

Tested Internet bikes

Burls Custom TT £2500

Net. gains

Dolan Tuono £1850

Buying a bike off the internet is getting easier and easier – and is likely to be cheaper too. Paul Vincent checks out four online options, from £750 to £2500

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Van Nicholas Amazon
Rohloff £2058



Photography Robert Smith Studios

Focus Merluza £750



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Burls Custom TT
£2500 complete, £995 frame

Burls www.burls.co.uk



Looking for a bike bargain? Chances are the best deal you'll get is on the internet. With no overheads on shop premises, website retailers can maintain their margins even though the price to you, the consumer, is hard to resist. As well as winning on price, online retailers can offer an otherwise unprecedented level of customisation for the savvy bike buyer. Some offer a frame size calculator so you can make sure your new pride and joy is the perfect fit, while some have interactive bike builder functionality on their sites. Here you work out the right size bike for you, choose the wheels, finishing kit and even colour scheme to suit your budget and tastes. Buying this way is fast becoming a safe and convenient alternative to travelling perhaps hundreds of miles to visit a specialist retailer.

This month we're looking at four bikes that can all be purchased easily on the internet: a custom titanium time trial bike from Harwich-based Burls, the

The Burls' steep seat angle is ideal for the extreme intensity of a short time trial

The welding on the Burls is neater than we've come to expect of an Eastern Europe-produced frame



Dolan Tuono

£1850 complete, £1080 f+f

Dolan www.bikes-dolan.uk.com



Terry Dolan Tuono, a new high end carbon race/sportive bike from the likeable Lancastrian who also supplies race bikes to the national squad, and the titanium Van Nicholas Amazon Rohloff – with its 14 hub gears it's an exotic

urban street warrior that has fixie street cred without the limitations of a single gear. These three bikes are all available on the high street as well, if you prefer the personal touch, while our fourth test bike, the Focus Merluza, described as



Our Dolan test bike was equipped with a Campag Centaur carbon chainset

'commuter-ready' but to our mind more a light touring machine, is only available through online store Wiggle.

Frame Burls 9 Dolan 9 Van Nicholas 8 Focus 8

Sourced and welded in Russia, the Burls uses 3AL-2.5V titanium tubing and the welding is neater than we've come to expect of a frame produced in Eastern Europe. The geometry is the classic 'micro-style' (see p104) with a level top-tube and Ritchey-type dropouts that add strength. On the basis that the tribar dimensions determine frame size on a micro-style frame, we opted for a 54cm top-tube that would suit the Oval A701 tribars – a current favourite at £235. We also opted for an Oval A900 Jetstream fork, probably the most aerodynamic fork available.

Built in Italy, the Tuono is the top model in Dolan's road bike range and uses unidirectional nanotube (UDN) carbon that is so new only Terry Dolan has it. There are lighter frames out there

The Tuono uses UDN carbon that is so new only Terry Dolan has it



**Van Nicholas
Amazon Rohloff
£2058**

Van Nicholas www.vannicholas.com



but the use of an intermediate density carbon promises better durability. The flattened chainstays – just 18mm thick at their narrowest, help to dissipate vibrations, and the dropouts are capped with alloy for durability. The 100 per cent carbon forks and a headset are included in the frame-only package and the frame angles are the same regardless of the size selected.

The Van Nicholas Amazon's 3AL/2.5V plain gauge titanium tubing has a tough, resilient quality that's suited to the urban environment. The welding falls short of the artisan standards of US-produced frames from the likes of Merlin and Seven, though the intricately CNC'd dropouts are certainly eye-catching. A Bushnell eccentric bottom bracket is used in preference to slotted dropouts to tension the chain, and unlike its derailleur-equipped sibling there are no disc brake mounts, though it's otherwise well appointed with rear rack and mudguard braze-ons, together with

The Amazon has a tough, resilient quality that's suited to the urban environment

You can keep the pedalling pressure on when changing gear with the Amazon's Rohloff hub



Focus Merluza

£750

Focus www.wiggle.co.uk



cable stops and guides exclusively for the Rohloff hub.

Focus's Merluza frame uses 7005 series aluminium and is ovalised both for looks and to make it easy to weld the oversized tubes. Designed to withstand the rigours of light touring (we think) and regular commuting, the Merluza's

tubing is a constant thickness throughout its length, and the XL frame tested weighs 2.24kg. Welding is neat throughout and there's a full complement of rack and mudguard eyes, and bosses for one bottle cage. The aluminium fork looks stylish and sports low rider rack bosses.



Not only does the Merluza have eyelets for rack and mudguards – the package includes the rack and mudguards!

