

# 2002 Touring Bike Buyer's Guide

## Narrow your choices, make your pick



PHOTO BY TOM BOL

**As is our custom, we'd like to remind you that this is what buying a touring bike is really all about.**

**F**or riders buying a new touring bike this year, there's great news —value has never been better. You can spend well under \$1,000 and get a bike with touring-specific geometry, pinpoint index shifting, and a 9-speed cassette mated with a triple crankset — features that would have been unbelievable to the intrepid Bikecentennial pioneers who crossed the country in 1976 twirling a 5-speed freewheel.

Back then, they couldn't have gotten a bike this good at

any price. But even in the new millennium, finding the right touring bike still takes some thought. Although fewer touring-specific models are being offered, there's a wide variety of touring-possible models. The perfect bike for your long-distance needs is almost certainly out there. To help you find it, we did your homework — talked with bike company reps at the Interbike trade show, searched through catalogs, pounded the Web and grilled experienced touring cyclists. Here's the scoop.

Many companies have backed away from loaded touring. At Interbike, Trek's venerable 520 wasn't even on display. Still, a decent selection of true touring bikes can still

**By Fred Matheny**

be found, at prices to fit any budget. For example, the steel-frame Fuji Touring costs just \$699 complete with rear rack. The top-line titanium Litespeed Blue Ridge is around \$2,780, depending on components.

For online shoppers, custom touring bikes are a mouse-click away at manufacturers such as Seven Cycles and Airborne. These companies and others will build to your specifications, even in titanium.

For light touring, consider an "event bike." These work great for supported tours, credit-card tours and centuries because they have triple chainrings plus clearance for fenders and wide tires. A modest amount of gear can be carried on a rear rack or in a large seat bag. Nearly every company includes several event bikes in its line.

An evolving category is "pavement bikes." These are road bikes with flat handlebars, bar-ends and 700C road tires. They typically have triple chainrings so can be used for light touring if an upright riding position and stability are priorities.

### Choosing the Right Bike

To narrow the choices, ask yourself three crucial questions:

Trek XO 1



#### 1. How much weight will I carry?

If light or credit-card touring is your style, you don't need a bike with great load-carrying ability. Your chief need is a triple crankset and clearance for fenders. Many event bikes will work. And because they're relatively light and handle more nimbly than loaded tourers, these bikes are at home in group rides and fast pachelines.

Cyclocross bikes, more available than ever due to the boom in 'cross racing, also work well for light touring. Avoid competition-specific models because they have a fairly high bottom bracket, no bottle cage mounts, and double chainrings with gears no lower than about a 39x25. Instead, look for a model that's designed for commuting and touring

first, cyclocross second. It'll have a fairly low bottom bracket for stability, lots of tire clearance, rack and fender eyelets, and a triple crankset with a low gear of at least 30x27.

A loaded tourer is right for long, self-sustained trips.

These bikes provide maximum load-carrying capacity, strength and stability. They feature eyelets and braze-ons for attaching racks, fenders and often a third bottle cage. Their wheelbase is extended for a smoother ride and more cockpit room. They're not as light and nimble as event bikes, but these aren't drawbacks when you're packing 40 pounds of gear.

Trailers are fast becoming accepted for touring. They track and balance well. You can pull a big load protected by a waterproof cover, then quickly unhitch the bike for unladen sightseeing after you've set up camp. Nearly any road or mountain bike with sufficiently low gears can tow a trailer.

#### 2. Will I tour on pavement or off-road?

The availability of 700C-wheel mountain bikes (see below) makes it possible to have one bike for roads and trails. But opt for a traditional touring bike if you plan to stick to pavement or a mountain bike if you're headed off-road.

Loaded touring bikes are purpose-built and combine a traditional drop handlebar with low gears, plenty of tire clearance, and eyelets for racks and fenders (see sidebar). Mountain bikes come stock with low gears and massive tire clearance. Although many cyclists dislike riding long distances with a flat handlebar because of its limited hand positions, others prefer the stability that comes with sitting upright. Bar-ends can be installed for more places to grip.

