

A dense forest of evergreen trees, likely pines or firs, with a dirt path leading through them. The trees are lush green and fill most of the frame. The path is visible in the lower right corner, winding through the undergrowth.

FIND YOUR WAY TO THE PERFECT TOURING BICYCLE

**ADVENTURE
CYCLING'S 2011
TOURING BIKE BUYER'S
GUIDE**

**BY
STEPHEN
LORD**



Bike touring is the ultimate expression of self-empowerment. Have bike, will travel. Carrying only what you need, you become self-sufficient for a few days at a time with an exhilarating feeling of independence that comes with mobility.

The best moments, perhaps fleeting for many of us on shorter trips, are when you

but every touring cyclist will have this experience. Understandably, we all spend a lot of time and money eliminating every possible source of discomfort because a well-equipped comfortable machine allied with your own fitness knows no limits. The longer the ride, the more important comfort becomes because what are minor

gauge handlers. It means sacrificing light weight in favor of thicker tubes and welds, stronger hubs and bottom brackets, and stiffer seatstays and chainstays to reduce the tendency of the bike to shimmy when carrying heavy loads on a rear rack. And it means running heavier, stronger wheels than those found on road or mountain bikes. Road and mountain bikers may choose something lighter with an eye for speed but for the touring cyclist heavier rims mean less trouble on the road and longer wheel life. Expect all this to add up to a bike that's a few pounds heavier than you may be hoping for. Once the bike is loaded, however, you won't notice the difference.

Stability

Touring bikes don't have a monopoly on stability but you can safely assume the best of them have it designed in. It's all about striking a balance between a bike's responsiveness to rider input and its tendency to continue in the direction its heading. A degree or two less head-tube angle on a touring bike compared to road bikes kicks out the steering a little further while keeping the front wheel and panniers away from your feet. Adding a front rack and panniers will add to that feeling of stability, though if you attach a high-mounted rack, follow highly-regarded bike builder Bruce Gordon's advice and make sure the panniers sit well back, as close to the steering axis as possible. On the road, you'll

Jamis



feel you're living life exactly as you want to — such is the appeal of bike touring. Your touring bike will become your close companion for weeks, months, or perhaps years at a time, so it's vital to find one that's suited to your unique traveling style.

Whatever your fancy, it must, however, have the same virtues as a good touring bike: comfort, strength, stability, and load-carrying ability. There will always be options for bike buyers with \$2,000 or more looking for a made-to-order touring bike, but there are far fewer choices for someone on a budget who might well be planning a much longer tour. If you find a ready-made touring bike that works for you, that's great, but ultimately these are someone else's conception, albeit drawn from an established tradition of what a touring bike should be.

Cycling has a long history of evolution by adaptation, and if you're attracted to a hybrid, urban, mountain bike, or a recumbent, give it a spin, it could be the best bike you ever had — something only you, the rider, can ultimately decide.

Comfort

On the road, you're likely to be on your bike for up to eight hours a day, and comfort and posture are as important on a bicycle as they are in the workplace. It's asking a lot of a bike to be comfortable for extended riding, day after day,

pains on day rides can develop into serious back, knee, neck, or wrist trouble over a long haul.

It's easier to find the right bike if you get measured up beforehand — even if you're not going for a custom or made-to-order frame — so you know the frame dimen-

Kona Sutra



sions to look for. Good bike shops offer bike-fitting services, as do some bicycle builders, often using computer programs to draw your ideal frame measurements.

Strength

Strength in a touring bike is not solely about a frame that can survive clumsy bag-

occasionally see touring bikes with rear racks mounted on the front wheel — a bad idea. Keep frontal loads as close to the steering axis and as low as possible to reduce the inertia which can compromise steering. There will be plenty of occasions when you'll need to dodge a hazard quickly.