Equipment

Burris 8 Dolan 8 Van Nicholas 8 Focus 8

The Burris is suitably equipped with Campagnolo's middle of the range Centaur gears together with bar end shifters that fit on the end of the tribars, though specifying a barely heavier Campagnolo Veloce chainset would have saved £70. The finishing kit includes a USE Alien seatpost, Hope cartridge headset and Oval 9cm stem. The Oval tribars are at the heart of this time trial set-up as they provide the means to get an effective aerodynamic riding position, by adjusting the height and width of the arm rests as well as the length of the extensions, and the gel pads cup the forearms comfortably. The Selle San Marco Rapide saddle has enough foam in the nose to let you adopt a forward-over-the-bottom bracket riding position without any numbness.

Based on a frame and fork-only price of £1080, the projected cost of the Campagnolo Centaur-equipped Dolan Tuono as we went to press – it should be

For a £750 bike, the Focus is well equipped and includes Shimano 105 10-speed components



available from mid Feb – is a competitive £1850.

The Dolan was decked out mostly with Dolan's own Alpina branded carbon Ergo handlebars and oversized carbon setback-type seatpost, together with a Deda carbon wrapped stem. The saddle was the little-seen Prologo Nago that has a stiff base and a shape that suited our testers.

Our Van Nicholas came with

some optional extras that we reckon are definitely worth the cost and include a beautifully made titanium setback-type seatpost, a leather Brooks saddle and highly effective Ergon grips. The Rohloff hub gear ratios are in larger steps than we're used to with a derailleur-equipped bike and, unlike other hub gears, full pressure can be maintained on the pedals when changing gear. Van



The online buying experience

Burls

Corresponding by email, Burls uses your existing bike dimensions to create a CAD drawing for your approval. Orders take between four to eight weeks to deliver. You are also invited to pay a personal visit and ride a sample of the company's wares. www.burls.co.uk

Dolan

The Dolan site is suited to those who already know what they want, with a section at the bottom of each page devoted to the seat-tube and top-tube measurements together with frame angles, though the knowledgeable staff or any one of Dolan's 11 dealers are on hand to advise. www.bikes-dolan.uk.com

Van Nicholas

This is the most comprehensive system we've seen and the most intuitive to use – just take the required body measurements and punch them into the system, then watch the total weight and stem length fluctuate as you change your requirements on screen. Unsuitable components can be changed without cost, and delivery time for the bikes is around two weeks. www.vannicholas.com

Wiggle

Delivery by carrier takes two to three days and the site leads you to a table of frame sizes that correspond to your height and inside leg measurements. There's a separate table for handlebar, stem and crank length that is tenuously based on the frame size selected but it's a good starting point. www.wiggle.co.uk

Other website buying opportunities:

Enigma

Enigma uses the www.bikefitting.com database system to establish frame fit and has a well thought out page called Ordering. It's based on a six point body measuring system and goes on to ask current bike dimensions and whether you prefer a stiff or compliant ride. You'll receive a recommendation within 48 hours. www.enigmabikes.com

Pedalforce

US-based Pedalforce is purely web-based and bikes are delivered in pieces with the cost of the build in the UK partly refundable. The site has comprehensive frame sizing instructions

and helpful drawings for body measurements. There's a total of eight groupset options available, but the only finishing kit options are for an aero elliptical or round seatpost. www.pedalforce.com

Ribble

Ribble Cycles gives you the biggest choice of all the internet options. Its Frame Size help page considers inside leg only but you can email for further discussion if, for instance, you have an especially long upper body. The Bike Builder page is clear and helpful. www.ribblecycles.co.uk

Thorn

Thorn, the reputable Somerset frame and bike builders, provides an ordering system via a PDF downloadable form. It requests your inseam, and bases the handlebar reach on your existing bike set-up. Customers are contacted prior to building the bike. www.sjsc.co.uk

Evans

Evans Cycles' interactive sales assistant, Erica, finds you a bike from a range of 13 brands including Colnago, Trek and Pinnacle. The assistant provides rudimentary size recommendations based on rider height but advises you to get in touch by phone or email. www.evanscycles.com

Sigma

Sigma Sport uses the www.bikefitting.com system. It offers 12 combined groupset, wheels and finishing kit packages graded in a pricing scale, and a comprehensive range of 10 frame brands including Sigma, Seven, Cervelo, Time and Derosa. www.sigma-sport.co.uk

PBK

PBK, or Pro Bike Kit, recommends the classic sizing calculation based on inseam x 0.67 and advises rounding it down to the nearest size which, for a rider with an inseam of 85cm, would be a 57cm frame or an XL size. A frame geometry table is provided. www.probikekit.com

Planet-X

Planet-X doesn't have a size guide and you pay £100 extra for the privilege of choosing crank length, bar width and saddle colour outside of the package options, but its Ultegra Carbon bike costs under a grand so we aren't complaining. www.planet-x-bikes.co.uk



Nicholas also operates an exchange policy so parts can be swapped out if they're the wrong size.

