PAUL HEWITT CUSTOM AUDAX £1375

DAVE YATES CUSTOM AUDAX £1750

GEORGE LONGSTAFF CUSTOM AUDAX £1750

PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT SMITH (STUDIO)

Fit for life

If you're serious about audax, a custom machine will last a lifetime and allow you to eat up the miles in comfort. PBP finisher Ben Searle tests three of the best

With audax events lasting up to four days with only short spells out of the saddle, comfort is paramount. And riding in a position that isn't perfect for you could lead to aches and pains. While these might just be a minor niggle on a typical 150km brevet – they could aggravate even causing you to abandon on the longer 300km plus events. And just imagine twice the distance or even a full-blown 1200km. For all these reasons a a perfectly sized and personally specced custom bike makes sense.

The custom approach gives you many opportunities to ensure maximum efficiency and to individualise the bike, for example, through the choice of bottom bracket height and crank length. You can also go further and order something really different, or off-the-wall if you have the confidence. Basically a custom machine from a knowledgeable dealer – who is preferably an audax rider him or herself – can address multiple concerns to ensure as many of your hours in the saddle as possible are enjoyable ones.

To know confidently what you want, it certainly helps to have some experience, preferably on a bike that is already reasonably suited to audax, and certainly with the same style of bars (normally drops). That said, a good builder should be able to steer you very much in the right direction, position you on an adjustable jig (or at least take and competently interpret exacting body measurements) and produce a machine that is very close, if not spot-on to your needs. You may already know exactly what you want and don't wish to discuss it any further. In both cases you need to be sure the desired result will be achieved.

Dave Yates of M. Steel Cycles is well known on the audax circuit, practising what he preaches and trying new designs in pursuit of the ideal. He pulled in a very respectable time of 73h42m in last year's PBP. The bike on test is Dave's own, which he plans to use for events of all lengths during the year – so it was intended to fit him rather than me. It's an example of what can be done: 'a weight-saving exercise... and a testing of its viability'. The frame is a 'compact' design built from oversize Reynolds 853 Pro Team tubing – the lightest (Reynolds) set available. TIG welded by Dave himself and would cost £1750.

Paul Hewitt is known for well-built machines that differ

from the run of the mill. He has aimed this one at shorter events, or alternatively as a lively machine for training and general use. Although full custom is the usual option (either from the customer's own dimensions or through Hewitt's jig fitting procedure), the test model is only broadly based on my dimensions. It's built from oversize Columbus Zona, a new tube set in the Nivacrom range and costs £1375. The Hewitt and Yates went for Shimano 105 and Ultegra groupsets respectively, with some tweaks and upgrades to get the best value for money for audax events.

A much more traditional approach has been taken by George Longstaff. He has also ridden his fair share of audax events (up to 600km) in the UK and Europe, not just on solo bicycles but tandems, trikes and even tandem trikes. The Reynolds 531/725 frame was based on my measurements using George's comprehensive order form. He used his experience to interpret my measurements along with my comments about my current audax bike and preferences. Better still, you can go and be measured up by George himself and have a full consultation that takes about half a day. It is intended for audax events of all lengths with the ethos that such a bike has got to handle a wide range of conditions and scenarios, and handle them well. In all three cases frame tubing and components can be fully specified to choice. The bikes tested are based on the recommendations/choices of the builders.

FRAME
Hewitt 8 Longstaff 10 Yates 8

A custom frame builder can mix and match tubes (including brands if required) to optimise the frame for audax, or rider weight. In all three cases our builders chose 'racing' tube sets. The Longstaff was built from Reynolds 531 Competition for the main frame

PAUL HEWITT CUSTOM AUDAX £1375, frame and forks only £565

Left: The Hewitt obtains maximum clearance from its 49mm reach Shimano 105 brakes

Far left: The short point lugs give the Hewitt a neat appearance

'The Hewitt handled beautifully...'

At a glance:

FRAME	8
HANDLING	8
WHEELS	7
EQUIPMENT	7
OVERALL	7

Jargon

Nivacrom
A very strong high-end heat-treated cromo steel, typically drawn to quite thin gauges to produce very light frames. It has excellent resistance to fatigue and heating during brazing/welding.

