



WINTRY WONDERS

As autumnal days give way to deep winter, these classy, weather-resisting bikes will make your off-season rides more pleasant

PHOTOGRAPHY RUSSELL BURTON



THE BIKES ON TEST...

CANNONDALE SYNAPSE AL
DISC TIAGRA **£1034.98**

▶ The second spec level of Cannondale's enduring endurance bike is still very reasonably priced at just over a grand. The aluminium frame is UCI-approved, should you fancy some top-level racing. It boasts an all-carbon fork and Shimano Tiagra gearing and mudguards don't hurt its fine looks, making this a good candidate for our wintry rides round up.

THE LIGHT BLUE ROBINSON V2
£1184.99

▶ With a slim-tubed Reynolds steel frame and steel fork, the Robinson V2 continues The Light Blue's habit of building modern frames with undeniably retro roots. Its Shimano Sora groupset, boxy rims and chunky tyres continue the theme, but does it feel current? We put it to the test against some of the UK's finest autumnal weather.

TREK CHECKPOINT AL4
£1289.99

▶ Second in Trek's aluminium Checkpoint gravel bike range, the AL4 is equipped with all the attachment points you could want for water and kit, plus there's plenty of tyre clearance for mudguards. Its beefy looks give an impression of solidity, but can it cut it on the road, battling spray, mud and everything else the winter can throw at us?

KINESIS R1
£1550

▶ It's been 20 years since Kinesis was founded in 1999, and its core business of good quality, great value aluminium frames continues to offer plenty to riders who are looking for something a little more UK-focused than the big brands. The brand new R1 continues that theme. We test Kinesis' reputation for solid quality in real-weather conditions.

RIBBLE CGR AL
£1604

▶ The aluminium arm of Ribble's extensive CGR (cross, gravel, road) model range includes this Shimano 105-equipped mean machine. Will its semi-compact frame with compact road gearing, hydraulic brakes and tough Mavic wheels with high-quality tyres be a recipe for success? Our wet, wintry road test will reveal all.

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ycling is, in our biased opinion, the finest, most intricately nuanced sport; very sociable,

environmentally responsible and a thoroughly practical means of daily transport. But there's a problem. Unless you're a track rider, ours is an outdoor pastime, and we're blessed in the UK with a maritime climate.

It's often been said that the weather is the most common subject of conversation in the UK, and for good reason. The one thing we can rely on is that it will always be different, and often quite wet.

How we deal with the vagaries of our weather varies. The maxim that there's no such thing as poor weather, only poor clothing is generally true, but why not tip the odds more in your favour? Instead of counting on your cycling clothing alone to gamely keep road spray and

precipitation at bay, get some mudguards. Clothing can be very effective, but it will be overwhelmed eventually, so why not cut out much of what's assaulting it?

Unless you're a cyclocross rider, no one needs a muddy stripe up their back, and your riding mates definitely don't want a face full of liquid slurry when following your wheel. You'll feel more comfortable and be more popular both on the bike and with the café owner. Also, not only will kit and bike washing be far easier because your 'guards have retained most of the muck, but both will last longer as a

**Ours is the finest sport,
but it's an outdoor pastime
and we're blessed in the UK
with a maritime climate**

A winter ride sans
a muddy stripe
up your back?
Yes please

consequence. It's a win-win situation and is an N+1 that really doesn't need to break the bank.

We've been smugly enjoying five mudguard-equipped bikes during a lengthy early autumn wet spell. Read on to see how they fared.

YOUR TESTER



ROBIN WILMOTT
TECH WRITER

▮▮▮ Robin followed several bike shop years with 10 years of forensic science, interspersed by regular contributions to *CP* and photographing bike races. He's raced road, time trials and mountain bikes with some success, but his most enduring love is cyclocross.

THE RATINGS
EXPLAINED

★★★★★
EXCEPTIONAL
A GENUINE CLASS LEADER

★★★★
VERY GOOD
ONE OF THE BEST YOU CAN BUY

★★★
GOOD
IT'LL DO THE JOB VERY WELL

★★
BELOW AVERAGE
FLAWED IN SOME WAY

★
POOR
SIMPLY PUT, DON'T BOTHER



WE SAY...
The Synapse AL has a sound core, decent component spec and fine ride quality

CANNONDALE SYNAPSE AL DISC TIAGRA

£1034.98 » All-weather 'dale

Cannondale's Synapse has long been an endurance bike favourite. One of the first bikes to offer features that now define a modern endurance machine, the Synapse expands the versatility and potential of a road bike with little difference in speed.

