

tech talk

'IT'S my bike, and I'll build it how I want to.' No, of course Dave Yates didn't stamp his foot and say that. On the other hand, you can be pretty certain that when it came to making an Audax bike for his own use Yates made a big effort to build something approaching his idea of the ultimate machine.

Audax riding is all about spending long hours in the saddle; hours during which a bike's small and normally unnoticed failings can start to niggle. While there may not be a prize for crossing the line in first place, in other respects the physical challenge of the Audax experience is remarkably close to road racing. Your Audax rider cannot afford to ignore any aid to cycling efficiency, and it is hardly surprising that many machines are nothing more than road race bikes with mudguards.

Such a description doesn't apply to Yates's bike, not least because right from the first it was always going to be used for Audax. One of the advantages of this approach is that the frame can be

Built with Audax in mind, the Dave Yates Randonneur may look like a race set-up with mudguards, but it comes into its own over 200km. Richard Hallett investigates

built specifically for mudguards. There is, of course, more to fitting these unloved strips of plastic or aluminium than making sure there is a bit of a gap between tyre and fork crown or brake bridge, and this particular cycle is a perfect example of how to do it properly. For a start it is fitted with a decent pair of guards. ESSE's super-tough thermo-plastic jobbies are pretty well the industry standard. They have a worthwhile safety feature in the shape of the front guard's stay clip, which releases the stay if anything gets caught between the guard and wheel.

The thin metal attachment clips do fall occasionally, so Yates has done away with them altogether. Instead, at the front he has brazed in a small threaded piece under the fork crown to take an Allen bolt via a hole drilled through the guard. The rear guard is similarly located by bolts threading directly into the brake and chainstay bridges. The system is neat, effective and well worth the extra effort.

No extra effort is required to avoid overlap — just the wit to make sure the front wheel spindle is far enough from the bottom bracket axle. A bit fatigued after 200km? That's when touching shoe to mudguard, or wheel for that matter, could bring you off. Yates has allowed 60.5cm between centres, which is more than enough for the average shoe. The back end gets the same sort of treatment; long stays, plenty of room

between the guard and seat tube so the tyre won't have a chance to rub. Mudguards can be irritating, but with a little attention to detail they can go unnoticed — except in a headwind.

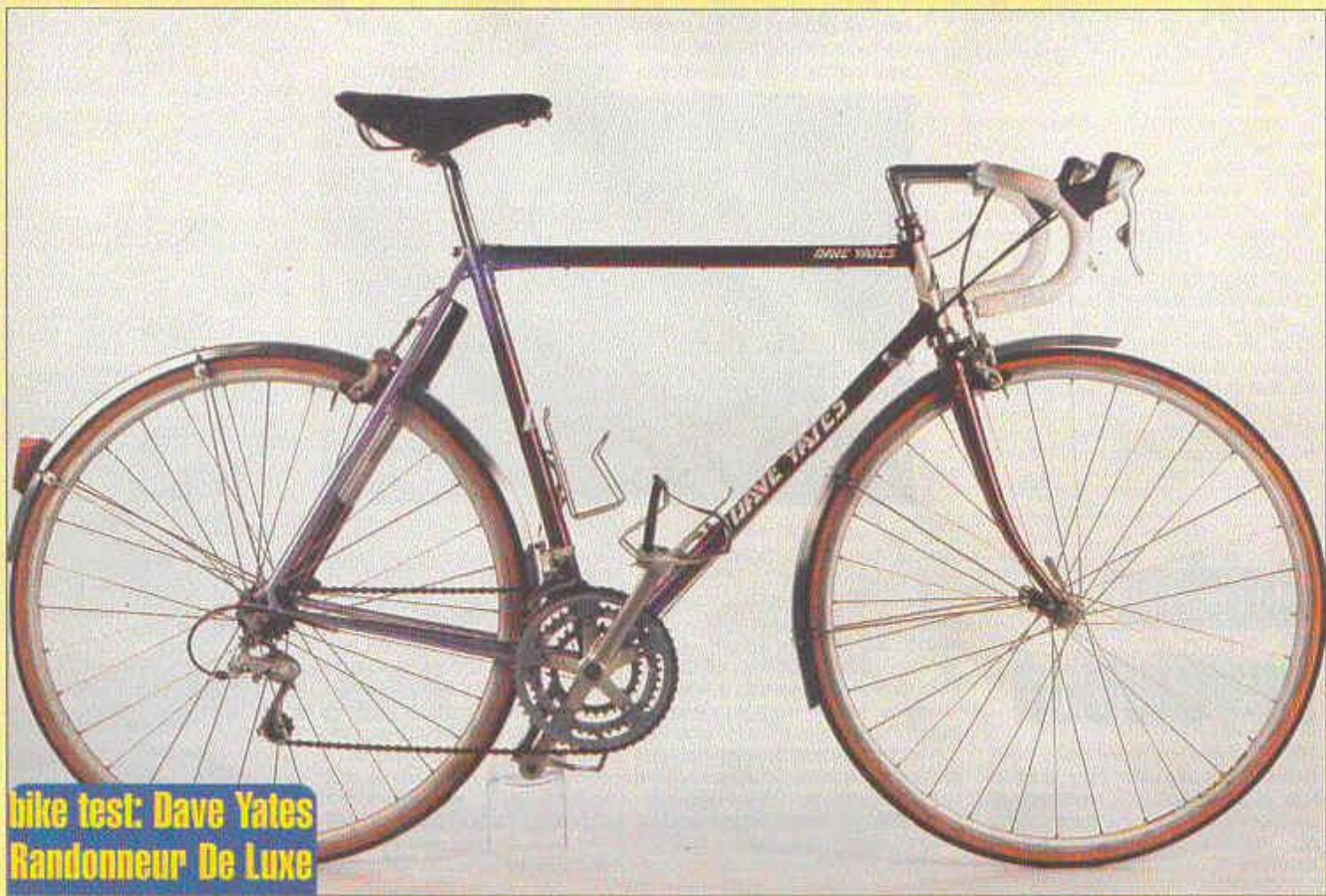
All that roominess adds up to a fairly substantial wheelbase, which is no bad thing. Yates wanted a bike that would require minimal effort to keep on the straight and narrow. Light but stable steering geometry, that wheelbase and a stiff frameset give the bike utterly reassuring handling. The frameset itself would be a straightforward, if beautifully finished, fabrication in Reynolds 653, were it not for the oversized top tube (that's where the extra stiffness comes in), cast lugs and the little hand-cut stainless steel DY logos brazed to each side of the fork crown and to the rear brake bridge. Yates made these to give his bike a personal touch, and they are not found on the base 531 or 653 Randonnée models. With this frame specification they add that all-important touch of luxury.