Of course, if you intend to use a mountain bike for road touring, you need to replace its knobby tires with quiet, easy-rolling smooth treads.

#### 3. How much can I spend?

One school of thought says to tour on an inexpensive bike because it's subject to abuse. The contrary view says buy a top-line bike because it's going to be ridden up to 10 hours a day in remote places, putting a premium on comfort and reliability. High-quality wheels and components are likely to be more dependable, and with luck a top-end frame

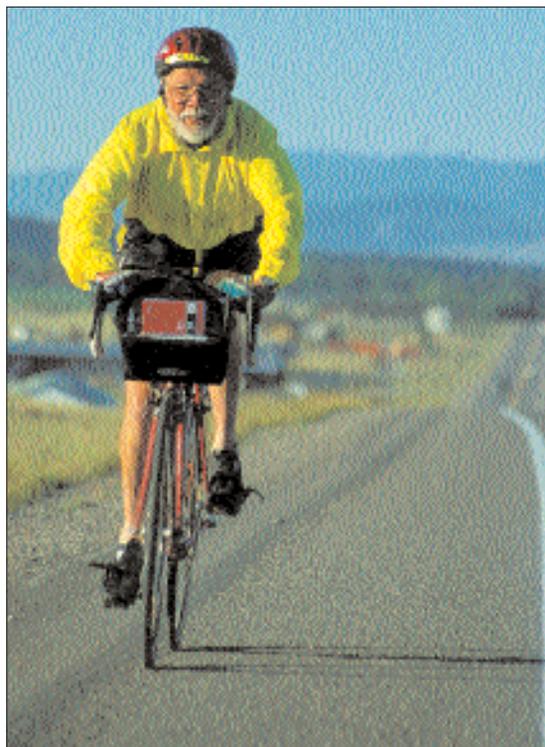


PHOTO BY AARON TEASDALE

**With a little homework, and honest answers to questions you ask yourself, you'll wind up with the right bike.**

# What to Look for in a Loaded Touring Bike

- **Frame design and construction.** Loaded touring bikes need long chainstays for stability (around 43cm, or just under 17 inches), heel clearance when using panniers and the longer chain line required by a triple. The most crucial safety feature is a hefty top tube for stability. Loaded bikes with flimsy top tubes are almost sure to shimmy on fast descents.
- **Braze-ons and eyelets.** Fork and rear-dropout eyelets let you securely attach racks and fenders. Seatstay braze-ons near the rear brake allow a rack to be installed. Some forks have a similar fitting in the side of each blade for attaching a front rack. This is useful but not essential because a clamp can be used. Some people even contend that holes in the blades weaken a fork.
- **Frame and fork clearance.** The bike should accept at least 32-mm tires plus fenders. Many modern road bikes have clearance so narrow that only 25-mm tires fit. The problem is especially noticeable in carbon forks that sacrifice clearance for aerodynamics and style.
- **Frame size and riding position.** When you're touring with a load, a higher handlebar boosts comfort and control. Time was, you needed a larger frame to get the bar high enough, and that reduced standover clearance. Now many bikes are designed with a sloping top tube and high front end. The handlebar sits up but the frame doesn't endanger your crotch during dismounts.
- **Saddle.** You can always replace the saddle, of course, but it's better if the bike comes with one you like. Recent concerns over numbness and impotence have prompted manufacturers to develop a variety of anatomical saddles with pressure-reducing cutouts and holes. Still, the storied Brooks B17 and Pro leather saddles are preferred by a good number of long-distance riders. These seats conform to the anatomy as they break in.
- **Shifters.** Brake-lever shifters are the norm. Concerns about reliability have proven to be unfounded. In fact, these shifters are used by cyclocrossers in mud-bath conditions. For a drop bar you can also choose indexed bar-end shifters with a friction option in case you have to replace your trashed 9-speed rear wheel with a 7-speed bought at a yard sale in the hinterlands.
- **Gearing.** Lower is better, especially when grinding a knee-busting load up the last hill of the day. Look for at least a one-to-one low for loaded touring (26x26 or 30x30, for example). A 24x32 is lower and better. For light touring, a 30x27, common on bikes with triple cranksets, should be sufficient.
- **Brakes.** Cantilever brakes are the touring standard due to their generous clearance and stopping power. Direct-pull brakes work great on mountain bikes, but they usually have less clearance and often don't work as well as cantilevers with road brake levers. Shimano has just re-introduced good-quality, long-reach sidepull brakes that fit many touring frames. They're solid stoppers, easy to adjust and have nearly as much clearance as cantilevers.