Here we have the £999.99 Synapse AL Disc, with its price mildly elevated by some classic SKS mudguards. It's quite the bargain on paper. Apart from the round seat tube, all of its SmartForm C2 alloy frame tubes (1) are specifically shaped to counteract stress, add stiffness, or increase comfort. The extensive SAVE flattened portions of the seat and chainstays provide the latter, while still allowing easy clearance for the 28mm tyres, and the SAVE fork is all carbon, which is impressive at the price.

It's neatly finished with a prominent white reflective stripe skipping across the frame and fork, although only the left seatstay is reflective, which is a little less practical for UK riders. The front brake hose is internally routed through the



TOP Quick-release rear wheel fixing with vertical dropouts
ABOVE As well as mudguard mounts there's provision for a rear rack

fork leg, while the rear brake hose and gear cables enter each side of the down tube and travel internally to their destination (2). This is uncommon on metal frames with a 68mm threaded bottom bracket because there isn't usually space within the shell, but somehow Cannondale has managed it, keeping things very tidy. As well as the mudguard mounts, there's provision for a rear rack, plus two bottle cages.

One quirk of the frame is combining the fork's 12mm thru-axle (3) with a quick-release rear wheel fixing. The dropouts are vertical, so with correct installation there shouldn't be any brake rotor alignment issues, but a little care is needed. The Shimano Tiagra 10-speed drivetrain is supplemented by an FSA Omega compact chainset and Promax Decoder R

SPECIFICATIONS

Weight 10.72kg (56cm) **Frame** Cannondale Synapse AL **Fork** Full carbon SAVE **Gears** Shimano Tiagra 10-speed, FSA Omega 50/34 chainset, 11-34t cassette **Brakes** Promax Decoder R **Wheels** Maddux RD 3.0 **Finishing kit** Cannondale Four 6061 alloy bar & stem

Winter or foul weather, riding on a budget doesn't get much classier than this

A good blend of practicality, durability and performance



mechanical disc brakes, keeping costs down. The alloy finishing kit is Cannondale's own, as is the saddle.

Known for its ride-smoothing ability, the Synapse, even in this bargain form, instantly feels comfortable. There are several factors at work, of course, not least the 28mm Vittoria Zaffiro tyres, which measure 30mm wide on these rims and were inflated to 70psi. The rims are Maddux RD 3.0 spinning on Formula hubs. They're aluminium, 25mm tall and 24mm wide externally. They're robust and spin well, but they aren't particularly responsive, accelerating with more wheeze than whoosh.

If you worry that Tiagra's 10 sprockets and 20 gears is too few, you'd be wrong. Sharing the ergonomics of Shimano's loftier levers, the Tiagra controls feel great. Shifting is functionally excellent, with positive actions and good feedback. The gear ratios of 50/34 up front and 11-34 behind are ideal, too, with a 1:1 bail-out gear that'll climb a wall. The Promax mechanical brakes feel reasonable and give decent feedback, but their initial bite is tentative and the braking power is considerably less than the hydraulic equivalent, needing a little more distance and lever force to get the job done.

At 10.72kg complete it's not featherlight, but the bike's weight is only really noticeable when climbing, otherwise it covers ground with a

HIGHS

SmartForm frame, all-carbon fork, Tiagra, tyre volume

LOWS

Front wheel deflection, mechanical disc brakes

BUY IF...

You want a bike to ease you through winter

pleasant briskness. As a training or commuting bike, this Synapse offers a good blend of practicality, durability and performance, unless you're heading to the mountains. We did notice some front wheel deflection when riding out of the saddle. Even after checking for sufficient clearance it still contacted the tail of the mudguard lightly.

There's a lot of comfort from the tyre volume, 25.4mm seatpost, saddle and frameset combined, but the handlebar doesn't damp all vibration, and a carbon seatpost would help further. The handling is neat, precise and confident at all speeds, and even in this budget-friendly form, the Synapse DNA ensures that it's a reassuringly stable, comfortably quick and stylish-looking way to separate yourself from winter's worst.

THE VERDICT

A brilliant all-rounder with well-specced gearing and practicality

★★★★★



FOR A LITTLE MORE...
CANNONDALE SYNAPSE CARBON DISC TIAGRA
£1699.99

The least expensive all-carbon Synapse comes with Shimano Tiagra 10-speed, including hydraulic discs, an FSA Omega chainset and Maddux RD 2.0 wheels.



FOR A LITTLE LESS...
CANNONDALE SYNAPSE DISC SORA
£849.99

For £150 less than the Synapse AL, you can have the same C2 alloy frame and full carbon fork, plus Shimano Sora 9-speed with an FSA Vero chainset, Promax mechanical discs and Vittoria tyres.