Load carrying

The ability to carry heavy loads is where touring bikes excel. A mountain bike, which passes other tests, may struggle here. Touring bikes have all the rack mounts you need and space for panniers. Not having eyelets for racks doesn't rule out a bike for touring, although, if they're missing, loaded touring is clearly not what the bike's designer had in mind when it was built. It's all about improvisation and taking the words "it can't be done" as a challenge!

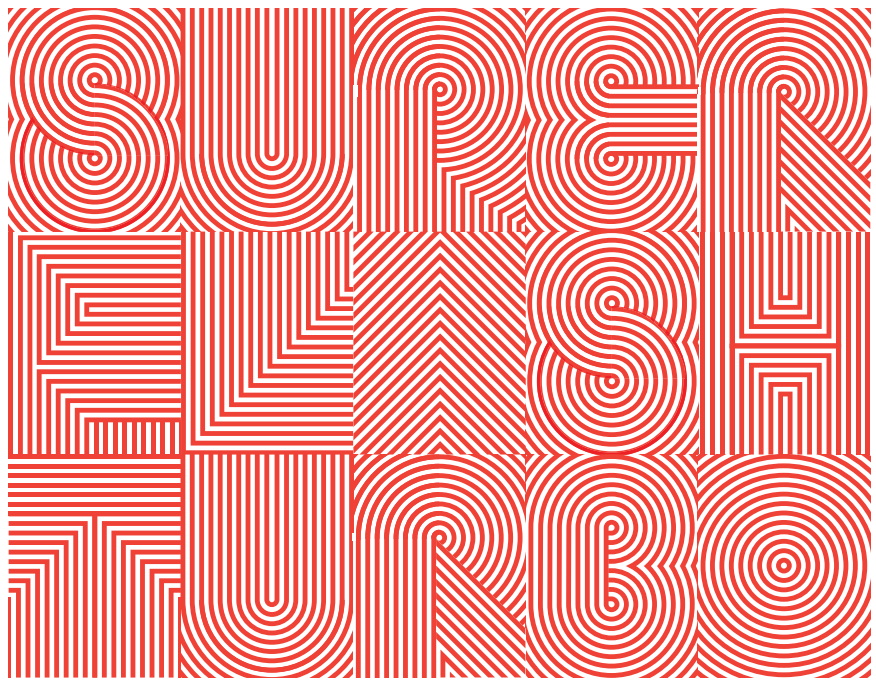
A touring bike, or a bike for touring?

I doubt many people ponder overlong whether to tour on a mountain bike or a touring bike. Most cyclists are drawn to one or the other and it's only those with a garage full of bikes who worry about which one to choose. These days, you can find a drop-bar touring bike built just as strong as a mountain bike, with the same low gearing and able to run tires almost as wide. Alternatively, mountain bikes ride perfectly well on roads just as SUVs do and, while you're unlikely to travel as many miles in a day on a mountain bike, it's your vacation and who's counting? If you're leaning towards a mountain bike, ask yourself if it ticks all the boxes to do the job. If so consider a conventional diamond-frame model, most likely designed for trail or cross-country riding; forget full-sussers, downhillers, and the rest. Select a conservative design and make sure it has at least 32-spoke wheels in a conventional pattern, and swap out the knobbies for something from Schwalbe, Vittoria's, or Nokian.

For those with big feet it's hard to find racks and panniers that leave enough room for heel clearance on a mountain bike, which have shorter chainstays to maximize traction by keeping weight over the back wheel. Building a touring rig that works is no easy task, but there's always the option of pulling a trailer for those who can't find room between pedal and pannier.

If you're interested in bikepacking, as has recently been discussed in *Adventure Cyclist*, that's an exciting subject but off topic here, instead head over to www.bikepacking.net.

Recumbents can make excellent touring bikes with a comfortable sitting posture and a very aerodynamic profile that makes them ideal for long stints on the road. Many can carry huge amounts of gear, too. But there are downsides, among them cost, weight, off-road and hill-climbing ability, and the difficulty of lugging them up stairs into hostels. But it is my view nonethe-



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less that someone keen to ride a particular kind of bike should be encouraged as long as they can see the pluses and minuses and decide with an open mind. Riding a recumbent is a very different experience from a diamond-frame, but many have gone round the world in style. If you get a chance to try one, you'll see why recumbent owners enthuse about them, as will be discussed in the June issue of *Adventure Cyclist*.