-F.M.

can last for decades.

A bike may be a utility vehicle, but it's also an investment meant to give pleasure and performance. Let your pocketbook guide you. Many riders who economize on a bike, then become more enthusiastic about cycling, soon wish they'd spent more for higher quality.

## Examples of What We Mean

To bring these general guidelines to life, let's check seven well-designed 2002 touring bikes.

### Loaded Touring:

#### ■ Seven Cycles **Tsunami/Muse**

[www.sevencycles.com](http://www.sevencycles.com)

Frame only: Tsunami titanium \$2,595.

Muse titanium \$1,995

Tsunami steel \$1,495

Co-Motion fork \$375

Loaded touring bikes need a stiff frame (especially the top tube) for stability while carrying panniers. But the perfect frame for a 200-pound rider can be overbuilt and needlessly heavy for a petite rider.

Seven Cycles addresses this problem by offering custom-built bikes. Orders are made through bike shops that are authorized Seven dealers. The Tsunami features butted tubes in either steel or titanium. The Muse is the same design but built with straight-gauge titanium for heavier loads.

Seasoned tourists traditionally choose steel frames for



durability. But titanium has won converts for its corrosion resistance and a slightly more compliant ride. Both the Muse and the Tsunami have clearance for 700x32C tires and fenders (up to 38C on request).

According to Seven's Tyler Levine, either frame can be ordered with complete touring braze-ons and even disk brake mounts. All such extras are included in the base price.

### Thumbs Up

- ▲ Custom sizing and tube thickness
- ▲ Touring-specific geometry
- ▲ All the braze-ons you'll ever need

### Thumbs Down



▼ There goes Junior's college money

■ **Fuji Touring**

[www.fujibikes.com](http://www.fujibikes.com)  
MSRP: \$699

Under the direction of industry veteran and CEO Art Wester, Fuji is experiencing a resurgence in the U.S. market. This century-old brand has based its comeback on offering sensible, well-designed bikes at reasonable prices.

The Fuji Touring continues that trend. It's a full-on loaded touring bike complete with rear rack for under seven bills. Fuji has packed this bike with extras including double eyelets front and rear, an adequate low gear of 30x32-teeth and Vittoria Randonneur 32-mm tires. There's even a spare spoke holder on the chainstay. Add a butted cro-moly frame and fork and you've got a pack mule bike built to last.

Of course, the Touring isn't a lightweight. At around 27 pounds (with rack) you won't win any hillclimbs. But when this bike is heaped with camping gear, you'll appreciate the stability a lot more than you'll hate the extra weight.

Your wallet will be heavier, too.

**Thumbs Up**

- ▲ Can't beat the value
- ▲ Rack and fender eyelets
- ▲ Comes with rack

**Thumbs Down**

- ▼ Heavy
- ▼ Cost-cutting on some components

**Light Touring:**

■ **Airborne Carpe Diem**

[www.airborne.net](http://www.airborne.net)  
\$2,120 with Shimano Ultegra components

Airborne lets you buy a bike online built with the component package of your choice. As with any online purchase, fit is the big issue to be concerned about. There's nothing like actually trying something on before you buy. Airborne's website offers sound fit information, making the transaction less chancy.