ALSO CONSIDER...



THE LIGHT BLUE ROBINSON V2 SORA

£1184.99 » Here's to you...

The Light Blue build bikes that hark back to more simple times with classical looks and conventional style but modern sensibilities. The Robinson has a neat, tig welded, double-butted Reynolds 725 steel frame with a straight-bladed Chromoly steel fork and a very classy-looking paint job.

The top tube is subtly ovalised in the vertical plane, as is the down tube where it joins the head tube, but it's oriented horizontally at the bottom bracket shell to counteract stress (1). The seatstays taper at each end and kink before the dropouts, while the wavy chainstays ovalise vertically before the bottom bracket and are crimped for tyre clearance. The seat tube and generously tall head tube are round with a diameter almost matched by the chunky, mildly tapered fork legs with a flattened inner face.

Unsurprisingly for such slim tubes, all the cables are routed externally behind the fork leg and beneath the down tube. The gear cables have conventional down tube bolt-on stops from



TOP A modern bike with a retro touch from The Light Blue **ABOVE** The gear cables have conventional down tube bolt-on stops

where the inner wires continue, whereas the brakes have outer casing from end to end (2). The Robinson has mounts for a rear rack, plus mudguard fittings; without these £35 mudguards there's clearance for 38mm tyres.

SPECIFICATIONS

Weight 11.84kg (ML) **Frame** Reynolds 725 DB steel **Fork** DB Cro-mo steel **Gears** Shimano Sora 9-speed, 50/34 chainset, 11-28t cassette **Brakes** TRP Spyre mechanical disc, 160mm rotors **Wheels** Halo Whiteline Urban **Finishing kit** Tioga City Slicker 32mm tyres, Passport Navigator saddle

Our bike came with 32mm Tioga City Slicker tyres, which measure 33mm on the Halo White Line rims, but still fit comfortably within the mudguards (3). These 32-hole rims have a beefy 25mm wide box section profile and spin on quick-release disc hubs, which are slowed by TRP's Spyre mechanical disc brakes. The rest of the drivetrain is Shimano's 9-speed Sora in grey anodising, giving a high-quality look. Ison completes the build with house brand Genetic's bar, stem and seatpost, plus Passport saddle.

A comfortable ride that rolls well on the flat

More a lifestyle choice than conventional, efficient training bike



Our ML size Robinson tipped the scales at 11.84kg. Ironically not so light, but no surprise for a build at this price and, in fact, not out of touch with the theoretically much lighter aluminium bikes in this test. Its mass is undeniable when lifting it over the threshold, but setting out on a ride instantly proves that there's a little sparkle in there. There isn't the urgent whip of a race bike when accelerating, because its planted nature makes gaining speed a more refined process; a firm press on the pedals is met with equal forward motion.

Settling down in to the Passport Navigator saddle is like sinking into a soft armchair because its padding is so deep and soft. We were concerned it might be squashy and detract from the ride, but although a bit bulky, we came to like it. The Genetic Flare bar angles out by 11 degrees and has a pronounced ergonomic flat section in the drop that we found comfy, but its extended lever reach may not suit those with smaller hands. In trying to maintain the sort of reach we'd expect on a standard 56cm frame, the 18cm head tube on our bike created a tall and slightly long front end, so, on reflection, the medium may be closer.

Building speed allows an appreciation of the Sora groupset, which has a good quality feel, positive action and Shimano's trademark slick shifting. On the flat, the Robinson rolls nicely, with the sort of relentless momentum that just

HIGHS

Neatly welded frame, Sora groupset

LOWS

It's harder work uphill, relatively tall gear ratios

BUY IF...

You want a well-built, nicely specced, good value, robust cruiser

takes everything in its stride. Gravity brings about a marked acceleration downhill, but when the road rises, it's another story. Speed falls away and you have to work quite hard for elevation gain, perhaps leaving some wanting lower than the 34 x 28 lowest gear. It feels honest, though. Even with the cushioning effect of 70psi in 33mm wide tyres, there's constant surface feedback. The biggest hits feel pretty firm

through the handlebar, but the saddle cushions much of the rear-end vibration.

The Robinson is a great place to refine your pedalling because it rewards silky spinning more than big-gear grinding. It's no mountain goat, but rides confidently with great solidity, ideal mechanicals and the best non-hydraulic disc brakes out there. As a daily commuter or tough winter trainer it won't let you down.

THE VERDICT

The Light Blue's Robinson keeps it real with appealing ride feel

★★★★★

ALSO CONSIDER...



