

Words **JAMES SPENDER**

Pearson

On And On

A gravel bike that loves the tarmac

For fans of the modern gravel bike, it's all here: asymmetric dropped chainstays; lowered seatstays; clearance for 700c x 45mm tyres; front and rear rack and guard mounts; multiple bottle bosses. Yet, says Pearson's co-owner, Will Pearson, there is a specific spin to the brief of its latest gravel bike.

'Although it's designed to be a capable off-roader with plenty of clearance for dirt, there is an emphasis on making it look and feel fast. We've found that the demand for adventure bikes that perform well on the tarmac is growing into a requirement in the UK market.'

At face value, the bike does indeed look the *rapido* part. Tubes are truncated, the tessellating fork crown and head tube borrow design cues from Pearson's aero road bikes, the flared bars have aero tops, and the carbon wheels are 40mm deep. Also, the whole thing looks incredibly clean – there's not a cable in sight. Put in some slim tyres and you could be forgiven for mistaking the On And On for a road bike. Yet looks alone don't win races.

Need for speed

A gravel bike is never going to be as fast as a road bike on the road, but not since the Pinarello

Grevil+ (issue 104) have I found a gravel bike this fast on the blacktop. The On And On really shifts, especially on the flat, where the aero wheels feel like they're putting in a turn and initial pick-up and subsequent accelerations are very good for a gravel bike. This all points to a stiff spine and rear triangle, and light-for-gravel rolling stock – a claimed 1,370g for the wheels and 480g apiece for the 40mm Pirelli Cinturato tyres.

Taking the bike off-road was a similar story. The overriding sensation was one of speed, but this was underpinned by impressive smoothness and well-balanced handling.

Comfort is so much to do with tyres it's almost boring to say so, but it's worth noting this tubeless setup gets an extra plush twist due to the wheels' 25mm internal width rims. These help the tyres spread wide to increase volume for comfort, and in theory this also helps lower rolling resistance, since bikes that bounce up and down are losing energy to deflection. However, another key to comfort is the On And On's geometry.

The maker says geometry is derived 'by gleaning data from the bike fits we carry out in our London studio', with the idea Pearson can

The spec

Model Pearson On And On

Price £5,500

Weight 8.8kg (medium)

Groupset Shimano GRX 815 Di2

Wheels Pearson Hoopdriver Rock And Roll

Finishing kit Pearson Carbon 15" bar, Carbon stem, Aero seatpost, Pro Stealth Performance saddle, Pirelli Cinturato Gravel H 40mm tyres

Contact pearson1860.com

Highlights

- 1 Shimano GRX Di2 shifts impeccably, and with a 40t 1x chainset and 11-42t cassette, the On And On could climb a wall
- 2 Plenty of mounting points for front and rear racks make the bike hugely versatile
- 3 Truncated tube profiles, hidden cables and 40mm deep wheels give an aero edge when road riding





Pick of the kit

Rapha Pro Team Insulated Rain Jacket, £310, rapha.cc

The Pro Team is made from Gore-Tex's Paclite Plus fabric, which is a two-ply laminate of abrasion-resistant outer bonded to a toughened Gore-Tex membrane. As such this isn't quite as packable as a Gore-Tex ShakeDry jacket, but it is every bit as waterproof, vastly more robust and – crucially – much warmer.

The secret is the synthetic inner lining, which at just 65gsm is less dense than a quality bit of A4 paper. The jacket feels almost as light as the lightest waterproofs, yet kept me toasty all winter.

tailor geometry to real rider needs. And here it really seems to work.

This medium On And On has a 582mm stack and 380mm reach, affording a middling-upright position so the drops still provided aero benefit but riding on the hoods or tops felt touring-bike comfy. Added to this is a long 1,021mm wheelbase and a 78mm bottom bracket drop, the former creating rough-ground stability, the latter lowering the bike/ rider centre of gravity in a way that made descending noticeably assured (a road bike BB drop is more like 68mm, for example).

Given all this, the On And On could be in danger of being stately, but the front has a 66mm trail, which isn't excessively short but is short enough to impart fairly nimble handling, which the bike still possessed even when laden.

Fully loaded

Taking advantage of the only day in weeks it hadn't rained, for my final outing with the On

The On And On could be in danger of being stately, but the 66mm trail is short enough to impart fairly nimble handling



The On And On has a lot of bottom bracket drop – how far the bottom bracket sits below the wheel axles – which lowers the rider's centre of gravity for extra stability

And On I bolted on a rack and set off on a 90km ride from Bristol to Taunton, two side panniers and a top rack bag loaded.

I later weighed this at around 15kg, but the extra weight troubled me much less than I was expecting. Over the Somerset Levels the going was flat and windy, which played well into the bike's aero hands, but more surprising was its performance in the Quantock Hills.

Out-of-the-saddle efforts didn't elicit the kind of tail-wagging I expected, testament to the stiff rear triangle and probably a stiff rack too (a Tailfin alloy model), and downhill the bike remained supremely sure-footed. Yet the biggest takeaway from that ride was the sheer lack of complaint from my backside, neck and hands. I really felt like I could have ridden all day.

I do have one gripe, though – the mounting points. They sit flush to the frame, meaning a bottle cage or rack contacts the paint and could damage it – something I found when I caused a paint chip while fitting a bottle cage. Thus, when it came to fitting the metal rack I fashioned some washers from the plastic foil wrap of a Covid test kit, which proved good frame-savers. Without these I'd fear longer-term damage to paint, and possibly even the carbon where unforgiving metal racks are involved.

Still, this is hardly a dealbreaker. As it is, nothing can detract from what a smoothly fast, supremely comfortable gravel bike the On And On proved to be. 🚲

Alternatively...



Precious metal

Pearson's Around The Outside (£5,600) has a long wheelbase and an upright position designed for long miles, and a titanium frame designed for a long life. With 650b wheels the bike fits mammoth 2.5in tyres.



Not-so-precious metal

The Pearson Irons In The Fire is built around a steel frameset with plenty of mounting options and 50mm tyre clearance. A GRX 600 groupset, alloy wheels and unbranded steel tubing helps keep the cost to £2,400.