Further Audax-orientated detailing is found in the provision of threaded seat stay and drop-out bosses for a rear rack, seat stay pump pegs to liberate space for a second water bottle on the seat tube, and a little additional boss for a rear light. A ride of 600km will inevitably involve some night cycling, and one popular tweak is to fit a dynamo only to be used for additional lighting on descents, where the extra

drag isn't a problem. This idea obviously doesn't appeal to our frame builder, or he would surely have fitted a dynamo boss as well.

Despite the impression given by all these braze-ons that weight saving is relatively unimportant, there is nothing really superfluous on the bike. Thirty-two double-butted spokes are deemed enough for reliability, especially as they are laced into Mavic Open SUP rims. Yates's choice of Michelin Hi-Sport Select tyres is a nice one, for in 23c section they are quick, grippy and durable. One of our test examples went pear-shaped after the Kevlar puncture protection band took a big cut, but they are otherwise excellent. His choice of inner tube was less inspired. The front wheel suffered a good old blow-out to its latex tube after just five miles of the test. Butyl may be boring, but at least it's reliable.

Some such description might well apply to Shimano's mid-range 105 groupset, which appears on the Yates in triple chainring guise. Here, for the moment, is the distinguishing mark of a pure randonneur bike. For sure, tourists use triples, but with much bigger sprockets at the back. Here we have a straight-through cassette giving ratios from 108-inch down to 40-inch, low enough for mountainous terrain taken Audax-style, but a bit too high for full touring. The real beauty of this cassette is the close spacing it gives between



bike test: Dave Yates Randonneur De Luxe

ratios throughout the range. You could get the same spread with a double ring set-up, but with much bigger gaps. The only downside to this arrangement is the increased 'Q' factor of the drive-side pedal.

As you'd expect, the rest of the groupset worked almost flawlessly for the test. The transmission uses a Sachs chain on its Shimano sprockets with no apparent ill effects, and the STI levers' function was well up to Ultegra standard. Only the loosening of a front hub cone after some time subtracted from a top score. Shimano continues to offer painted finishes on some component parts, and the shade chosen for 105 is

nice enough. It certainly looks good with Yates's rather fancy paintjob.

The white head tube gives a classic touch continued by the Cinelli 1A stem and Campagnolo headset. The filament of a budget Kalfloy seatpost spoils things a tad, although this particular Ritchey-copy model always works well. Perhaps the seatpin just cannot hope to shine in the company of that magnificent saddle.

You may be comforted to know that this saddle did not take part in the test, partly because a piece of butt (yes, really) leather shaped by decades of intimate contact fits its owner better than anyone else. Brooks saddles are held in

high regard by aficionados, but they need careful treatment for long life. Get them wet, and the shape goes in short order. They are best used on bikes with mudguards; then the weight is less noticeable.

If the saddle shows Dave Yates to be a die-hard traditionalist, then his bike taken as a whole says that he is one with an eye for a good tweak and a pretty finish. The rest of the bike is pretty good too, but you'd need to ride it a long way to know how good.

What is Audax?

