



Cycle's test promise

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easily lower it. But this position puts no stress on your lower back and your upright posture is great for traffic, where you can both see and be seen, and for enjoying the wide open spaces on those long, long days in the saddle. Its flared bar is a real boon in a lot of situations, offering that much more control over more challenging surfaces. I like the fact that while the drops are shallow they come back a long way towards you.

The Sonder, though still very much a tourer, is a little livelier. That isn't surprising considering its lower weight, narrower tyres and steeper head angle. Once the bike is loaded with panniers, of course, any weight difference becomes pretty much negligible. The Sonder has an absolutely lovely ride on the road, where the tyres have enough volume to soften so-so surfaces without stealing too much of your speed. A long wheelbase ensures stable handling at all times. The only thing I missed was a bottom gear as low as the Surly's 26/34, which I think a full-on tourer needs, both for carrying heavy loads and for climbing – and especially for both at the same time!

The Surly's super-wide Extra Terrestrial tyres, which Surly describes as 'heavy-duty off-road touring tyres', are comfortable over even the roughest surfaces. I found they worked well over both smooth and rough surfaces, gripping on grit and light gravel and not feeling too sluggish on tarmac. For road commutes or touring entirely on surfaced roads, I'd go for slicker and slimmer

Other options



KONA SUTRA SE
£1,899

Chrome-moly tourer with abundant braze-ons, a 3x10 Shimano Deore drivetrain controlled by bar-end shifters, TRP Spyre brakes and 700x40C Schwalbe Marathon Mondial tyres.
konaworld.com



GENESIS TOUR DE FER 10
£1,499.99

A chrome-moly tourer that's equipped with essentials like mudguards and a rack but whose 3x9 Shimano Sora drivetrain has a too-high [30/32] bottom gear. Cable discs, 700x37C Marathon tyres.
genesishikes.co.uk

1.5in or 1.35in tyres, but I'd happily stick with these for the towpaths, tracks and poorly surfaced roads I do a lot of my riding on.

The Surly is a little heavier than the Sonder but it was a decent, albeit sedate, climber. Its 20in bottom gear keeps you in the saddle and spinning where you'd be grunting and out of the saddle on the higher-g geared Sonder. The brakes on both bikes performed well in all weathers, though they do require more effort on your part than hydraulics.

One final point: while the Sonder is virtually silent when you're pedalling, start freewheeling and it's like you've unleashed a hive full of bees! It was loud enough to turn the heads of walkers on the Bristol and Bath Railway Path. ●

Verdict

Both these bikes tick the usual touring boxes – long-distance comfort, rear racks, solid components – plus some less common ones, such as tubeless-ready tyres. Yet there are differences.

The Sonder's geometry makes it a little livelier to ride, but although its SRAM gears work very well, they're too high for extended, loaded tours, especially a tour that takes in hilly or mountainous terrain. Despite costing a good deal less, it's equipped better than the Surly, featuring mudguards and bottle cages.

The Surly can't match the Sonder for value but, out of the box, is the one I'd pick for heavily-loaded, expedition-type tours. It's tough, practical and comes with a more suitable gear range.