A metal frame

The choice of frame material for a touring bike is sometimes seen as critical and it certainly is — once the decision is made, there's no going back. My advice is to choose between aluminum or chromoly steel. If you can afford titanium, you'll have a bike that is light and lively when you take the panniers off, but fully loaded may feel very similar to everyone else's loaded touring bike. Ultralight tourers sometimes choose a carbon-fiber fork for its ability to soak up road chatter, but there is a risk of breakage or damage which a tourer can do without, and it precludes fitting a front rack, though you could change out the fork for a more suitable steel one with eyelets. High-end chromoly, such as Reynolds 853 or 953, is another luxury



Surly LHT

far from home. Steel is the easiest frame material to repair abroad and, at a guess, a village welder is less likely to wreck a generic chromoly or aluminum frame than pencil-thin exotic material. Even then, a field-repaired frame may regain only a fraction of its former strength without the heat-treatment techniques that are used to build frames these days.

So how do you choose between aluminum and steel? Go back to basics and pick whatever bike appeals to you. The frame material is secondary but you'll probably develop a personal preference between thicker-diameter aluminum frames or more slender chromoly models, perhaps solely on looks. I go for chromoly and lust over fillet-brazed welds and traditional lugs, but others like the chunky look of oversized aluminum tubes and massive welded joints. Keep things simple by picking a bike without too many fancy or proprietary fittings you might have trouble servicing or replacing down the road or abroad.

Handlebars

One of the main differences between mountain bikes and traditional touring bikes is the handlebar. In my observation, newcomers to cycling tend to go for straight bars as they're

easiest to use, while more experienced and older riders who grew up on drops prefer to stick with what they know. I bought a straight-bar adventure bike a few years ago and gave my drop-bar bike to a young guy who had just finished a four-year ride and

whose Rockhopper had finally seized up. He'd never ridden a drop-bar bike until that moment. A few years later I switched back to drops on another adventure tourer — and crashed within 200 yards of my home, so unfamiliar had I become with riding them. I came to love drops again on a long, hot cruise through Turkey, Syria, and Iran, but when I headed into the mountains, I found the lack of control the narrower drops offered made for very hard work on rocky tracks. In addition, braking tends to require more effort on long, wet, off-road descents necessitating frequent stops to rest my hands.

The choice between straight and drop bars should remain a personal one, as comfort and convenience are entirely subjective and my intent is only to offer suggestions to help people get on the road with whatever works for them. I do wish, however, that more bike builders offered their touring bikes with the option of straight bars. Take a look at the hundreds of actual on-the-road touring bikes on fullyload-edtouring.com. About a third of touring cyclists ride bikes with straight bars, nearly all them mountain bikes. One of the most popular bikes for adventure touring, the Surly LHT, takes drop or straight bars, and I suspect it's no coincidence that it's also the most commonly seen bike on that website. My hunch is that if the touring bike industry offered more straight-bar models, they'd sell a lot more bikes.

Brakes

Much more development has gone into brakes and gear controls for straight bars in recent decades than for drops, and there are now several great options for straight-bar riders. The favored traditional option is to have the gear shifters at the ends of a



Salsa Fargo

that won't make much difference when the bike is loaded like a mule, but is very nice the rest of the time.

Exotic frame materials such as titanium, high-end chromoly, aluminum, and carbon fiber are the hardest to repair

drop bar. It's a simple and reliable setup but the levers are not at hand and are vulnerable when the bike is dropped. Combined brake-and-gear levers are a great alternative and surely no less sturdy than mountain-bike combined brakes and gears, but are still not where your hands rest most of the time, and so not ideally positioned for maximum control, which you will appreciate on winding mountain-road descents.