(including 28.6mm diameter top tube) and forks, with tube wall thickness down to 0.5mm. Heat-treated 725 tubing was used for the stays. The purpose of this was to provide some compliancy in the frame and forks for comfort but a stiffer rear triangle for some zap on hill-climbing. The result fitted me absolutely perfectly.

Our methods of measuring frame alignment did not do full justice to the Longstaff, as George was able to demonstrate to us. Even the fork blades keep identical

What kind of audax bike?

Go out on any randonnée and it soon becomes obvious that there is no single preferred type of machine. Broadly speaking most bikes divide into three types: road bikes with mudguards shoe-horned in (or left off on some short events), classic tourers, and purpose made machines like those tested. So what do you choose? And is a custom bike really necessary?

A decent audax bike is expensive, but it's an adaptable rather than specialised tool that's good for commuting (especially for longer trips and where you have somewhere safe to leave it), training and light- to medium-weight touring. Depending on which side you tip the balance it can also be pushed into road racing (if you keep the handling on the smart side), or heavier touring – even camping (if you go for cantilever/V-brakes and 32mm tyres). And virtually all make lovely mounts for any kind of smooth surface day riding. Most off-the-peg bikes (of whatever type) usually lack the comfort and detailing required for audax.

Getting something high quality and specialised is nearly always going to be a custom or semi-custom affair – except the Thorn range of bikes (see Rivals). Some custom builders try to keep the base-line cost down; for example Dave Yates' start from around £1099 with a Shimano 105 equipped Reynolds 631 brazed frameset.

A steel frame is the usual choice. This is because of the wide range of suitable tubing available, the comparative cost and complexity of building anything similar from aluminium, and not least, steel generally builds into a more comfortable (ie. shock absorbent) frame. There are other considerations too, steel tends to be more durable and is comparatively easy to repair – important considerations considering the distances many Randonneurs notch up.

Going into exotica, a custom titanium frame could provide a unique blend of strength, comfort and weight-saving but you'll have to spend over £2000 on the frame alone – and most likely order it from the States. An off-the-peg one may miss out on the vital audax detail, and of course is not specific to your body. Similar arguments can be used for and against carbon fibre. You may want to think about the other choices this amount of dosh opens up, such as interesting recumbents like the ICE Trice Classic at £1815, used successfully on last year's PBP. A fixed-gear bike is another option that will at least keep the cost down, and it does benefit from being custom made.

DAVE YATES CUSTOM AUDAX £1750, frame and forks only £690

Left: A long titanium seatpost and a titanium-railed saddle aim to increase shock absorbency

Far left: A threadless fork/headset system helps to minimise weight

'a bike for those who thrive on carrying next to nowt...'

At a glance:

FRAME	8
HANDLING	7
WHEELS	9
EQUIPMENT	8
OVERALL	8

rake and symmetry throughout their length. The bottom bracket mitre was absolutely perfect and the silver-braze penetration complete but not a tad overdone. This implied only the very minimum of heat had been used.

The care continues, to include wax-oiling inside all tubes and a bottom bracket drain hole to prevent internal rusting. This is a good idea considering the all year round, all weather nature of audax and the possibilities for condensation to collect inside the frame. The 10/10 rating represents the fitness for purpose of the frame through its design and exceptional build standard. Although very expensive for a 531 frame you are buying long-term reliability and a level of craftsmanship that almost belies belief.

The Hewitt is also lugged and silver-brazed and is built from the new Columbus Zona Nivacrom tubes with mid-sections of 0.5mm. An oversize top tube (28.6mm) and down tube (32mm) are used. This ensures both a stiff and light frame. There was nothing to dispute in build terms – a good 'clean' frame. In terms of tubing choice and oversizing a similar approach is taken by the Yates, but using Reynolds 853 in gauges down to 0.4mm bringing the frame weight to a paltry 1.57kg, a figure more often associated with aluminium and titanium. More weight is saved by TIG welding instead of using lugs. The tube's butts are shorter too, as the heat affected zone is smaller than with brazing. The welding is quite adequate but a little utilitarian, and ironically, because it is done by hand rather than machine, less neat than on many quite cheap frames. Thinking long-term, the frame could have a shorter life than the rivals as lugs disperse stress.