FOR A LITTLE MORE...
THE LIGHT BLUE ROBINSON V2 105 £1549.99

For a few hundred pounds more, this Robinson frameset boasts a complete Shimano 105 groupset, with 50/34 chainrings and 11-28 cassette, TRP Spyre mechanical disc brakes and Halo wheels.



FOR EVEN MORE...
THE LIGHT BLUE ROBINSON V2 RIVAL 1x £1724.99

If you want to keep things simple, the most expensive Light Blue Robinson comes with a SRAM Rival 1x groupset, TRP Spyre disc brakes and Halo GXC Disc wheelset with 38mm tyres.

Nicely finished and well-specced, the Checkpoint AL 4 has enormous potential and a positive character

The AL 4 performs well both on road and on gravel

WE SAY...

The Checkpoint AL 4 is a solid do-it-all road bike that dreams about hitting the rough stuff

TREK CHECKPOINT AL 4

£1289.99 ♦ Alpha Trek

The second rung on Trek's Checkpoint ladder is this AL 4, which shares an entry-level Alpha 200 aluminium frame with the lesser-specced AL 3. Up front is a carbon fork with tapered alloy steerer.

Can a gravel bike really pass muster as an all-weather, all-season machine? We think so. With a frameset built to take a pounding, heaps of tyre clearance and mounts for almost anything, the Checkpoint is well-featured; when appropriately configured, it should be versatile enough to take you almost anywhere.

As well as the obvious full mudguard mounts, there's a third bottle cage mount beneath the down tube (1), which is useful for a spare bottle on long rides. The two cage mounts within the main triangle each offer high or low fitting positions, allowing for rider preference and frame bag fitment. Behind the stem is a top tube mount for a fuel/essentials bag and the Checkpoint can take racks front and rear. The stem accepts Bontrager's Blendr compatible



TOP Neon lime 'guards will keep you seen **ABOVE** A 50/34 compact chainset offers a range that's suitable for on- and off-road

accessories, such as lights, camera and GPS mounts; the NCS mudguards on our model even have a Blendr mount at the rear for an extra lighting position.

Every tube, except the round seat tube, is heavily shaped. The top tube is flattened, the head tube sculpted to resemble some of Trek's other bikes and the seatstays create an arc between the seat tube and rear dropouts. The fork is subtly curved, too, but there's no IsoSpeed on this model.

It's nice to see a complete groupset with no shortcuts and the Checkpoint AL 4 has Shimano's 10-speed Tiagra. A 50/34 compact chainset with 11-32 cassette offers a range suitable for road and beyond. Hydraulic discs with 160mm rotors give perfectly modulated, powerful braking with minimal

lever pressure. The levers boast Shimano's usual ergonomics, and no matter how badly timed our actions were, the drivetrain shifted sweetly every time. The Control Freak cable routing system pulls them all in to the top of the down tube, but our knees clashed with the free cables when riding out of the saddle (2).

There's an obvious comparison to be made between the Synapse and Checkpoint as both have aluminium frames, Tiagra and big tyres, but are 600g and £250 apart in price. The Trek's frame is built for greater tyre clearance and with gravel riding in mind its fork has an alloy steerer (3). The Checkpoint's hydraulic brakes are lighter and more effective than those on the Synapse, but the Cannondale has lower gearing and narrower 28mm tyres. The wheels and finishing kit are broadly equivalent, so it's really a choice between cheaper and road-focused and more versatile but a little more costly.

From the Bontrager Arvada Comp saddle, our 56cm Checkpoint AL 4 felt like a perfect fit. The saddle itself was comfortable and the Bontrager bar and stem stiff enough when under load, without transmitting much road buzz. Although the semi-compact frame exposes plenty of the alloy seatpost to flex, a carbon seatpost upgrade could improve seated comfort.

The Checkpoint is great on the open road, its 32mm Bontrager R1 tyres measure 33mm. With

HIGHS

Frame design and mounts, hydraulic Tiagra groupset

LOWS

Chirpy mudguards

BUY IF...

You want a bike with carrying options to explore rural or urban environments

70psi inside they give a helpfully cushioned ride. Their smooth central band rolls efficiently while the textured shoulders seek out all the available grip in slimy corners. Bontrager's wide Affinity rims support the tyres well and can be simply converted to tubeless for a smoother, more secure ride. They accelerate willingly, not rapidly, but with enough go to make attacking hills an option.

Through technical twists and turns the Checkpoint feels just like a road bike, its 72.2-degree head angle (size 56cm) and 73.5-degree seat angle, 61mm trail and 1021mm wheelbase are a fine balance of stability and agility and we had no toe overlap issues with the mudguards. They give excellent coverage with built-in flaps, but we did experience regular chirping from them. For the price, though, the AL 4 is a well-sorted package.