Until very recently, mountain-bike brakes have been far stronger than road-bike brakes. Disk brakes were only found on suspension forks, which had the rigidity necessary to cope with the asymmetric twisting forces disk brakes exert on the front axle. For the last year or so, a number of touring bikes, such as Co-Motion's Americano and Pangea, Kona's Sutra, and the Jamis Aurora Elite, have offered cable-operated disk brakes on rigid forks designed to handle these stresses. All of them chose Avid's excellent BB7s, which are so strong you don't need the greater power, expense, and complication of hydraulics. There is some resistance to disk brakes among tourers, including some of the round-the-world crowd who argue it's easier to find replacements for cantilever

brakes on the road than it is for disks. Personally, I'd take a chance on my BB7s for a long tour. The pads are so small you could carry enough for a year or two in your back pocket, the cable is standard, and it's not difficult to straighten a disk if it

Gearing

Many touring bikes nowadays use mountain-bike groupsets. The lowest setup, a 22T chainring upfront driving an 11-34T cassette in the rear, offers just under 17 gear inches, lower than what 99 percent

Co-Motion Pangea



gets whacked and bent, although it is hard to get it perfectly flat again. The advantages of disk brakes for long-distance tourers are immense — not least, they substantially increase the life of your rims.

of tourers need but, if you're riding the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route or getting breathless on a 15,000-foot pass in the Andes, you'll take all the gears you can get. Touring puts extra stress on wheels and

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TOURING BIKES FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

All prices and specifications may vary to some degree. Please check with the manufacturers before making any decisions.

Bilenky Cycle Works offers the light-touring Tourlite (\$3,965 and up); the traditional, steel Midlands (\$3,700 and up); and the coupling-equipped Travel Sport Special (\$3,600): www.bilenky.com, 215-329-4744.

Bruce Gordon offers the hand-built Shimano XT Rock 'n Road (\$2,999; \$3,349 with racks) and the Taiwanese factory-made BLT (Basic Loaded Touring) with a SLX Group - complete bike except Pedals and water bottle cages - (\$1,725 with racks made in California). Prices do not include shipping and handling or assembly: www.bgcycles.com, 707-762-5601.

Cannondale offers the 2010 rack-equipped, aluminum Touring 1 and the 2010 Touring 2 - check prices with local dealers: www.cannondale.com, 800-245-3872.

Co-Motion Cycles offers the light-touring Nor'Wester Tour (frame: \$1,695; complete bike: \$3,376), the around-the-world Americano (frame: \$1,850; complete bike: \$3,615), and the rugged Pangea (frame: \$1,850; complete bike: \$3,630): www.co-motion.com, 866-282-6336.

Dawes Cycles offers a line of nine Touring Bikes (£599/\$975 to £2,899/\$4,725): www.dawescycles.com/c-81-touring-bikes.aspx, +44 (0) 121-748-8050.

Ellis Cycles offers the Lugged Tour/Randonneur (\$3,400): www.elliscycles.com, 262-442-6639. Fuji Bicycles offers the traditional steel Touring model (\$1,049): www.fujibikes.com.

Gilles Berthoud offers highly-customizable steel touring bikes from France (2,550/\$3,400 and up): www.gillesberthoud.fr, +33 03-85-51-46-51. (Site in French).

Gunnar Bikes offers the Rock Tour, a mountain bike designed for loaded touring (\$975 stock design frame, \$1,250 custom/made to measure frame), the Grand Tour, a traditional touring bike principally designed for road and light off-road use (\$975 stock design frame, \$1,250 custom/made to measure frame), and the Fastlane, a disc brake touring and commuter bike, (\$900 stock design frame, \$1,200 custom/made to measure frame.) Matching fork with Tubus Tara rack mounts and double eyelets are available for the Grand Tour and Fastlane (\$325): www.gunnarbikes.com, 262-534-4190.