The Yates is unusual in audax circles through its 'compact' style – more usually seen on competition machines. Such designs use a much shorter seat tube than conventional road bikes, and have a sloping top tube. Some comfort benefits are claimed for the longer seat post required, especially if more flexible titanium is used. There may also be small weight saving gains and the bottom bracket can be stiffer. Stand-over height is increased which offers advantages for smaller riders. Compact frames were originally touted as good for dealers as three frame sizes would fit all – an irrelevance if custom.

The Hewitt was rather short on braze-ons and in particular lacked those for a rear rack. Most would argue that these are pretty essential. They can of course be specified when you place your order, but it perhaps serves as a reminder not to take anything for granted when going custom. Those on the Yates were poorly positioned as the rack arms interfered with the brake, unless mounted somewhat lopsidedly – one problem of a compact frame is

GEORGE LONGSTAFF CUSTOM AUDAX £1750, frame and forks only £695

Left: Hope 135mm hubs were chosen over Campag as they provide less wheel dish

Far Left: The seatstays are both shot in and wrapped – a tricky mitre impeccably executed

'The perfect all-round audax machine...'

At a glance:

FRAME	10
HANDLING	10
WHEELS	10
EQUIPMENT	9
OVERALL	10

the lack of space for the fittings. The Yates and Hewitt can be specified with dynamo brackets but the availability of excellent hub generators like the Schmidt makes this less of a requirement. The Longstaff has a front fork mounted dynamo bracket. The front light bracket is welcome, avoiding clashes with bar-bags. Only the Longstaff provides three bottle cages. Two are often needed for long events, especially at night when facilities can be hard to find. Avoiding dehydration is a must and an issue on any long ride. The third bottle cage is useful for a battery pack, tool roll, or simply stowing a rolled up spare tyre. The Longstaff's attention to detail is exemplified by those little extra braze-ons: a chain hook on the seatstay for transporting the bike without its wheel; and a chain hook on the chainstay – to make relocating the wheel easier.

HANDLING
Hewitt 8 Longstaff 10 Yates 7

The Longstaff's shallow 71.5° head angle and tight(ish) radii forks help ensure good shock absorbency. The shallow head angle also allows greater fork offset to be used (which further aids shock absorbency) while keeping plenty of trail (6.2cm) for high speed stability – a perfect combination for audax. For the typical early season events on grimy debris strewn lanes the Longstaff was ideal offering fully confident handling in all manner of difficult circumstances. In the bunch it held a very positive line, turning easily and surely, but not too quickly when required; all excellent qualities for night riding or simply very long hours in the saddle.

The Hewitt handled beautifully too, but steering was a little quicker. For shorter events – those it was designed for – it was perfect, but it wouldn't go far amiss on longer rides. The small amount of extra punch that could be felt when honking over a brow was one of the differences between it and the Longstaff, though this would be more beneficial to a bigger and more powerful rider than me, and of course a custom frame from most builders would properly address this issue.

Though Nivacrom and other heat treated steels such as 853 and 725 are often thought of as 'stiff', it's the tube diameter and wall thickness that has a much greater bearing on this. However, the feel does seem to be affected and such steel can be more efficient, transmitting your input more and absorbing it less. Compared to the Longstaff, the Hewitt and Yates bore this feeling out, the Yates felt more springy, but no less efficient than the Hewitt.

The Yates' handling was disappointingly vague compared to the rivals, although fine at high speed. This would not be our first choice as you get into the night portion of a typical 400 or 600. Neither were we convinced about the forks' ability to absorb shock in the way the Longstaff's could. The rear end, even with the longer titanium seat post still felt more jarring than the other test bikes, though we like the titanium railed Flite saddle, which did go someway to make up for this.

WHEELS
Hewitt 7 Longstaff 10 Yates 9

Rather than use Campag hubs, the Longstaff has 135mm Hope hubs. The extra width, plus their design, produces a less dished wheel that should minimise potential spoke problems. The sealed cartridge bearings provide very long gaps between service intervals – ideal for a bike that's rolled out for a long ride, week in, week out. These are married to red Ambrosia Excellence rims which not only perfectly complemented the frame enamel but have won a reputation for reliability and long wear life compared to the customary Mavics (as fitted to the rivals). Many other colours are available. Reputable Sapim 36/36 double-butted spokes and top notch wheel building complete a robust yet reasonably ▶

Jargon
PBP Paris-Brest-Paris
Prestigious and gruelling 1200km grand-daddy of audax events held every four years.