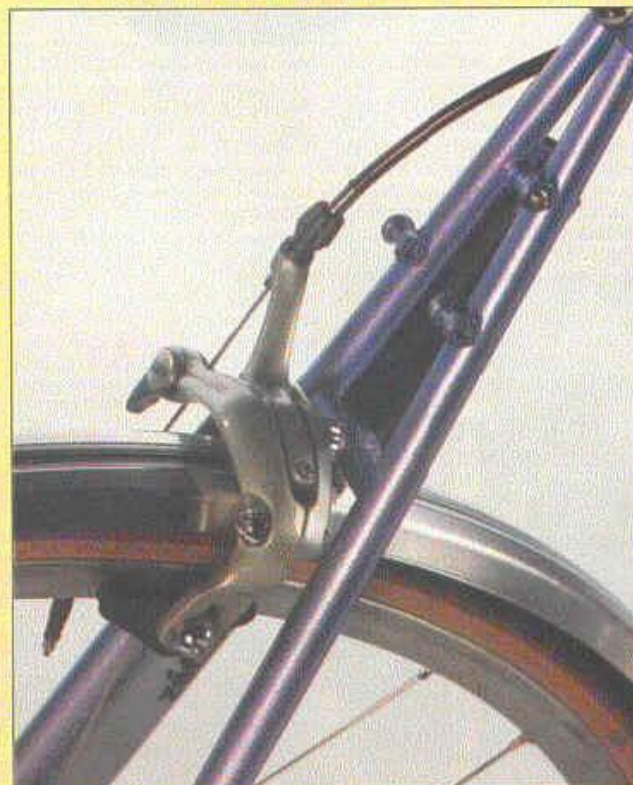
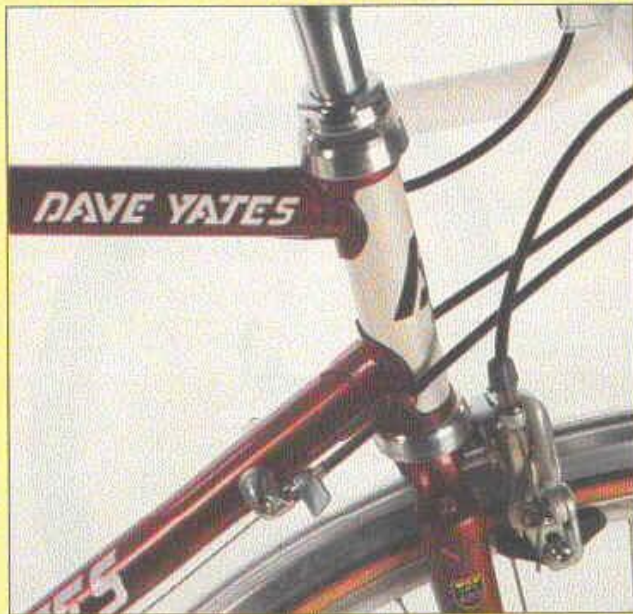
AN Audax ride is an event run under either Audax Club Parisien or Euraudax regulations. The more general term 'Randonnée' refers to any Audax or similar touring ride. Think of a reliability ride with knobs on and you are on the right track, for the idea is to complete a pre-determined course within a specified, not especially generous time limit. The average speed required may be anything from 15 to 30kph, and Audax riding is intended to cater for riders of all abilities.

At its best, though, Audax is a severe test for a fit rider. While there are rides at 50, 100 and 150km, the real action starts at 200km. On completion of this distance a rider qualifies as a Randonneur, but there is harder to come in the shape of rides of up to 1,000km. The ultimate Audax ride is from Paris to Brest and back over 1,200km. To qualify for the P-B-P, which takes place every four years, you will have to complete a series of rides, one each, of 200, 300, 400 and 600km, within one year.

Audax events are organised by Audax UK members and listed in the AUK calendar, which currently lists over 290 rides per year. Each rider carries a route sheet and card that has to be stamped and timed at control points along the route. This is later sent to AUK for validation, after which the rider may

buy the medal and badge for the standard distance ridden.

There are categories for fixed wheel, trike and tandem and for juniors, women and veterans, and joining AUK costs a new member £9. If this sounds like fun, or a suitable challenge for that matter, apply to Ray Smith, AUK Membership Secretary, 43 Marriott Grove, Sandal, Wakefield WF2 6RP for membership details.



Information

MODEL: Dave Yates
Randonneur De Luxe
MANUFACTURER: M Steel Cycles
DISTRIBUTOR: M Steel Cycles on 0191 234 4275
PRICE: £2500 (frame only, this spec); £3,200 complete
WEIGHT: 11kg
FRAME: Reynolds 653 lugged
FORK: Reynolds 053 steel
SIZE RANGE: to order
GROUPSET: Shimano 105
DEVIATIONS: seatpost
GEAR RATIOS: 52/40/30 with 15, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20
TYRES: Michelin R1 Sport Sued 23c
BAR: Cinelli 66/42
STEM: Cinelli 1A
SADDLE: old Brooks Professional
SIZE TESTED: 55.5cm
B/B HEIGHT: 26.3cm
STANDOVER HEIGHT: 81cm
performance: ○○○○○
value: ○○○○○
for: comfort, stability, little tweaks
against: saddle

