

Kit reviews

GEAR

COMPONENTS, KIT, AND MEDIA SELECTED AND REVIEWED BY SPECIALIST JOURNALISTS AND CYCLING UK STAFF

Kool-Stop SALMON RIM BRAKE BLOCKS

£8.00+ koolstop.com

WAY BACK IN THE 1970s, when disc brakes were new to motorcycling and cycle brake performance decidedly sketchy in the dry, let alone wet weather, Oregon-based Kool-Stop began making brake blocks, or pads, that were a marked improvement on the bone-hard, low-friction offerings fitted as original equipment even on the leading rim brakes of the time. The day after scattering a crowd of spectators at a rain-soaked Worthing sea-front criterium, having failed to slow appreciably at the end of the first straight with my Campagnolo Super Record brakes, I went out and bought a set of Kool-Stop blocks...

Since then, OEM blocks have improved out of all recognition. But Kool-Stop brake blocks have also moved on since then and retain a significant edge in several aspects of performance over products from the major component manufacturers, while in many cases costing less.

The Kool-Stop range of replacement rim brake blocks is extensive, stretching to rod-

pull brakes for old-school upright roadsters, and includes blocks made to match visually the originals of classic brakes by Mafac, Weinmann, Suntour and more, in addition those from Shimano and Campagnolo. And yes, there's a version of those early 'Continental' blocks, as well as the original finned Air-Cooled Safety blocks. There are several compounds, for various climactic conditions and rim materials, although it's hard to tell from the website which to choose since they are all, apparently, excellent in all conditions.

That aside, what's so good about the



'Salmon' pink compound? Arguably the best known of Kool-Stop's products, it is an 'aggressive' mix formulated for the wet but still, says the maker, superb in the dry. I tested it here as a replacement for Shimano's Deore XT trekking V-brake pads. First up, it works much as claimed; in this installation, in very wet conditions, it is progressive, sensitive, and powerful after a slight delay of perhaps ½ second.

In the dry, it is very powerful and requires care, but there's some squeal when braking hard downhill at speed. Importantly, and unlike the OEM pads, there's no obvious tendency to pick up abrasive grit in the wet. Nor do Salmon pads seem to generate much grey sludge, so rim life should be improved. The pads themselves have barely worn in well over 1,000 miles, with moulding lines still showing, which is useful given the generally short life of thin V-brake pads. At the very least, these are a significant improvement in all areas over the original equipment – and inexpensive.

Richard Hallett

Review requests

Is there a product that you would like us to review?
WRITE TO: Cycle,
 PO Box 313, Scarborough,
 YO12 6WZ **EMAIL:**
cycle@jamespembroke-media.co.uk



- PROS & CONS**
- + Exceptional braking, wet or dry
 - + Huge range of fittings
 - Can squeal in dry weather

OTHER OPTIONS



1 SWISSSTOP £20+
 Excellent performance from a selection of compounds to suit aluminium and carbon rims, for sidepull callipers, V-brakes, and cantilevers. swisstop.com



2 AZTEC £4.99+
 Inexpensive brake pads that work well and come in designs to suit a wide range of brake and rim types. madison.co.uk

- PROS & CONS**
- + Inexpensive
 - + Surprisingly good
 - Like most, inline only

Brand-X ASCEND DROPPER SEATPOST

£139.99 hotlines-uk.com

DROPPER SEATPOSTS ARE great. Being able to lower (then raise) the saddle while you ride along makes a mountain bike much more manoeuvrable. A dropper post can also help cyclists with mobility issues, being lowered for mounting and dismounting then raised for riding along. If you're not already sure you need one, however, the price might put you off; the iconic RockShox Reverb has an RRP of £284 and upwards. This Brand-X Ascend is just £139.99, discounted to £99.99 on chainreactioncycles.com at time of writing. It's cheap enough to buy speculatively.