The rivals

ARGOS PARIS-BREST-PARIS £1299 (FRAME ALONE £495)
Semi-custom frame, Reynolds 725 tubing/531 forks. Very good value if you don't want to go fully custom, with rock steady handling making it a good choice for long distance sorties – like the Paris-Brest-Paris. Specced with mainly Shimano Ultegra equipment. Efficient and relaxed ride. Reviewed C+88. Contact Argos Cycles ☎ 0117 972 4730.

THORN AUDAX FROM £899 (FRAME ALONE £399.95)
A mix of top quality Reynolds tubes picked and mixed to benefit audax use. 19 frame sizes cater for nearly everyone. 26in wheels for smallest models. Custom also available. Tight radii forks for full shock absorption and a very relaxed feel. Complete audax braze-ons. Good mix of mainly Shimano MTB/road equipment, or to choice. Outstanding performance and value. Reviewed C+78. Contact SJSC ☎ 01278 441501 www.sjscycles.com/audax.html

CHAS ROBERTS AUDAX £1120
Reynolds 631/725 fully custom frame. Reviewed in C+90. A faultless bike for short or long events and even lightweight touring, the Roberts makes the most of the high quality steel tubes and custom building. Roberts' usual attention to detail is evident in the perfect alignment and topnotch paintwork. Mainly Campag Veloce components. Contact Chas Roberts Cycles ☎ 0181 684 3370

light and comfortable package.

The Longstaff's Vredestein Ricorso tyres are not dear but having completed last season on a pair I can say they are ideal for audax and feel reasonably lively. They are reliable, have good grip and are puncture resistant. They are easily cut by glass but it does not seem to penetrate if dug out now and again. They even work fine with bottle dynamos.

The Hewitt pushes the boundaries, running on a 32 spoke rear wheel and 28 front which saves a minute amount of weight and wind resistance. The front could prove more hassle when replacing rims – it's usually cheaper and easier to get a pair of 32s or 36s. Wheel building was top quality – Paul Hewitt builds for pro riders, after all – still spinning perfectly true after the test. The Michelin Axial Pro tyres rolled nicely and had a good feel, our only reservation being comfort and pinch punctures owing to their narrow section – you can't always avoid potholes on audax.

After the frame, Dave Yates has invested most heavily in the Dura Ace hubs. While these are some of the least likely to let you down hub problems are comparatively rare. Considering the object we were surprised lighter spokes had not been used instead of the 2/1.8/2mm supplied. Why not use Sapim Laser spokes (2/1.5/2mm)? These would increase elasticity (and thus comfort) and also have a higher fatigue limit than most standard d/b spokes – reliability would be enhanced. The Schwalbe tyres fitted felt good in all conditions, have the added protection of a Kevlar belt and a more generous air-pocket than their nominal size implies.

EQUIPMENT
Hewitt 7 Longstaff 9 Yates 8

There is little to choose between the Hewitt's 105 and Yates Ultegra chainsets, both now use Hollowtech construction, have similar appearance and are nice and rigid under load – the 105 is actually 18g lighter than the Ultegra. Both supposedly come in 165 and 175mm lengths but these never seem to reach our shores. The Hewitt's Ultegra bottom bracket was a welcome upgrade.

The Longstaff played mix and match to a much greater degree – though the result looked perfectly coordinated. The TA Zephyr chainset is an expensive piece of kit, and gear shifts across it are less precise than Shimano's. But you gain the right to choose your crank length (150 to 185mm). This can be particularly beneficial for audax as the correct length increases your efficiency and can reduce the chance of strain injuries. A fully custom frame can take best advantage of crank length, for example by lowering or raising the bottom bracket to suit – a good designer can tweak the frame in a number of other ways to take further advantage – especially for very small or tall riders. The Shimano UN52 was a little too cheap for our liking with a shorter and more abrupt end to its life than we'd like.