THE VERDICT

All-road versatility with refined road manners for a fine riding machine

★★★★★



FOR A LITTLE MORE...
TREK CHECKPOINT ALR 5
£1700

Trek's ALR 5 has a 300 Series Alpha aluminium frame, which makes it the highest specced aluminium Checkpoint, with a complete 105 hydraulic groupset and 40mm tyres.



FOR A LITTLE LESS...
TREK CHECKPOINT AL 3
£1000

If your budget doesn't stretch to the AL 4, the entry-level Checkpoint shares the 200 Series Alpha aluminium frame and adds a 9-speed Sora groupset, mechanical discs and 32mm tyres.

ALSO CONSIDER...



WE SAY...
The Kinesis R1 is a great example of simplicity executed perfectly

KINESIS R1

£1550 ♦ All the single roadies

The new Kinesis R1 is designed as a versatile road bike that's optimised for a single-ring drivetrain. Among its useful fixtures and fittings is internal routing and an external cable stop for a front derailleur, just in case you feel the need. If you do, the very low seat tube-mounted bottle cage might need a little spacing away from the frame to allow for the mech's clamping band.

It's an elegant frame with a tapered head tube leading to pleasingly round main tubes and seatstays (1). The chainstays are subtly ovalised vertically and crimped for chainring clearance. The seatstays are crimped for tyre clearance below their bridge and for 160mm disc rotor clearance too. All of the tubes are straight with no S-shaped waviness and it gives an attractive, no-nonsense look, as well as keeping metallic mass to a minimum.

The internal cable routing ports are sited at 8 and 4 o'clock below the down tube with a pair on the left and one on the right. They exit ahead



TOP The internal cable routing ports sited on the down tube
ABOVE R1 chainstays help maximise tyre clearance

of the slim BSA bottom bracket shell to continue externally to their respective components. There's a rear rack mount, as well as mounts for full mudguards, flat-mount disc calipers and thru-axes at both ends. With a bridge adding strength, the R1 chainstays use every scrap of width to attach to the bottom bracket shell and maximise tyre clearance (2). The 30mm Schwalbe tyres have mildly aggressive, round tread blocks that grip like an Octopus. They measure 31.5mm and fit well within the Fend Off mudguards, but the frame has room for more.

SPECIFICATIONS

Weight 10.6kg (57cm)

Frame Kinesis R1 Double Butted Alloy

Fork 6061 Kinesis R1 Full UD carbon

Gears SRAM Apex 1 44-tooth X-Sync chainring, 11-42t cassette

Brakes SRAM Apex hydraulic disc

Wheels Novatec hubs

Finishing kit Kinesis Road alloy stem and seatpost

The carbon fork legs have a chunky but sculpted look, blending perfectly with the head tube and includes a neat platform for the disc caliper. With a complete SRAM Apex 1x

This is yet another Kinesis frameset that's ideally suited to typical British conditions

Instant zing when pressing on the pedals

groupset and reasonable finishing kit, our R1X is the lightest bike on test by just 20g. It will be available from January in this build only for £1500 and as a frameset in 2020. Its weight clearly benefits from forgoing a chainring, front mech, shift lever and cable, and even though the large 11-42 cassette adds some weight, it could be offset with a carbon seatpost.

Our 57cm bike has a 90mm stem and flared bar that measures 44cm, centre to centre, at the levers and 49.5cm at the ends. It seemed incongruous and a little shorter and wider than I'd expect at the start of our first ride. But the R1 is designed with extra reach to avoid toe overlap, meaning that the stem is intentionally shorter. It made for a fairly active front end until we became used to how the wide bar damps its movement. Then it felt perfectly accurate and very comfortable.

You might think that a straight-tubed frame would feel a little dull, but the R1 has an instant zing when pressing the pedals. That sensation didn't dull throughout and is always welcome, making accelerations and climbing far more engaging. The drivetrain remained whisper-quiet with crisp shifts from the Apex setup. The gearing range of 44-tooth chainring and 11-42 cassette worked well. For general road use, it's almost under geared at the low end, although the near 1:1 ratio could be your friend on steep or

HIGHS
Fine riding frameset

LOWS
Shorter stem and wider bar than we'd choose

BUY IF...
You want a year-round, reliable workhorse that's a lot of fun to boot

long climbs. The high 44x11 gear is equivalent to 52x13 and pedalling at 35mph doesn't require more than a normal cadence. We didn't find the gear jumps to be a problem, and there's no ratio duplication.