Handsome Cycle Company offers the Devil and the She Devil (both \$409 frame, respectively): www.handsomecycles.com.

idworx Bikes offers trekking bikes with Rohloff hubs. Easy Rohler (3,399/\$4,750), Off Rohler (3,595/\$5,020), Easy TiRohler

(5,675/\$7,925): www.idworx-bikes.de/de/bikes/trekkingbikes.php, +49 228-184700. (Site in German).

Independent Fabrication offers the Independence frame set (\$2,310 steel; \$3,820 titanium) for long-distance touring, and the light-touring Club Racer frame set (\$2,200 steel; \$3,820 titanium): www.ifbikes.com, 617-666-3609.

Jamis Bicycles offers three touring bikes with chromoly frames including the classic Aurora (\$1,100), the Aurora Elite (\$1,700), and cyclocross-inspired Bosanova featuring disc brakes (\$1,150): www.jamisbikes.com.

Koga Miyata offers the Worldtraveller (\$2,700), and the Traveller (\$2,300), all with front and rear racks and many accessories: www.kogausa.com. For availability call Mount Airy Bicycles: 301-831-5151.

Kona offers the Sutra (\$1,469), a steel tourer with mechanical disc brakes: www.konaworld.com, 360-366-0951.

Kross offers the Trans Sander, Trans Alp, Trans Pacific, and Trans Continental. Prices unavailable at press time: www.kross.pl, 059 722-44-45.

Masi Bikes offers the Speciale Randonneur (\$1,145): www.masi-bikes.com.

Nashbar offers bikes and frames including the Double-butted Aluminum Touring Frame (\$199). Prices up to 70 percent off: www.nashbar.com, 877-688-8600.

Paké makes cyclo-cross style frames including the C'Mute (frame and fork \$359): www.pakebikes.com.

Pashley Cycles offers the ultra-classic Clubman Country (1,495/\$2,410): www.pashley.co.uk, +44 01789 292 263.

Rando Cycles offers the Basic (999/\$1,400), the Camper (1,999/\$2,800), the Globe-Trotter (2,999/\$4,200), the Tourer (1,999/\$2,800), and the Voyager (3,999/\$5,560): www.rando-cycles.fr, +33 01-43-41-18-10. (Site in French).

Raleigh Bicycles offers the Sojourn (\$1,200) and the Port Townsend (\$910): www.raleighusa.com, 253-395-1100.

REI offers the Novara Safari (\$849), Randonnee 2010 (\$1,199), and Verita (1,099): www.rei.com, 800-426-4840.

Ridgeback Bikes offers the Panorama (£1,249/\$2,020) and the Voyage (£799/\$1,290): www.ridgeback.co.uk.

chains — think of that grinding sound as your front derailleur struggles to drag the chain onto the smallest chainring as you begin a steep climb. What we really didn't need was narrower chains and more, thinner sprockets at the back. 7- and 8-speed gear systems work fine for touring, while the current 9-speed mountain-bike groups require more wheel dishing, meaning weaker rear wheels. Nearly all touring bikes now use 135mm mountain bike rear axles, but Co-Motion's Americano has a tandem-width 145mm rear axle to eliminate dishing. 10-speed gear systems mean thinner sprockets and weaker chains with no upside for tourers, but that doesn't mean they won't be foisted on us!

The alternative to derailleurs is the

14-speed Rohloff hub gear, often seen on big-budget expedition tourers, though less common on light tourers with drop bars. The rapid-shifting Rohloff works much better if the gear changer is right at your fingertips on a straight bar. What you get for the extra \$1,000 or more is a rock-solid, enclosed gear system and the benefit of a thicker chain that lasts longer turning a wheel that's not dished and, therefore, inherently stronger. Dutch maker Santos (santosbikes.com) and Co-Motion offer Rohloff-gearped touring bikes with an optional Gates belt drive instead of a chain (think no more oil-stained ankles), and the belt drive has proven itself during James Bowthorpe's record-breaking round-the-world ride in 2009. If you find derailleurs

too demanding of frequent minor attention, and ride in dusty or muddy places, a Rohloff could be the gear system for you, but take a long test ride first. Some find the buzz in the lower 7 gears irritating on long climbs. I found I preferred tinkering with derailleurs myself to getting technical support — rarely needed, admittedly — over the phone for my Rohloff hub.