What's perhaps surprising is how good it is. I've used RockShox Reverbs, as well as droppers from KS, and the Brand-X Ascend compares pretty well. It works in the usual way, which is to say: like an office chair. You press the release lever and your weight pushes the seat down – either fully or, if you prefer, partially. Press the lever when you're not sitting and pneumatic pressure pushes the seat back up to its original position.

The Ascend is actuated by a remote lever on the handlebar, which is a much better option than a lever under the saddle. Not having to ride one-handed means you drop the saddle more easily and more readily; on some rides, I use the dropper remote nearly as much as the gear shifter. It's operated by a standard gear cable.

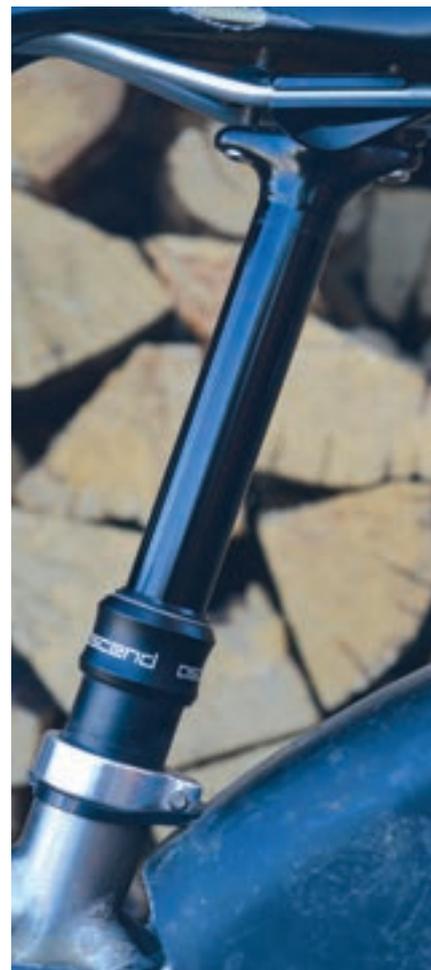
This version is a 'stealth' one, designed for internal routing through the seat tube and

(on suitable frames) the down tube. Fitting is a bit of faff as you need to get the cable length just right, but the cable end attached to the seatpost yoke isn't easily accessible like a gear or brake cable would be: it's in the frame. Measure twice, cut once! And don't forget a spoke for fishing the cable out of the frame... It would be easier to fit if the cable could be trimmed at the lever end.

Once set up, the Ascend works well, smoothly descending and ascending through 115mm of its nominal 120mm travel. I've been using silicone spray after rides to prevent stiction and have had zero problems. Keeping it clean obviously helps; I'm using a Mudhugger rear guard. There's a little rotational play between the upper and lower shafts, but not enough to bother me.

The only issue is that, like most droppers, it's an inline post. As I normally use a layback post, that shortened the distance to the handlebar by about 20mm, making it feel cramped. I fitted an 80mm stem in place of the existing 60mm, but would prefer a shorter stem and a layback dropper. A longer frame would work too but would be more expensive to buy than a different dropper.

The Brand-X Ascend is available in 30.9 and 31.6mm diameters and with a 120 or 150mm drop. There's an Ascend XL with a 170mm drop, as well as an Ascend II, for bikes without internal routing, in 27.2, 30.9, and 31.6mm diameters, and in 105 and 125mm drops. There's also a CX one



(27.2mm only) in 85 and 105mm drops with a drop-bar lever. The 31.6, 120mm Ascend post I tried weighs about 640g, including lever and cable. It's a penalty of 300-400g over a rigid post but one that's worth paying. If it came to a choice between a suspension fork and a dropper, I'd pick the dropper.