Carpe Diem means "seize the day," and Airborne's titanium beauty is great for seizing those vacation days you can devote to light touring. The frame and fork shown here have rack braze-ons but take note that the Kinesis aluminum fork doesn't. Clearance is adequate for fenders, even with 700x37C tires.

**Thumbs Up**

- ▲ Reasonable price for a titanium bike
- ▲ Convenience of e-shopping with minimal risk of fit problems
- ▲ Also good for fast pacelines, cyclocross or commuting

**Thumbs Down**

▼ Traditionalists won't like the sloping top tube.

■ **Trek XO 1**

[www.trekbikes.com](http://www.trekbikes.com)  
MSRP: \$699.99

Trek swiped this moniker from the late and lamented bike company, Bridgestone. But even diehard Bridgestone fans might excuse the pillage because there's a lot to like in Trek's version — a double-butted, aluminum-frame cyclocross bike.

Rear mounts accommodate a rack for carrying all you'll need for credit card touring. Cantis combined with massive tire clearance front and rear mean you can mount wide rubber for on- and off-road jaunts. The stock Bontrager Jones tires work on dirt and pavement, although at 32-mm you may want something wider if your adventure plans include mild singletrack.

The XO 1 comes with Shimano M515 clipless pedals, compatible with recessed-heel shoes for efficient riding and walking. Bar-end shifters are a plus, too, but the 8-speed cassette yields a 30x26-tooth low gear, inadequate for steep climbs with a moderate load.

The bike's best feature? When you're not touring you can race 'cross or simply ride the rough stuff.

**Thumbs Up**

- ▲ Tire clearance up to 40 mm
- ▲ Bar-end shifters
- ▲ Replaceable derailleur hanger

**Thumbs Down**

- ▼ Higher cross-specific bottom bracket
- ▼ Inadequate low gear of 30x26-teeth
- ▼ 8-speed cassette when 9's now standard

**Off-Road Touring:**

■ **Cannondale F400 with CAAD3 frame**

[www.cannondale.com](http://www.cannondale.com)  
\$915

It's getting harder to find a good hardtail mountain bike for touring. Most models lack eyelets for racks and fenders. According to Cannondale's Tom Armstrong, it's a cost issue. Every add-on raises the price, so with little demand for fender/rack mounts manufacturers don't include them.

But Cannondale's bucking the trend. The F400 has rack eyelets on its rugged aluminum frame, making it a top choice for loaded off-road adventures. With slicks, it'll haul your gear on pavement, too.



**Airborne  
Carpe Diem**



The front suspension won't bob when you're climbing out of the saddle, thanks to Cannondale's lockout mechanism on the HeadShok fork. You simply turn a dial to make the fork rigid or give it the amount of shock absorption you like for bumpy roads or trails.

At a suggested retail price of less than a grand even with the legendary CAAD3 frame, you might expect second-rate components. But the F400 has a carefully chosen mix of Shimano LX, STX and XT. What the parts lack in cachet they recoup in reliability. Same goes for the 32-hole wheels with trail-worthy Cannondale Performance rims.

The F400 exceeds 26 pounds, depending on frame size. But when it's loaded and bumping along some wild single-track, you won't notice an extra pound or two.

**Thumbs Up**

- ▲ Junior can go to Harvard
- ▲ Lockout suspension fork
- ▲ Reliable rather than flashy components

**Thumbs Down**

- ▼ Not a lightweight

**The Big Wheel Option:**

- Gary Fisher Supercaliber \$2,750
  - Gary Fisher Mt. Tam \$1,750
- [www.fisherbikes.com](http://www.fisherbikes.com)

**More and more riders are turning to trailers to carry their gear.**

Wes Williams of Willets Brand Bicycles in Crested Butte, Colorado ([www.willitsbrand.com](http://www.willitsbrand.com)) pioneered 700C wheels on mountain bikes, lauding their advantages for 12 years. Bigger wheels roll over obstacles more easily, the tire contact patch is greater for more traction and just about any road rubber can be installed, making the bike more versatile. But for years, Williams was a voice crying in the wilderness.