Wheels

Wheel size is another issue that confuses bike buyers. The debate over 26-inch versus 700C is out of all proportion to the size difference — just two inches — because it's really all about mountain bikes versus road bikes. The emergence of 29er bikes on fat-tire 700C wheels proves you can have it both ways.

Rivendell Bicycle Works offers custom touring frames (\$3,500 and up). The company also offers frame, fork, bottom bracket, seatpost and headset bikes from \$1,000 including the Sam Hillborne (\$1,000), the Betty Foy (\$1,000), the Atlantis (frame, fork, and headset \$2,000), and the Hungapillar, a new touring bike with mountain bike clearances (frame, fork and headset \$1500 or \$1600): www.rivbike.com, 800-345-3918.

Roberts Cycles offers the Clubman, Transcontinental, Cumbria and Rough Stuff: www.robertscycles.com, +44 (0)20-8684-3370.

Rodriguez Bicycles offers the Adventure (\$1,999 and up); S&S-equipped (\$2,699 and up), the Willie Weir co-designed model UTB from (\$2,099); S&S equipped (\$2,799), the Navigator (\$1,999 and up); S&S-equipped (\$2,699 and up), the 6-pack Micro folder (from \$4,199 including all couplings), the Toucan ST Tandem (\$2,999); S&S equipped (\$4,599), the 8-ball convertible tandem/single travel bike (from \$6,999 including all couplings), as well as many other road bike and tandem models: www.rodcycle.com, 206-527-4822.

Salsa offers the Vaya road adventure bike (titanium frameset: \$1,999; steel frameset: \$599; complete bike: \$1,499) the adventure touring 29er Fargo (titanium frameset: \$1,999, steel frameset: \$499; complete bike: \$1,650), and the light touring Casseroll (frameset – frame, fork, front rack- \$549;

complete bike, \$1,199): www.salsacycles.com, 877-668-6223.

Santana offers a wide array of tandems suitable for touring (starting at \$3,295): www.santanatandem.com, 800-334-6136.

Santos offers several cycles including the Santos Trekking, Santos Trekking Comfort, Santos Trekking Lite, and the Santos Trekking Special: www.santosbikes.com, +29 (0)252 426123.

Seven Cycles offers the steel Halcyon (frame: \$2,095; complete bike: \$3,499 and up); the Halcyon S (frame: \$2,695; complete bike: \$4,099 and up); and the expedition Expat S (frame: \$2,695; complete bike: \$4,199 complete bike): www.sevencycles.com, 617-923-7774.

Soma Fabrications offers the light-touring frames the DoubleCross (\$399), the ES (\$399), the MTB frame Groove (\$419), the heavy duty Saga Touring (frame and fork \$499), and the Double Cross DC, which has disc and cantilever brake mounts (\$419): www.somafab.com.

Surly offers the steel Long-Haul Trucker (frame: \$470; complete bike: \$1,199), the Karate Monkey (frame: \$465; complete bike: \$1,099), and the new Troll 26" mountain/touring/commuting (frame: \$495) – check for updated LHT: www.surlybikes.com, 877-743-3191.

Terry Bicycles offers the Valkyrie Tour (\$3,100) and the Isis Sport (\$3,800) for light touring: www.terrybicycles.com, 800-289-8379.

Thorn Cycles Ltd. Offers the Club and Audax - check for pricing and availability: www.thorncycles.co.uk.

Tout Terrain offers the Panamericana (frame with shock: \$2,695): www.tout-terrain.de/2, +49 (761)-58997-44.

Trek offers the venerable steel 520 (\$1,429.99): www.trekbikes.com.