Dan Joyce

OTHER OPTIONS



1 KS ETEN INTEGRA £130
Cable-operated layback post available in 30.9 and 31.6mm with 125mm travel and in 27.2mm with 100mm travel. KS eTen Remote version is externally routed. jungleproducts.co.uk

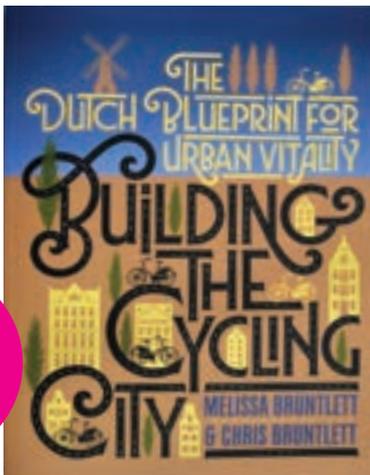


2 ROCKSHOX REVERB STEALTH £328
Hydraulically actuated, internally routed post available in 30.9, 31.6 and 34.9mm diameters, with 100, 125, 150, and 170mm travel. External version is cheaper. rockshox.com

Book reviews

BOOKS

A ROUND-UP OF THE LATEST CYCLING-RELATED READS



Melissa & Chris Bruntlett
BUILDING THE CYCLING CITY £18.99
 islandpress.org

LOOKING AT MANY or (let's be frank) most urban areas in Britain, it's hard to see them ever doing what it takes to match Dutch levels of cycle-friendliness. But this book, subtitled 'The Dutch Blueprint for Urban Vitality', will make you think again.

The authors, cofounders of a creative agency specialising in inspiring happier, healthier, and simpler forms of transport, begin with the story of Rotterdam. Annihilated by bombs in 1940 and avidly rebuilt for the car, the city missed the bike so much that it was deliberately and successfully planned back in. It can happen.

In just over 200 pages and 40 black and white images, Melissa and Chris Bruntlett explain exactly what the Dutch did and are still doing to keep their towns and cities cycling. As they point out, it's not because the Netherlands is flat; it's not because the weather's nice; nor because the Dutch are 'morally superior to the rest of the globe'. It's because they've built a dense 22,000 mile network of fully separated bike lanes, tamed the motor vehicle, and their per capita spend on cycling is 15 times the amount invested by its near neighbour, England.

London and a few other cities are getting there, but others have a long way to go. This is why cycling advocates, professional or voluntary, will love this book. It's underpinned by history, first-hand observation and expertise on 'human scale' urban planning, while its style is so approachable that it reads like a story.

Cherry Allen



Richard Barrett
CYCLING LÔN LAS CYMRU £11.95
 cicerone.co.uk

LÔN LAS CYMRU loosely translates as 'Wales' Green Lane', and with this helpful journey planner you'll be well set to explore its length from Cardiff to Holyhead. Barrett writes a good guide, giving you concise information about local sites, places to stay, transport links and route planning. That's fortunate as this book is light and fits in a jersey pocket. There's a ride planner for both directions, linked to a GPX file, and itineraries for doing the ride in four to seven days. Buy it and ride it!

Sam Jones



David Flanagan
CYCLING IN IRELAND £22
 threerockbooks.com

THIS COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE to cycling the Emerald Isle has something for everyone, from off-road circuits to family-friendly rides, and a whole chapter on the epic 2,500km Wild Atlantic Way. It packs in 80 routes, with detours for those hungry for extra miles and proposed shortcuts for when those Atlantic storm clouds start rolling in. With tips on local refreshments, GPX route downloads, and stunning photography guaranteed to have you longing for the open road, it's highly recommended, whether you're planning a country-wide tour or just looking for new rides to add to your repertoire.

Keir Gallagher



Jeremy Whittle
VENTOUX £8.99
 simonandschuster.co.uk

YOU KNOW VENTOUX, the 1,900m mountain in the centre of France, the bald one, looks like the moon, the one where Froomey had to run, where Armstrong frustratingly never won and yes, the one where Tom Simpson lost his life through a cocktail of over-exertion, brandy, pills, and his stubborn determination to win the Tour. Whittle is an aficionado who seems obsessed with the mountain, like the thousands who climb it again and again. He interviews some of them, along with many of the greats of cycle sport, to get under the skin of the mountain and the sport. A great read.

Matt Mallinder



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