Now the idea has hit the mainstream. Gary Fisher (among others) has followed suit with the Supercaliber and Mt Tam.

Both bikes have top-line components (Shimano, Avid, Bontrager, Time) and Fisher's favorite geometry: a long top tube and short stem for better handling on rough stuff. The big drawback on the Fisher bikes, specifically, is that you can't use a conventional rear rack. Even if braze-on fittings were on the seatstays, they'd be below the top of the big rear tire. On the other hand, 700C mountain bikes may well be the best trailer-towing models out there.

**Thumbs Up:**

- ▲ Advantages of 700C wheels
- ▲ Nice component selection

**Thumbs Down:**

- ▼ Conventional rear rack won't work

*Fred Matheny has been riding since the early 70's and still races — he placed third in the time trial at the 2000 Masters Nationals in the Jurassic age group. He has been writing about the sport nearly as long as he's been riding, most recently as Fitness and Training Editor for Bicycling Maga-*

**Gary Fisher  
Mt. Tam**



**Gary Fisher  
Supercaliber**



PHOTO BY DENNIS COELLO

# Touring Bikes 2002

	Brand and Model	Price	Frame	Wheel/Tire	Bars	Components	Contact
LOADED TOURING	Seven Muse	\$3200	Titanium	700x38c	Drop	Your Pick	sevencycles.com 617.923.7774 *
	Seven Tsunami -Ti	\$4200	Butted Titanium	700x38c	Drop	Your Pick	sevencycles.com 617.923.7774 *
	Seven Tsunami -Steel	\$2600	Butted Steel	700x38c	Drop	Your Pick	sevencycles.com 617.923.7774 *
	Jamis Aurora	\$595	Butted Chromoly	700x30c	Drop	Shimano Sora	jamisbikes.com 800.222.1570
	Fuji Touring	\$699	Butted Chromoly	700x32c	Drop	Shimano Mixed	fugibikes.com 201.337.1700
	Trek 520	\$999	Butted Chromoly	700x35c	Drop	Shimano Mixed	trekbikes.com 920.478.4678
	Terry Madeleine	\$2000	Reynolds 853	700x32c	Flat	Shimano Mixed	terrybicycles.com 800.289.8379
	Waterford Adventure	\$2700	Waterford Custom	700x38c	Drop	Shimano Mixed	waterfordbikes.com 262.534.4190
	IF Independence	\$2900	IF Custom	700x38c	Drop	Shimano Ultegra	ifbikes.com 617.666.3609
	Co-Motion Americano	\$2795	Butted Chromoly	700x38c	Drop	Dura-Ace/XT	co-motion.com 541.342.4583
	Cannondale T2000	\$1550	Aluminum	700x35c	Drop	Shimano Mixed	cannondale.com 800.245.3872
	Bruce Gordon BLT	\$1485	Butted Chromoly	700x45c	Either	Shimano LX	bgcycles.com 707.762.5601 *
	Bruce Gordon Rock n' Road	\$2385	Butted Chromoly	700x45c	Either	Shimano XT	bgcycles.com 707.762.5601 *
	Sakkit Expedition 26	\$3700	Lugged Butted Steel	26x1.9"	Either	Shimano Mixed	coinet.com/~beckman 541.388.5146
	Novara Safari	\$750	Butted Aluminum	26x1.9"	Flat	Shimano Nexave	rei.com 800.426.4840 *
Rivendell Atlantis	\$2200	Lugged Butted Steel	26"/700c	Flat	Shimano Mix	rivendellbicycles.com 925.933.7304	