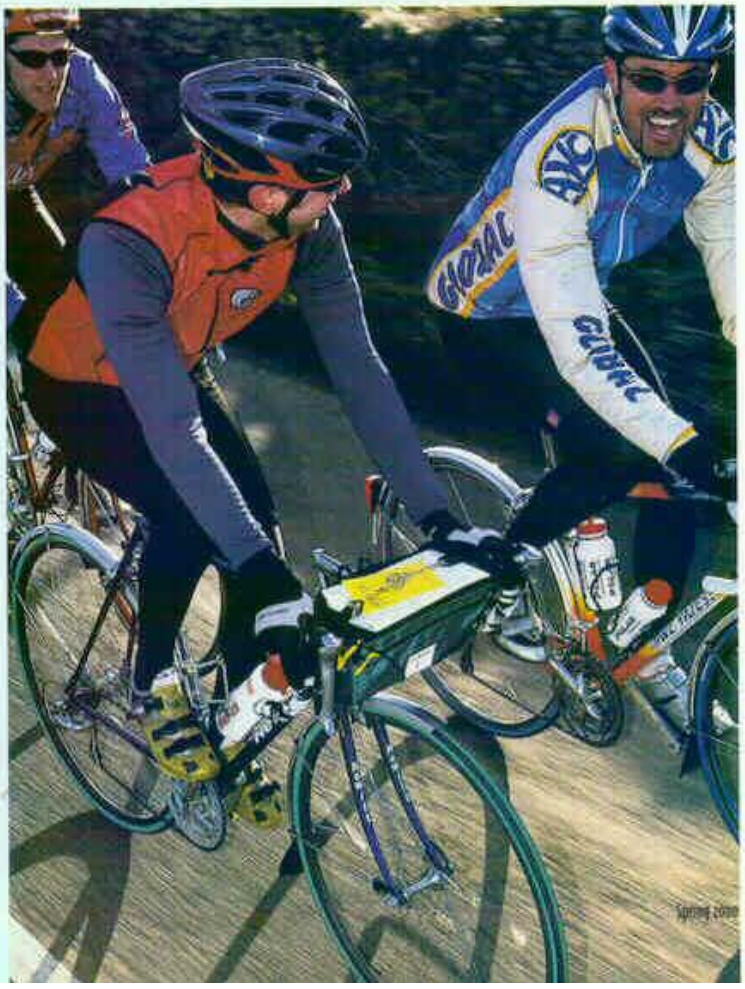
The gear ratios of the Yates and Hewitt were identical, covering a 32 to 108in range. These and the Longstaff all produce nicely close ratios in the cruising gears, the Longstaff's a tad closer in the mid range. Overall the Longstaff's spread is on the lower side at 27 to 95in. This is made easier to achieve by the TA chainset and the ring choices it offers. All the bikes had sensible choices for the style of riding at which they were aimed.

Jargon
Oversize
An oversize frame in this context generally means a 28.6mm top tube and 32mm down tube. Most top tubes were 25.4mm although 28.6mm has become more typical. 28.6mm is the norm for down tubes.

The Hewitt achieved maximum clearances from 49mm reach Shimano 105 dual-pivot brakes. The Yates similarly manages this with Ultegra whereas the Longstaff gets another 4mm and a little more adjustment leeway out of 57mm RX100s. Perhaps because the latter are linked to Campag levers instead of the Shimano, a 'harder' feel results – less give, less power, but more positive.

All the bikes had SKS mudguards with pull-free fittings at the front if something gets caught in the wheel. Only the Longstaff came with a rack; the Nimrod is over 200g lighter than a Blackburn and perfectly adequate for randonneurs.

The Longstaff's Nordlicht dynamo gives you fit and forget lighting though the noise and drag are a little more than many randonneurs would tolerate. The bracket will also accommodate the revolutionary, and much better LightSpin dynamo when full production finally gets underway.



