



(Above right) Stronger 6mm screws secure the rear carrier instead of 5mm ones

## SPA CYCLES Ti TOURING

Chris Juden tests an own-brand bike from touring specialists Spa

Spa Cycles' titanium tourer arrived for review before the audax bike that we featured in the February-March issue. The latter was an eleventh hour substitution for a bike from another manufacturer that failed to arrive. That's why we've featured two titanium bikes from Spa only two issues apart.

Titanium is arguably the ideal material for a touring bike, being lighter than steel, but just as fatigue resistant and immune to corrosion (also saving the weight of paint). Unfortunately it's rather expensive, but becoming more available and affordable. Ten years ago a titanium tourer would be a cyclo-cross frame on holiday; nowadays it's more likely

designed for the job.

Spa Cycles' Ti-Tourer draws upon this retailer's long and close association with cycle-touring. The frame is designed by CTC Forum regular '531Colin' (Thomson), who also builds Spa Cycles' wheels, and it's equipped with components selected for performance versus price by proprietor John Pocklington. The result is a bike that'll save a pound or two in weight over similar tourers in steel and costs only a few hundred more.

### Frame & fork

Titanium being not only 45% lighter than steel, but less stiff in similar proportion, the tubes of this frame are mostly 3mm (1/8in) fatter than a tourer made from Reynolds 725 and also have slightly

thicker walls. This gives the frame about the same bending stiffness, but saves a little weight even though they're plain gauge 3/2.5 (percentages of aluminium and vanadium) alloy. Some Ti frames have butted tubes in stronger 6/4 alloy and whilst that does save a little more weight, 3/2.5 is less affected by welding, so the benefits of butted 6/4 are not as great as one might expect, especially given the requirement for stiffness when a touring frame is carrying luggage.

There's nevertheless that subtle springiness we appreciate in steel. The ride of this bike is very much like the Hewitt Cheviot SE that I reviewed in 2003 – and liked so much I bought it. The geometry is similar too, with differences all in



### NEED TO KNOW

#### Spa Cycles Titanium Touring

**Price:** £1550 (from £1450)

**Contact:** Spa Cycles of Harrogate, [www.spacycles.co.uk](http://www.spacycles.co.uk)

**Sizes available:** 51, 54, 57, 60cm

**Weight:** 12.48kg complete (54)

**Frame & fork:** Titanium (3/2.5 plain gauge) frame with fittings for 3 bottles, top-tube pump, mudguard & carrier (M6). Steel fork with fittings for low-load carrier, lamps & guard.

#### Transmission:

27-speed, 20–113in. Stronglight Impact 170mm cranks, 46,36,24T alloy rings, 11-32 cassette, Tiagra front & LX rear mech, Tiagra STI shifters. SPD pedals.

#### Wheels:

Schwalbe Marathon Racer 32-622 tyres, Rigida Spyder rims, 36×3 2.0/1.8mm db spokes (2.0/2.4 sb rear rhs), LX hubs.

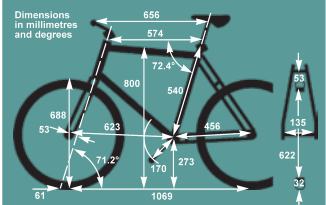
**Braking:** Tektro SR720 cantilever brakes

#### Steering & Seating:

Stronglight O'light headset, 65mm spacers, BBB 80mm 6° stem, 39cm shallow drop bars. B17 saddle.

#### Accessories:

Tubus Cargo rear carrier, Stronglight mudguards,



the right directions. There's a full complement of fittings (e.g. bosses for three bottles), and I was pleased to see 6mm screws (rather than 5mm) securing the rear carrier. All good carriers have holes that big nowadays. It's time all frames caught up!

Chinese titanium is married to a British fork in Reynolds steel, since suitable Ti fork blades or a carbon fork with enough offset for a 71° head angle are not available. Enamelled black, it matches the Tubus rear carrier and bristles with braze-ons, including separate mudguard eyes (leaving both at the fork-end for the carrier) and for a lamp on either side. (Keen-eyed readers may have spotted that a couple of those are missing from our pre-production sample.) Most importantly it works well with the frame.

There are no 'lawyer's lips' on the dropouts, to stop the front wheel dropping out if left unfastened, so the bike won't conform with EN14764. However, I think that Spa Cycles' customers (especially those in the market for an expensive tourer) will know how to use a quick-release and appreciate not having to re-adjust it each time they put the wheel back. I might even argue it's safer that way.

One thing I didn't like was the amount of swarf inside the seat-tube (from threading the bottle bosses) that if not removed would have marred the seatpost and might even jam it. Titanium easily sticks to other metals, so anti-seize is essential on all threads

and fittings. And whilst it is better that a touring bike not attract attention when its rider is off looking at something else, the plain brushed metal finish and somewhat drab decals will disappoint those who want an expensive bike to look expensive.

### Components

Spa's Ti-Tourer is available as a frame and fork for £850, to be assembled with your own choice of components, or in a standard Shimano Tiagra/LX build as reviewed. I'm not convinced that external bearings give any real advantage over square taper bottom brackets, so it pleases me that Spa Cycles stir this mix of road and trekking equipment with a Stronglight chainset. It all works very well together, with faultless indexing thanks to 9-speed compatibility (make the most of it: Tiagra goes 10-speed next year!) and despite the front mech being designed for much bigger chainrings that have one more tooth difference between outer and middle. The last factor brings this 36T middle ring very close to the mech, but being more curved than the cage keeps it clear.

The wheels run true and have differential spoking at the rear to balance the dish. Schwalbe's most efficient variety of Marathon tyre keeps the world rolling smoothly by, and when necessary Tektro wide-profile cantilevers bring it to a firm stop. The handling is also good, loaded or not, and there's



Loaded or not, the handling of Spa's Ti Touring bike is good

clearance for wider (37mm) tyres.

The rest of the equipment is also well chosen: shallow dropped bars thickly padded with tape, a choice of stem lengths and 65mm of spacers to perfect your position, a classic Brooks B17 leather saddle (it's actually quite a while since I've sat on one of those but found it immediately comfortable), Stronglight headset and mudguards, a couple of bottle cages and a Tubus Cargo carrier. That last is not part of the standard build, but one of the best ways to load up this or any touring bike. I added my own SPD pedals and £100 to the standard price to allow for these necessary extra parts, with which the bike was also weighed.

### Conclusion

It's a totally sound tourer, one of the best I've had the opportunity to ride. Well done, Colin and John! I'd certainly like a tourer that weighs a bit less and that baggage handlers can't scratch the paint off... maybe if my son has the Hewitt instead?

## RIVALS



**Van Nicholas Amazon**  
€2403 (c. £2129)  
Carbon forked Ti touring/cyclo-cross bike. Check for toe overlap before purchase. [vannicholas.com](http://vannicholas.com)



**Sabbath Silk Route** £2199  
Ti frame and cromoly fork, similar to the Spa bike reviewed. Also available as a frame only. [sabbathbicycles.co.uk](http://sabbathbicycles.co.uk)



**Dawes Super Galaxy**  
£1700  
Not titanium but steel, the 2011 incarnation uses Reynolds 853 for the frame. [dawescycles.com](http://dawescycles.com)