Velotraum offers the Konzept: www.velotraum.de, (07033) 9990. (Site in German).

VooDoo offers the Nakisi (see pages 38-39).

Waterford Cycles offers custom-built touring bikes, the new T-22 and 1900 Adventure Cycle (frame: \$1,800) and the TIG T-14 (frame: \$1,400). Matching fork with double eyelets, stainless steel dropouts and Tubus Tara rack mounts available (\$350): www.waterfordbikes.com, 262-534-4190.

Windsor Bicycles offers the steel touring bike, the Tourist (\$1,495): www.windsorbicycles.com.

CUSTOM TOURING-FRAME BUILDERS:

Curt Goodrich Bicycles www.curtgoodrich.com, 612-788-6812.

Ira Ryan Cycles www.iraryancy.com/bikes-tour.html, 503-810-2504.

J. Peter Weigle www.classicrendezvous.com/USA/weigle_jp.htm, 860-434-0700.

Littleford Custom Bicycles www.littlefordbicycles.com, 503-922-1934.

LPY Cycles www.lpycycles.com, +86 1312-060-4962.

Mariposa www.mariposabicycles.com, 416-423-0456.

MSH1 Bicycle Works www.msh1bw.com, 860-537-9746.

Peacock Groove www.peacockgroove.com, 651-269-5295.

Pereira Cycles www.pereiracycles.com, 503-333-5043.

Peter Mooney Cycles www.peter-mooney.com, 617-489-3577.

Rex Cycles www.rexcycles.com, 916-446-5706.

Spectrum www.spectrum-cycles.com, 610-398-1986.

Steelman Cycles www.steelmancycles.com, 650-364-3939.

True North Cycles www.true-northcycles.com, 519-585-0600.

Vanilla Bicycles www.vanillabicycles.com, 503-233-2453.

Velosmith www.velosmith.com.au, +61 (0)3 6266-4582.

Willits Brand Bicycles www.willitsbikes.com, 877-558-4446.

Note: *The June issue of Adventure Cyclist will cover non-standard bicycles and will contain a table of tandems, recumbents, folding bikes, and more.*

Some touring-bike builders recognize that for larger sizes of a given frame, the bigger wheel size makes sense. Conversely, shorter riders, especially women, are more likely to find a 26-inch-wheel frame that fits them. Worldwide, 26-inch wheels are the most common size and, if you're riding in Africa or Asia, you'll have a tougher time finding 700C wheels — not that it stopped several round-the-world riders from using 700C bikes. If you want to tour on 29er wheels, that's possible too with bikes like Salsa's Fargo.

Nearly all touring bikes come with 36-hole (H) rims while mountain bikes generally come with 32H rims. Again, this is small stuff designed to make life more difficult for us cyclotourists, but

although 36H is undoubtedly more desirable, and therefore harder to find just when you need a new rim, it's only one factor in wheel strength. Spoke tension, strong rims, beefy and properly inflated tires, and indeed minimal loads and careful riding are more important for long-lasting, trouble-free wheels.

Room to fit wide tires and fenders gives a touring bike a lot more versatility, though first consider if this will be your one do-it-all bike or just one more for the collection. Most touring bikes will take a 35mm wide tire, perfect for loaded road touring in the lower 48, but a bike that can take wider tires is surely better able to carry a camping load and go trail riding. Some tourers think that fenders are just one more thing to

break, but they aren't heavy and they help keep not just rain but also dust off your gears, frame, and panniers. And they're removable if you change your mind.

Once on the road, you'll be glad you chose solid, well-thought-out gear that runs without complaint, allowing you to concentrate on your trip — but don't forget: a touring bike is just a means of travel and not *the* end in itself. The happiest cyclists I meet on tour are often riding rubbish bikes but are deeply immersed in the world around them. **AC**

Stephen Lord is the author of the Adventure Cycle-Touring Handbook. You can purchase this book through our online store at www.adventurecycling.org/store.