PAUL HEWITT CUSTOM AUDAX

£1375, frame only £565
Hewitt cycles ☎ 01772 424773
www.hewittcycles.co.uk

FRAME AND FORKS

Size tested: 22in
Sizes available: any
Weight as tested: 10.00kg/22.0lb (no pedals)
Frame: Lugged and silver brazed Columbus Zona Nivarom CrMo
Frame Weight: 1.84kg/4.0lb
Fork: Columbus Zona Nivarom CrMo
Fork weight: lugged: 0.64g/1.4lb

BIKE DIMENSIONS

Top tube: 57cm/22.4in
Seat tube: 54cm/21.3in
Chainstays: 42cm/16.5in
Wheelbase: 101cm/39.8in
Head tube angle: 72°
Seat tube angle: 73°
Fork offset: 5.0cm
Trail: 5.9cm
B/b height: 26.5cm/10.4in
Standover height: 79.9cm/31.5in
Braze-ons: 2 x bottle cages, mudguard fittings, chain hanger

FRAME ALIGNMENT

Head tube: perfect
Rear triangle: perfect
Fork: perfect

TRANSMISSION

Chainset: Shimano 105, 30-42-52T 170mm
Bottom bracket: Shimano BB-6500 (Ultegra)
Freewheel: Shimano HG70 12-13-14-15-17-19-21-23-25T
Chain brand: Shimano HG92 (Ultegra)
Derailleurs: Shimano 105
Gear levers: Shimano 105 ST1
Pedals: none

GEAR RATIO (IN):

Chainring \ Sprocket	13	14	15	16	17	19	21	23	25
30	62	58	54	51	48	43	39	35	32
42	87	81	76	71	67	60	54	49	45
52	108	100	94	88	83	74	67	61	56

WHEELS

Front & Rear: 28H Mavic Open Pro CD on Ultegra hubs w/tl/b s/s Sapim spokes, 32H Mavic Open Pro CD on Ultegra hub w/tl/b spokes (gear side), p/g (left side)
Tyres: Michelin Axial Pro Winter, 700x23mm
Wheel weight: 1.14kg/2.5lb (f), 1.37kg/3.1lb (r)

OTHER COMPONENTS

Handlebar stem: 3T Pro Chrome, 120mm
Handlebars: 3T Morphe randonneur anatomic 43cm (c-c)
Headset: Shimano Deore XT
Saddle: San Marco Rolls
Seatpost: Kalloy 'R' type, 27.0mm
Brakeset: Shimano 105 dual pivot 49mm
Accessories: SKS P-35 mudguards, 2 bottle cages

DAVE YATES CUSTOM AUDAX

£1750, frame only £690
M. Steel Cycles ☎ 0191 234 4275
www.msteelcycles.co.uk

FRAME AND FORKS

Size tested: 57cm (equivalent)
Sizes available: any
Weight as tested: 9.20kg/20.4lb (no pedals)
Frame: TIG welded Reynolds 853 Pro Team
Frame Weight: 1.57kg/3.5lb
Fork: Columbus EL unicrown
Fork weight: 0.64kg/1.4lb

BIKE DIMENSIONS

Top tube: 55.7cm/ (equivalent)
Seat tube (c-c): 45.2cm/17.8in
Chainstays: 42.5cm/16.7in
Wheelbase: 101.0cm/39.8in
Head tube angle: 72°
Seat tube angle: 72°
Fork offset: 4.0cm
Trail: 7.0cm
B/b height: 27.3cm/10.7in
Standover height: 76.0cm/29.9in
Braze-ons: mudguard and rack mountings, 2 pairs bottle mounts

FRAME ALIGNMENT

Head tube: perfect
Rear triangle: perfect
Fork: perfect

TRANSMISSION

Chainset: Shimano Ultegra 170mm 30-42-52T
Bottom bracket: Shimano Ultegra
Freewheel: Shimano HG70 13-14-15-16-17-19-21-23-25
Chain brand: Sachs PC59
Derailleurs: Shimano Ultegra
Seat levers: Shimano Ultegra ST1
Pedals: none

GEAR RATIO (IN):

Chainring \ Sprocket	13	14	15	16	17	19	21	23	25
30	62	58	54	51	48	43	39	35	32
42	87	81	76	71	67	60	54	49	45
52	108	100	94	88	83	74	67	61	56

WHEELS

Front & rear: 32H Mavic Open Pro CD rims on Dura-Ace hubs w/DT s/s d/b spokes
Tyres: Schwalbe Stelvio Kevlar 700 x 23mm
Wheel weight: 1.14kg/2.5lb (f), 1.30kg/3.3lb (r)

