Bike test

Steel tourers

Today's touring bikes combine traditional materials and styling with modern standards. **Simon Withers** tests a Sonder Santiago and a Surly Disc Trucker

SIMON WITHERS

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There's more than one way to build a drop-bar steel tourer, as our two test bikes demonstrate. While disc brakes are now almost ubiquitous, the lack of a touring-specific groupset means that drivetrains often differ. Tyre widths vary, too – and sometimes so do diameters: tourers are one bike type where the 26in wheel isn't dead.

The Surly Disc Trucker, which evolved from the now-discontinued Long Haul Trucker, comes with either 26in wheels (sizes 42-56cm) or 700C (sizes 56-64cm). Since the test bike is a 54 it has the smaller wheels, which are shod with super-wide rubber for comfort on tarmac and grip and control off road. Its triple chainset provides wide-range gearing, while its maximum load capacity is a massive 136kg (300lb).

The Sonder Santiago has a 2×11 SRAM Rival drivetrain with a sub-compact double chainset (48-32). All frame sizes come with 700C wheels fitted with tyres in a narrower, more traditional touring bike width: 35mm. They're tubeless ready, as are those of the Surly, and Sonder will set them up tubeless for an extra £44.99. Both bikes come with rear racks. The Sonder also gets bottle cages and SKS mudguards.

Frame and fork

It's steel for both bikes, of course. Why wouldn't it be? The Surly Disc Trucker uses 4130 chrome-moly for its frame and fork, while the Sonder Santiago's frame is made from Reynolds 631, which Reynolds says is 10 per cent stronger than its 531 predecessor. Both framesets are neatly TIG-welded and tidily finished, with the Surly having a rich powder-coated paint job. Cable routing is external, which may make for a slightly cable-heavy look but also makes DIY maintenance easier – a win for me.

Since the framesets are steel, you have the added bonus that, if looked after, these two should last you a lifetime. Steel production also has much less of an environmental impact than titanium, aluminium or carbon and is far