Selle Italia's X3 saddle is relatively firm with a good shape (3). It's fixed to a short aluminium seatpost, which made the surprisingly plush ride feel, with 70psi in the tyres, impressive. The wheels have

slick Novatec hubs and unbranded Alex rims, which spin up quite well and do add a little to the ride. Kinesis' own metal Fend Off mudguards are superb with rigid stays that don't flex or vibrate and long mudflaps. They'll look after you, your bike and your riding buddies.

The Kinesis R1 has all a UK-based rider could want. It's easily upgradeable, very enjoyable to ride and simple to maintain.

THE VERDICT

Understated class, great practicality and excellent ride quality

★★★★★



FOR A LITTLE MORE...
KINESIS TRIPSTER AT ADVENTURE BIKE £2200

Push the boundaries and your budget with the Tripster AT's Kinesisium frame and Columbus carbon fork, built with SRAM Apex and Rival, Ritchey finishing kit and Schwalbe G-One tyres.



FOR A LITTLE LESS...
KINESIS G2 ADVENTURE BIKE £1500

Knock £50 off and you can bag yourself the G2's 6061 double-butted alloy frame and carbon fork built with SRAM Apex 1, off-road gearing and 38mm Schwalbe G-One tyres.

ALSO CONSIDER...



WE SAY...
The CGR AL minimises the inevitable compromises common with this type of bike

RIBBLE CGR AL

£1604 » Covering all bases

C

GR stands for 'cross, gravel, road', and alludes to the numerous ways that the steel, aluminium, titanium or carbon CGR framesets can be built.

Versatility is a good thing, so long as a bike does master the majority of its proposed uses.

Available with a wide range of single and double chainring groupsets, 700c and 650B wheelsets, plus tyres and tyre clearance, the CGR has the potential to fulfil many riders' everyday needs. Our model was upgraded from the standard £1399 build and came equipped with a Shimano 105 groupset, including hydraulic disc brakes with Tektro rotors and Mavic's Allroad wheelset with some fetching Continental tyres, plus mudguards.

The finishing kit consists of Ribble's own Level 1 alloy bar and stem, plus 27.2mm carbon seatpost, topped with a Prologo Kappa RS saddle. SKS mudguards comfortably cover the tyres and there's a front flap to keep more spray off your feet and drivetrain (1). The subtly flared



TOP Subtly flared bar gives a comfortable hand hold **ABOVE** SKS mudguards fit comfortably with a front flap to keep spray off your feet

bar is swept back giving a comfortable hand hold when riding on the tops and an ergonomic grip in the drops with easy reach to the levers.

Hydroforming gives the 6061 T6 heat-treated aluminium frame tubes their character and performance. The top tube is an upturned triangle, while the oversized down tube is similarly oriented but with a more rounded forward face. The chunky ovalised chainstays angle away from the threaded bottom bracket shell and are crimped for tyre and chainring clearance, while the dropped seatstays have a wide stance and prominent kink above the dropouts; both have bridges.

Cables enter the down tube on each side and exit from the cowed tube end (at the bottom bracket shell) continuing externally. There's a third bottle

SPECIFICATIONS

Weight 10.8kg (M)

Frame 6061 T6 aluminium
Fork Full carbon fibre

Gears Shimano 105, 50-34 chainset, 11-32t cassette

Brakes Shimano 105 hydraulic disc

Wheels Mavic Allroad

Finishing kit Level 1 alloy bar & stem, Level 1 carbon post

An honest and likeable do-it-all bike



Whether exploring, commuting, winter training or just riding around, the CGR AL has plenty to offer

cage mount below the down tube and provision for a rear rack, as well as full mudguards (2). The full carbon monocoque fork is extremely broad shouldered, but elegantly purposeful (3), with lots of clearance and internal brake hose routing.

It's an impressive package, tied together with a colour coded saddle and bar tape. Our medium-sized machine weighed in at 10.08kg, a mere 20g heavier than the Kinesis R1. Comparing the two bikes and their differing drivetrains, seatposts, wheels and tyres still leaves things even, so the only way to sort things out is on the road.

The 28mm Continental Grand Prix 4 Season tyres measure 31.5mm wide on Mavic's generous Allroad rims and are a high quality tyre that ensures a good ride feel. We ran 70psi in them for consistency and were very glad to have their confident control on roads almost completely covered in slick mud. Without 'guards, we'd have been looking like a bog snorkeller in no time.

