension is absolutely incredible and many will consider it a game-changer. The rest of the bike is excellent, too, all adding up to a cycle that offers unequalled comfort from a standard road bike. 🚴

Rating



OVERALL
94



Specialized Roubaix Expert

Comfortable, beautiful and very quick...



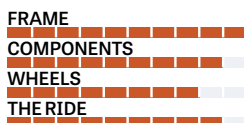
All three of our bikes on test impressed us immensely, and although they all broadly fit into the endurance bike category, they're all slightly different, too, appealing to slightly varying riding styles.

The Mason Definition has been expertly designed and is extremely capable. Downhill, it seems to take the worst possible roads and still be composed and comfortable. It's fantastic for riders who just love the biggest, toughest of rides, or perhaps even some light touring or bike packing but don't get too het up about climbing speed.

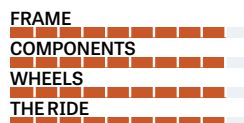
The Giant Defy feels faster and more nimble, reacting to pedal inputs and feeling great at speed. It's comfortable on long rides, though not on the same level as the others on test, but enough for most riders and roads. With neutral, stable handling it could be a perfect bike for those looking to take on big sportives and go quickly.

The Specialized Roubaix, with the new Future Shock suspension technology has set a new bar for front-end comfort. What surprised us most was just how quick it felt, with no feeling of loss of speed or energy because of the suspension. It might be the most expensive on test, but if comfort is high on your wish list, nothing this fast comes this close. One for the shopping list. 🚲

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