OTHER COMPONENTS

Handlebar stem: Cinelli Sesamo threadless 10.5cm
Handlebars: ITM Scatto anatomic 44cm (c-c)
Headset: Tange Aheadset threadless tin
Saddle: Selle Italia Flite Titanium
Seatpost: Campagnolo Record Ti 27.2mm
Brakeset: Shimano Ultegra dual pivot 49mm
Accessories: 2 x bottle cages, Zefal mini-pump, SKS P-35 mudguards

GEORGE LONGSTAFF CUSTOM AUDAX

£1750, frame only £695
George Longstaff Cycles ☎ 01782 561966
www.Longstaffcycles.co.uk

FRAME AND FORKS

Size tested: 55.5cm
Sizes available: any
Weight as tested: 11.50kg/25.3lb (no pedals)
Frame: Lugged and silver brazed Reynolds 531 (main tubes), 725 rear triangle
Frame Weight: 1.97kg/4.3lb
Fork: Reynolds 531
Fork weight: 0.73kg/1.6lb

BIKE DIMENSIONS

Top tube: 56.7cm/22.3in
Seat tube (c-t): 53.5cm/21.1 (c-c)
Chainstays: 41.0cm/16.1in
Wheelbase: 102.7cm/40.4in
Head tube angle: 71.5°
Seat tube angle: 74°
Fork offset: 5.2cm
Trail: 6.2cm
B/b height: 24.6cm/9.7in
Standover height: 79.0cm/31.1in
Braze-ons: full range inc 3 bottle cage mounts, dynamo and front light mounts

FRAME ALIGNMENT

Head tube: perfect
Rear triangle: perfect
Fork: perfect

TRANSMISSION

Chainset: TA Zephyr 165mm 26-36-46T
Bottom bracket: Shimano UN52
Freewheel: Campagnolo Daytona 13-14-15-16-17-19-21-23-26
Chain brand: Sachs PC59
Derailleurs: Campagnolo Racing Triple T
Gear levers: Campagnolo Daytona Ergopower
Pedals: none

GEAR RATIO (IN):

Chainring \ Sprocket	13	14	15	16	17	19	21	23	26
26	54	50	47	44	41	37	33	30	27
36	74	69	65	61	57	51	46	42	37
46	95	89	83	77	73	65	59	54	47

WHEELS

Front & rear: 36H Ambrosio Excellence rims on Hope hubs w/ Sapim s/s d/b spokes
Tyres: Vredestein Ricorso 700 x 25mm
Wheel weight: 1.50kg/2.9lb (f), 1.55kg/3.41lb (r)

OTHER COMPONENTS

Handlebar stem: ITTT Record
Handlebars: ITTT Prima anatomic 44cm (c-c)
Headset: Stronglight X94 1in
Saddle: San Marco Rolls
Seatpost: Selcof Racing 27.2mm
Brakeset: Shimano RX100 57mm
Accessories: 3 x bottle cages, SKS P35 mudguards, Nordlicht 2000 dynamo w/Lumatec Plus front light, Nimrod alloy rear rack w/Vistalite LED rear light

CYCLING PLUS VERDICT

Audax is about reliability and keeping going, and that is what I identified most with the Longstaff's frame build, equipment, handling when tired, and for my long-term investment. This might sound like playing safe, but it was also a real delight to ride, and certainly spirited. Although the equipment is well chosen the overall price is a little high. This was in part down to the frame but it did come with a rack and lighting. And it was by far the best bike for longer events.

The Yates also seems like a lot of money, and we dispute that this level of weight-saving really is that important for audax. But hey, it is Dave's own bike – he has built what he wanted and it is something of an experiment. And if you have a particular need – or want – then Dave has an open enough outlook to make it for you. His delving and riding will pay off as he will be better informed to advise you.

The Hewitt appears a more affordable package. The frame was excellent value in itself, though the whole package was expensive compared to any of those in the rivals box. But the bigger question remains: is it an audax bike or a racer with mudguards? Though it's very enjoyable to ride on shorter events, so is any decent road bike, thus begging the question, why go custom?

HEWITT 7

One for the whippets, or the larger more powerful rider on shortish events. Scant audax detailing.

LONGSTAFF 10

The perfect all-round audax machine where fit, comfort, reliability and craftsmanship are all paramount.

YATES 8

A fit minimalist's bike – for those that thrive on carrying next to nowt.