

TOP TECH RIDDEN & RATED

We find out if there's still a place for steel when aluminium and carbon dominate the bike world



SURLY BRIDGE CLUB ■ £1,599 ■ ison-distribution.com

AT A TIME when the majority of the cycle trade is rarely talking about anything except electric bikes, it's reassuring to know that there's still brands out there bucking the trend and doing their own thing. Surly is resolutely one of that minority, sticking to what it's always done best: making quality steel-framed rides, with an eye for neat details.

That doesn't mean that Surly's range is old fashioned, or persists with defunct standards; the brand uses modern geometry across the relevant categories and mixes up-to-date components with all the features you actually need. And although the Bridge Club sits in its 'touring' line-up, we'd probably

more accurately define it as a commuter/bikepacking/touring all-rounder — it's as durable as any daily driver, comfy over the long haul and allows you to pack big when needed. Incidentally Surly's Preamble model is almost identical



to our test machine, but comes with 700c wheels if you lean more to the road. However, for riders like us who like to hit the towpaths, duck across heathland and parks at every opportunity, and tackle easy trails all on the same trip, the Bridge Club handles the lot, with ease.

Our most frequent loop kicks off with a spin round Clapham Common's shared paths, before taking in Wandsworth Common, the Tamsin Trail in Richmond Park and a return by the river. And for multi-surface outings like this, the Bridge Club is hard to beat. The double-buttressed chromoly frame and fork absorb small bumps and the constant rippling of gravel tracks nicely, and the 2.4in WTB

tyres work a treat, adding comfort, assurance and extra grip, especially as terrain turns wetter and muddier. We like the cheeky chainstay decal stating 'fatties fit fine', which hints at the fact you could use even wider tyres (up to 26in x 3in) if you



wanted, but we feel the 27.5in ones supplied offer the best of all worlds.

A single 32-teeth chainring is paired with a wide-range 11-50t cassette, more than adequate low gearing for anywhere in southern England, while we've found the Tektro disc brakes to be reliable and (from experience) easy to service. We got on well with the WTB saddle too as it's a similar shape to our own favourites, but we're less enamoured with the deeply-swept handlebars — we'd likely swap to a low-rise bar if we owned the bike, but again that's a personal preference. It's not a glittery spec by any means, but when you don't have any issues that's fine by us.

There's also multiple mounts for

panniers and bags (look at those fork legs!), and full mudguards, and we're hoping to deploy the former on King Alfred's Way before the bike goes back. To be considering the Bridge Club for such an epic is testament to how highly we rate it.

FACTFILE

- Five sizes available, from XS to XL (XS only by special order).
- Clearance for 700c x 47mm tyres, as well as those mentioned.
- Room for three bottles, plus bags.

VERDICT

- + Steel still has a unique ride feel.
- + Great for 'dirty' commutes, roughstuffing and bikepacking.