

ADVENTURE BIKES



Andy Donahoe

MODEL: LIGHT BLUE DARWIN ONE BY, £1750 ■ ison-distribution.com

UNTIL NOW Light Blue (owned by major cycling distributor Ison) has largely flown under the radar, but it offers both ‘urban’ and ‘sport’ ranges and it’s in the latter that you’ll find a couple of dozen steel-framed road, touring and adventure bikes, including the Darwins.

Built around a beautifully-finished Reynolds 725 tubeseat and steel fork, the One By has the aesthetic appeal of an old tourer yet it’s shod in the latest tech – and it rides really well, reminding us why there’s still a place for the original frame-building material alongside the expensive composites. On the road it’s been faultless, especially over the long haul. And off-road, on hardpacked gravel tracks and chalky

bridleways, it’s been composed and comfortable. The fork may be more jarring than a carbon equivalent, but chunky 38c Halo tyres do a decent job of ironing out the bumps and hollows. What’s more the fork, like the frame, is doused with mounting options for racks and bottles.

Called the One By due to its single chainring up front, the wide-range cassette meant we only wished for a lower gear on two particularly steep climbs (we’d invest in a smaller chainring for alpine tours). The TRP disc brakes were equally impressive, never lacking in stopping power even when carrying a full set of panniers or bikepacking bags.

We also loved the ‘riser’ design and flare of the handlebars – little things can make a big difference.

FACTFILE

- The Darwin family also includes ‘dedicated’ touring models with 2x11-speed gearing, and MT (mountain) models with fat 47c tyres mounted on 650b wheels.
- Lots of useful upgrade options available on the One By including: Passport Tour rear rack (£45), Passport Lug-Kages x2 (£35), SP PD-8 dynamo & BM50 lamp (£85).
- The frame also has mounts for a hub gear if you wanted to swap later, plus a ‘coupler’ in case you wanted to fit a belt drive.

VERDICT

- + The simplicity of a ‘one by’ drivetrain is ideal for UK touring and bikepacking.
- + Hugely versatile bike with upgrade/swap options.