LIGHT TOURING	Airborne Carpe Diem	\$2006	Butted Titanium	700x38c	Drop	Shimano 105	airborne.net 888-652.8624 *
	Gunnar Crosshairs	\$2175	Gunnar Custom	700x38c	Drop	Shimano Ultegra	gunnarbikes.com 262.534.4190
	Rivendell Rambouillet	\$2200	Lugged Butted Steel	700x38c	Drop	Shimano Mix	rivendellbicycles.com 925.933.7304
	IF Club Racer	\$2900	IF Custom Blend	700x30c	Drop	Shimano Ultegra	ifbikes.com 617.666.3609
	Trek X0-1	\$899	Aluminum	700x32c	Drop	Shimano Sora	trekbikes.com 920.478.4678
	Surly Cross Check	\$858	Butted Chromoly	700x45c	Drop	Shimano Mix	surlybikes.com 877.743.3191
	Bianchi Volpe	\$850	Butted Chromoly	700x32c	Drop	Shimano Tiagra	bianchiusa.com 510 264 1001 *
	Bianchi San Remo	\$1200	Butted Chromoly	700x32c	Drop	Campagnolo	bianchiusa.com 510 264 1001 *
Novara Randonee	\$750	Reynolds 520	700x32c	Drop	Shimano Mix	rei.com 800.222.1570 *	
OFF-ROAD	Cannondale F400	\$920	Aluminum	26x2.0"	Flat	Shimano Mix	cannondale.com 800.245.3872
	Trek 6500	\$700	Aluminum	26x2.1"	Flat	Shimano Deore	trekbikes.com 920.478.4678
	Bianchi Denali	\$1100	Butted Chromoly	26x2.1"	Flat	Shimano LX	bianchiusa.com 510 264 1001 *
	Sakkit Great Divide Tour	\$3700	Lugged Butted Steel	26x1.9"	Either	Shimano Mixed	coinet.com/~beckman 541.388.5146
	Bruce Gordon BLT EX	\$1485	Butted Chromoly	26x2.1"	Either	Shimano LX	bgcycles.com 707.762.5601 *
	Bruce Gordon Rock n' Road EX	\$2385	Butted Chromoly	26x2.1"	Either	Shimano XT	bgcycles.com 707.762.5601 *
BIG WHEELS	Willitts "28 Incher"	\$2500	Steel	700x52"	Either	Shimano XT	willitsbrand.com 970.349.0130 *
	Willitts New Sheriff	\$4500	Titanium	700x52"	Either	Shimano XTR	willitsbrand.com 970.349.0130 *
	Fisher SuperCaliber	\$2750	Aluminum	700x52"	Flat	Shimano XTR	fisherbikes.com 920.478.4678
	Fisher Mt Tam	\$1750	Aluminum	700x52"	Flat	Shimano XTR/XT	fisherbikes.com 920.478.4678
PAVEMENT	Trek 4500	\$400	Aluminum	26x2.1"	Flat	Shimano Mix	trekbikes.com 920.478.4678
	Trek 4300	\$310	Aluminum	26x2.1"	Flat	Shimano Mix	trekbikes.com 920.478.4678
	Bianchi Lynx	\$420	Butted Chromoly	26x2.1"	Flat	SRAM 5.0	bianchiusa.com 510 264 1001 *
	Cannondale Silk Warrior 700	\$1623	Aluminum	700x28c	Flat	Shimano Mix	cannondale.com 800.245.3872
	Cannondale Silk Adventure 700	\$1243	Aluminum	700x37c	Flat	Shimano Mix	cannondale.com 800.245.3872
EVENTS	Trek 1000	\$600	Aluminum	700x25c	Drop	Shimano Mix	trekbikes.com 920.478.4678
	Bianchi Eros	\$1100	Butted Chromoly	700x25c	Drop	Campagnolo	bianchiusa.com 510 264 1001 *
	Cannondale R900 Triple	\$1875	Aluminum	700x23c	Drop	Shimano 105	cannondale.com 800.245.3872
	Cannondale Silk Warrior 500	\$1543	Aluminum	700x25c	Drop	Shimano Mix	cannondale.com 800.245.3872