The CGR is obviously built tough, and its strength gives the impression of efficiency. It can certainly cover ground deceptively quickly, but it doesn't always feel as direct as we expected, as if the wheelset is very slightly holding it back. The gearing range is excellent, with 50/34 up front and 11-32 at the back, the only thing left wanting

HIGHS

Great overall specification, wheel and tyre size options

LOWS

Transmits a little more road vibration than we'd like

BUY IF...

You want a versatile bike you can tailor to suit your specific riding needs

will be your ambition, and Shimano's 105 hydraulic discs are powerful.

Despite a decent exposed length of carbon seatpost, the CGR AL transmitted more vibration through the otherwise very comfortable saddle and handlebar than the Kinesis. We found the riding position to be almost identical to our preferred 56cm frame setup, and we felt at home. The CGR AL's handling felt accurate and a little predictable at speed, but not the most informative.

The beauty of the CGR's frameset design is that a simple tyre swap opens up a whole new route outlook, and there's the option of 650b wheels and even greater tyre volume, too.

This is a horse for many courses, and while perhaps not the best at any one, it's an honest and very likeable trier.

THE VERDICT

A great value, versatile bike that'll turn its wheels to almost anything

★★★★★

ALSO CONSIDER...



FOR A LITTLE MORE...
RIBBLE CGR AL ULTEGRA
£1799

If you can afford to shell out £200 more then this CGR AL adds a Shimano Ultegra hydraulic groupset and Mavic Aksium Disc wheelset to the aluminium frame.



FOR A LITTLE LESS...
RIBBLE CGR AL APEX
£1199

If you want to save yourself a nifty £400 and go 1x, this CGR AL is well worth the spend as it has SRAM's Apex 1 groupset, Mavic Aksium wheelset with Schwalbe G-One Allroad tyres and a wide gear range.



Riding in whatever the weather gods throw at you is hard enough, but the R1 is a very capable and rewarding place to be

Lovely ride feel, simplicity and execution make the R1 a winner

AND THE WINNER IS... KINESIS R1

Elegance and simplicity perfected

With the incessant rain and quantity of tractor-borne mud on our local roads throughout October, never was there a better demonstration of the worth of mudguard-equipped bikes.

Of our five models, The Light Blue's Robinson was always going to plough its own furrow, struggling to match the outright performance of the others, but bringing its own calm ride quality to proceedings. Its beautiful frame and competent spec have their appeal, but will fare better on flatter terrain.

Next up, we have a three-way tie between the Trek Checkpoint AL 4, Ribble CGR AL and Cannondale Synapse AL. They're separated on paper by almost £600, but on the road, each has its merits and all are very worthy choices, which are easily up to being your ideal all-weather bike. While the Ribble and Trek are essentially gravel bikes that do road very well, the Synapse is road-focused and also impressively light for

the money. Its money-saving features cost it a few per cent here and there with average brakes, sluggish wheels and slightly harsh handlebar, but it's still a bike we enjoyed greatly, thanks to its composed ride.

The Checkpoint impressed with its potential for going far beyond the tarmac and it has a well-conceived overall package. Clashing our knees with the cables became frustrating, and the chirpy mudguards weren't ideal, but the Trek is great fun to ride. Ribble's CGR is a story of potential versatility and thoroughly decent road manners, but it felt a little harder over broken tarmac than we hoped and although pretty swift, it lacked some feedback.

Our winner is – at the time of writing – the first Kinesis R1 in the UK. Based on its lively ride feel, up-to-date 1x drivetrain, simplicity and execution, it's a deserved winner. Riding year round in whatever the weather gods throw at you is hard enough, but the R1 feels fresh and a very capable and rewarding place to be.

NEXT MONTH

TOP FIVE BIKES FOR SPEED & COMFORT

We take five of the best new endurance bikes: Trek's innovative front and rear IsoSpeed Domane, Specialized's Future Shock-equipped Roubaix, Cannondale's legendary Synapse, Giant's advanced Defy and Simplon's slick Kiara all feature in the round up.

