

## Group test

# FAST-ROLLING WIDE TYRES



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Heavy tyres are optional for touring and gravel bikes. **Richard Hallett** reviews lighter, faster-rolling rubber



#### FOLDING BEAD

Lighter and more expensive than a steel wire bead, this feature also makes it easier to carry a spare.

#### WEIGHT

A thinner tread and a lighter, more supple carcass save weight. A 700x37C tyre is heavier than a smaller diameter 650x37B but, as a guide, expect a weight of well under 500g for either size.

#### PUNCTURE PROTECTION

A puncture-resistant layer adds weight and stiffness, so lighter tyres do without or employ a less effective one. For tubeless tyres, this may be largely irrelevant.

#### TREAD PATTERN

With a thin tread cap, this will inevitably be light. Even a file tread works well on gravel, but no tyre in this category is meant for mud. A thin, light tread cap reduces mileage and puncture resistance.

#### TUBELESS COMPATIBILITY

Tyres suitable for use with tubeless rims or with a tubeless conversion tend to have a tighter bead and will take a higher inflation pressure than conventional clinchers but need a sealant fluid to be airtight.

#### SIZE

Larger air-chamber tyres for road and gravel are mostly 30-50mm wide and made to fit 700C/29er (622mm) and 650B/27.5" (584mm) rims. As a rule, wider is better for comfort and rolling resistance – but inevitably heavier.

**T**HE PERFORMANCE ADVANTAGES of wide-section, lightweight cycle tyres over narrow ones were well-understood prior to the Second World War but forgotten in the decades afterwards as cycling enthusiasts looked to competition machinery for technical guidance. Today such tyres are mainstream, their combination of low rolling resistance, bump absorption, and rough-roads capability unlocking new riding experiences. Key features include: a generous air volume; a lightweight, supple carcass more commonly associated with road racing tyres;

and a shallow tread pattern unsuited to off-road cycling proper but more than capable of tackling unmetalled roads.

These tyres also suit cycle touring, with the widest examples ideal for the weight of a fully-laden machine, where their speed can significantly extend the range of a day's riding. While they are less durable than a heavy-duty touring tyre, many are tubeless compatible, alleviating some concerns over vulnerability to punctures. If you are looking for a faster, more responsive ride, today's large-volume all-road tyres may provide the answer.

#### Pressure drop

Racers use narrow, high-pressure tyres. For everyone else, wider and softer is usually better. For more, visit the website: [cyclinguk.org/cycle/tyre-pressure](http://cyclinguk.org/cycle/tyre-pressure)

**1 SCHWALBE G-ONE SPEED TLE £64.99**

**SCHWALBE.COM**

Made in a decent range of sizes from 40-584 to a massive 60-622, and including a useful 30-622, the G-One Speed rolls well while offering substantially greater toughness than the lightest tyres on test here. The 40-584 test sample is, at just under 450g, some 140g heavier than the same-size Gravel King. The tyre is tubeless-compatible and employs a 'MicroSkin' fabric to help the sidewall retain air when used with a sealant liquid. It worked perfectly with a Stan's No-Tubes kit, sealing immediately, holding a test 80psi (but ridden at the recommended maximum 60psi), and retaining air pressure for a week between checks. Used tubeless, it offers a compelling combination of speed, comfort and toughness. The pimped tread pattern grips well on wet, slippery back-lane tarmac, but it is shallow and can't be expected to offer extended life; expect around 2,000 road miles from the rear.

**2 PANARACER GRAVEL KING £39.99**

**ZYROFISHER.CO.UK**

Panaracer was instrumental in kickstarting the fast, fat tyre trend a decade or more ago, and the Gravel King shows the Japanese manufacturer's expertise in the field. The tyre's fine file tread, in a grippy natural rubber compound, and its lightweight AX-Alpha Cord casing make it a typically speedy, comfortable big-volume tyre, while a thin anti-puncture layer under the tread adds worthwhile toughness. Fatter versions (38mm or wider) are tubeless-compatible. At 310g, the 650x38B version is astonishingly light, and the 700x38C is only 10g heavier. Limited tread life may restrict its application, but the speed-versus-toughness trade-off will please the faster rider on road or gravel.

**3 COMPASS BON JON PASS £54**

**SVENCYCLES.COM**

A fine exemplar of the 'speed at all costs' breed of all-roads tyre, the 35mm Bon Jon Pass sits in the middle of a family of tyres



from the US brand. The standard version uses a fine casing (there's an even lighter alternative) and a thin tread with a file pattern to keep weight to an impressive 350g; construction is comparable to that of a high-end competition road clincher or tubular tyre. It rolls exceedingly quickly, especially on broken tarmac, where the supple construction and large air chamber soak up moderate bumps with aplomb. Tread life is limited, however, and resistance to puncture by sharp object negligible unless used tubeless. An 'event' tyre if ever there was one.

**4 CONTINENTAL CONTACT SPEED £29.95+ (RIGID BEAD) CONTI-TYRES.CO.UK**

Wearing a tread pattern modelled on that of the German manufacturer's Competition tubular, the Contact Speed is perhaps the fastest-rolling tyre in Continental's commuting and touring range. Its tread cap is thin, so don't expect huge mileage, but this and the supple 180tpi carcass keep weight down and allow the tyre to perform well on a variety of surfaces. Two Safety System anti-puncture layers stiffen the tyre enough to lessen ride comfort and increase rolling resistance when compared with the lightest rubber in the category, but for many this will be an acceptable trade-off for reduced susceptibility to flats. The Micro-diamond tread patterns grips well on loose and greasy surfaces, giving the tyre true all-roads capability, and extends over the 'skinwall' sidewalls for added protection, making the tyre suitable for use with a bottle dynamo. The Contact Speed is made in a wide range of sizes from 20x1 1/8" to 700x42C and including numerous 26" and 27.5"/650B sizes. In some of them, there's a choice between rigid and folding beads, the latter saving some 80g – and adding £10 – per tyre.



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