**Handup Gloves, $29**

Have you ever had a piece of gear that makes you smile every time you use it? For me, it’s these gloves. They’re super high quality, made with bright and fun fabrics, and have irreverent and silly words on the palms — Party Time, Stoked, Get Rad, Braaaap, Send It, etc. They’re made from a lightweight four-way stretch mesh fabric on the back, with a thin, ultra-durable faux leather Clarino palm that gave me a good grip on the bars every ride and never got soggy. The meshy back and the microporous palm did a great job of wicking sweat, but the gloves also provided some protection in cool temps. They pull on easily and are tight enough to stay on without a Lycra-shredding Velcro wrist tab.

It’s ridiculous that these gloves make me smile every time I wear them, but I ride bikes because it makes me happy. In the middle of a huge climb or on a tour day when nothing’s going quite right, I look at these gloves and they remind me how lucky I am to be out on my bike. —BB

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**Archer Components D1x Trail, $369**

Is a hybrid electric/cable shifting solution the best of all worlds or an unholy abomination? Archer isn’t afraid to ask — the D1x Trail kit is a retrofittable electronic shifter mounted to the chainstay that connects to an existing derailer via a short length of cable. A bar-mounted remote connects to the shifter via Bluetooth, and the whole thing is powered by high-capacity lithium-ion rechargeable AA (shifter) and AAA (remote) batteries. Archer claims the unit is compatible with any derailer and any number of speeds (obviously it will only shift the rear derailer on a 2x or 3x setup). I tested the D1x on a SRAM GX 1x11 drivetrain, and using the accompanying iPhone app I was able to quickly dial in very accurate shifts. The app allows for tiny adjustments in each gear during initial setup in lieu of indexed cable shifting. It’s a fairly straightforward process, except that each gear step requires individual setup unlike a cable-based shifter.

On the road and trail, the D1x is a beat slower than a cable shifter, which made for a few rough shifts under too much power early on, but I quickly adjusted. The buttons on the remote had a nice positive “click” feel to each shift (left for moving up the cassette, right for down), and the touch required was far lighter than required for a trigger shifter.

So why would you make the trade? Well, folks with hand issues will find the light action a godsend, and the shifter’s ability to adapt to any derailer opens some interesting possibilities for drivetrain mix and match. The remote uses SRAM’s Matchmaker mount, which is officially for flat bars, but it doesn’t take a ton of imagination to see how this could be rigged up to dropbars. A claimed 80-hour ride time would be manageable for most situations, and the “Get Home Gear” feature shifts you to a preselected gear when the battery reaches a critical level. —AS
Lauf Smoothie Handlebar, $220

The Lauf Smoothie may look like any other premium carbon dropbar, but the devil is in the details. It's available in 400mm, 420mm, and 440mm widths (I tested the widest), with a short 125mm drop, 80mm reach, and a moderate 16° flare. Where it differs is in the top's 3° backsweep and, unusually, a very sharp turn to the hoods. That hard angle makes for some interesting hand positions — I found myself hooking my thumbs in the corners while climbing. It adds a degree of difficulty when taping the bar though, and at first that sharp corner seemed to be in the way when riding in the drops, but I quickly got used to it.

What sets the Smoothie apart is its flex. Like the leaf springs in its suspension forks, Lauf employs glass fibers to design “smooth zones” into the bar to dampen vibrations and absorb bumps. While riding along a rough road, I could move my hands from the tops to the hoods to the drops and feel the difference along the way. In fact, I could flex the drops with my hands alone. It's incredible. The Smoothie works so well that I would aim for cracks and railroad crossings, only to chuckle as I floated over them.

At $220, the Smoothie would appear to cost a pretty penny, but compared to other high-end carbon offerings, some of which run to well over $300, it's very nearly a bargain. Lauf markets the Smoothie as a gravel product, but it's a smart choice for anyone with sore hands. —DM

Velocio Women's LUXE Bib Short, $259

Let me give y'all the gift of discovering something so essential that you'll be mad you've never questioned why it didn't exist before. One word: FLYfree. Velocio's Women's LUXE Bib Short is the cycling product every female-bodied cyclist has been unknowingly waiting for — pee-break–friendly bibs. As the name implies, these bibs allow a quick behind-the-tree “nature break” without the hassle of removing every other clothing item first. Freedom, finally! This innovative technology is actually pretty simple in practice: the suspender straps cross like an X in the back and are so elastic that they allow the waist of the bibs to be pulled down and out of the way in a squat. If you're skeptical about how straps can be so stretchy and still snap back to fitting tight when you get back on the bike, you're not alone. But I can vouch — this elastic is otherworldly and always snaps back.

Along with the gift of FLYfree, the LUXE Bib Short has a glove-like fit with thick, uniform suspender straps that will never dig into your shoulders and soft compression material with legs that err on the longer side, which I really appreciate. Velocio designed these bibs with minimal seams, and I haven't experienced even a slight chafe yet. These are truly luxurious (you absolutely get what you pay for), and lately I've found myself reaching for them every time I go for a spin. —AM