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	CANNONDALE SYNAPSE AL DISC TIAGRA £1034.98 ★★★★★	THE LIGHT BLUE ROBINSON V2 SORA £1184.99 ★★★★★	TREK CHECKPOINT AL 4 £1289.99 ★★★★★	KINESIS R1 £1550 ★★★★★	RIBBLE CGR AL £1604 ★★★★★
SIZE TESTED	56cm	ML	56cm	57cm	M/53cm
SIZES AVAILABLE	48, 51, 54, 56, 58, 61cm	S, SM, M, ML, LG	44, 49, 52, 54, 56, 58, 61cm	45.5, 48, 51, 54, 55.5, 57, 60, 63cm	XS, S, M, L, XL
WEIGHT	10.72kg	11.84kg	11.32kg	10.06kg	10.08kg
FRAME	SmartForm C2 Alloy	Reynolds 725 DB steel	200 Series Alpha Aluminium	Double Butted Alloy 6061	6061 T6 heat treated aluminium
FORK	Full Carbon	DB Cro-mo steel	Checkpoint carbon, tapered alloy steerer	Full UD carbon	Full carbon fibre monocoque
FRAME ALIGNMENT	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
TRANSMISSION					
CHAINSET	FSA Omega 50/34	Shimano Sora 50/34	Shimano Tiagra 50/34	SRAM Apex with 44t X-Sync chainring	Shimano 105 50/34
BOTTOM BRACKET	FSA cartridge BSA	Shimano RS500 68mm threaded external	Shimano RS500 68mm threaded external	SRAM GXP	Shimano BBR60
CASSETTE	Shimano HG500 11-34	Shimano Sora HG40 11-28	Shimano 11-32 10-speed	SRAM 11-42	Shimano 105 11-32
CHAIN	KMC X10EL	Shimano Sora HG53	Tiagra HG54 10-speed	SRAM PC1110	Shimano HG X11
DERAILLEURS	Shimano Tiagra	Shimano Sora 9-speed	Shimano Tiagra, long cage rear	SRAM Apex 1	Shimano 105
GEAR LEVERS	Shimano Tiagra	Shimano Sora 9-speed	Shimano Tiagra, short reach, 10-speed	SRAM Apex 1	Shimano 105
WHEELS					
FRONT AND REAR	Maddux RD 3.0 rims, Formula CRX-512 hubs	Halo Whiteline Urban	Formula RX hubs, Bontrager Affinity Disc rims	Novatec 4 in 1 hubs, Alex 1.9P rims	Mavic Allroad
TYRES	Vittoria Zaffiro 28mm	Tioga City Slicker 32mm	R1 Hard-Case Lite 32mm	Schwalbe G-One Speed RG 30mm	Continental Grand Prix 4 Season 28mm
WHEEL WEIGHT	1.69 (F); 2.38 (R)	1.86 (F); 2.3 (R)	1.8 (F); 2.36 (R)	1.41 (F); 2.09 (R)	1.51 (F); 1.97 (R)
COMPONENTS					
STEM	Cannondale Four 6061 alloy	Genetic SLR	Bontrager Elite, Blendr compatible	Kinesis XX alloy	Level 1 alloy
HANDLEBAR	Cannondale Four 6061 alloy	Genetic Flare	Bontrager Comp VR-C alloy	Kinesis XX flared alloy	Level 1 alloy
HEADSET	FSA sealed bearing, 1 1/4in - 1 1/8in integrated	1 1/8in external cups	FSA integrated sealed cartridge bearing, 1 1/8 - 1 1/4in	1 1/8in - 1 1/4in integrated	1 1/8in - 1 1/4in integrated
SADDLE	Cannondale Stage Ergo	Passport Navigator	Bontrager Arvada Comp	Selle Italia X3	Prologo Kappa RS
SEATPOST	Cannondale Four 6061 alloy	Genetic Heritage	Bontrager approved, alloy	Kinesis XX alloy	Level 1 carbon
BRAKES	Promax Decoder R mechanical disc, 160mm rotors	TRP Spyre mechanical disc, 160mm rotors	Shimano Tiagra hydraulic disc, 160mm rotors	SRAM Apex hydraulic disc, 160mm Centreline rotors	Shimano 105 hydraulic disc, 160mm Tektro rotors
EXTRAS	SKS mudguards	Chromoplastic mudguards	Bontrager NCS mudguards	Fend-Off mudguards	SKS Thermoplastic mudguards

SPECIFICATIONS & MEASUREMENTS

Geometry is probably the most important factor when buying a bike but, as you can see from these tables, even bikes nominally the same size can vary considerably. All reputable bike retailers – high street and online – should ensure the bike fits you.

Trek Cockpit 69.2cm Standover 79cm BB height 27.5cm Fork offset 50mm Trail 59mm	Cannondale Cockpit 69.2cm Standover 79.5cm BB height 27.2cm Fork offset 50.5mm Trail 58mm	The Light Blue Robinson Cockpit 71.6cm Standover 83.5cm BB height 28.6cm Fork offset 44.5mm Trail 66mm
Kinesis Cockpit 67cm Standover 81cm BB height 27.4cm Fork offset 41mm Trail 72mm	Ribble Cockpit 69.2cm Standover 80cm BB height 28.7cm Fork offset 47.5mm Trail 62mm	