For a £750 bike, our Focus Merluza is well equipped and includes Shimano 105 10-speed components together with an FSA Gossamer 30/39/50 triple chainset. The 12-27t cassette provides a

sensible set-up for light touring and commuting, though we can't help thinking the gear indexing should have been tuned a little better given that this will arrive at the customer's door. Other kit includes highly effective Tektro RX5 brakes, a Fizik Pave Sport saddle which includes a very

compact yet surprisingly effective integrated rear light, and an 11cm adjustable stem. The SKS mudguards are tough but they could have done with a mudflap for foul weather.

Wheels

Burls 9 Dolan 9 Van Nicholas 8 Focus 8

For the Burls we selected wind-cheating, deep section Corima Aero wheels, costing £1077 in total, plus £70 for Vittoria CS tubulars. We chose these in preference to the popular combination of a disc rear wheel and deep-section front wheel as they're easier to cope with in blustery conditions. We opted for the sprint versions as their boxed rim construction is more resistant to pothole damage than the hooked section of a clincher wheel. The cartridge bearing hubs are built to the French firm's usual high standards and the bladed aero spokes are easy to true.

A fair proportion of the Dolan's total price can be attributed to the new Mavic Ksyrium SL Premium wheels. These head the Ksyrium

Jargon busters

Eccentric bottom bracket: Instead of being in the middle (concentric), the bottom bracket bearings are non-central – eccentric – so that when the bottom bracket body is turned it alters the chain tension.

Micro-style: Essentially a compact frame design with a level top-tube.

Ritchey-type dropouts: Dropouts that are both stronger and easier to weld to the tubes than the traditional flat-type dropout.

Nanotube: This broadly used term refers to the smaller atomic particles that go to create a denser, stronger material.

range and use titanium skewers and hub components in place of the steel ones of the SL model. Other wheels with carbon rims are lighter uphill but we would opt for these Ksyriums in most circumstances as their aluminium braking surfaces provide far better braking modulation on full-attention descents that you'll encounter in a continental sportive. The Continental Grand Prix 4000 tyres grip tenaciously in the wet,





though we were unfortunate and picked up a puncture.

The Van Nicholas uses DRC aluminium rims with butted stainless steel spokes interlaced using the popular three-cross spoke pattern where the spokes cross one another three times. The Rohloff rear hub contributes to the heavy feel of the rear-end, but the Continental Sport Contact 700x32 tyres compensate well for this and are a better choice than touring-specific tyres as they roll faster and are highly effective shock absorbers into the bargain. Rear wheel removal is a cinch thanks to twin quick release clips that disconnect the control cables from the hub.

Focus's use of Fulcrum Racing 7 wheels on the Merluza is slightly at odds with the rest of the bike as they

are more usually seen on budget racers. They look good though, with their black spokes and mid-section rims and the hubs are easy to service. The spoke pattern, based around left hand radial rear and crossed driveside, is up to the job for commuting, though for touring – which is what we reckon this bike is more suitable for – you should consider stronger/heavier wheels. The Schwalbe Road Cruiser tyres are great for wet weather commuting as they're very resistant to punctures.

Handling
Burls 9 Dolan 9 Van Nicholas 8
Focus 8

The Burls' steep seat angle is ideal for the extreme intensity of a short distance time trial, and the Oval

Jetstream fork's twin-bladed design directs the airstream away from the front wheel for even greater speed. The arm rests of the aluminium Oval A701 tribars felt best with the height spacers removed but we could have done with a 1cm longer stem to provide more knee clearance when riding out of the saddle.

The Dolan Tuono combines the sharply accurate handling properties of a carbon road bike at the high end of the stiffness scale with a smooth ride quality akin to a bike intended for sportives, and shows that you can have responsiveness without needing to wear a second pair of shorts to blunt vibrations. The relatively short head-tube and low riding position will please those who like to climb aggressively, and the fork's exemplary lateral stiffness and pinpoint accurate steering responses inspire confidence to feather the brakes into and out of corners on fast descents.

Despite being a significant 18 per cent heavier than the recently tested (issue 197) version with drop bars and derailleur gears, the Van Nicholas climbs better than any other Rohloff-equipped bikes that we've tried recently, though a little perseverance was needed as the fork had a tendency to chatter until the Shimano cantilever brakes had a chance to bed in properly. The cantilever brakes fall short on power compared to V-brakes on fast descents, but we aren't complaining with their performance around town. The

bike's upright riding position feels relaxed and sprocket sizes were judged to be about right for general cycling duties.

The Focus Merluza slots comfortably between the adroit climbing ability of a cyclocross bike fitted with mudguards, and the stiff and stable ride of a full-on expedition rig like the Koga Miyata Terra Cruiser. The steering is light yet stable when descending at speed, and the provision of auxiliary brake levers for the flats is very handy, although their narrow spacing means that they're not ideal for fast descents. The Mini-V brake arms provide impressive control whether panniered up or not, and the Schwalbe Road Cruiser tyres provide a sense of speed combined with the puncture protection needed for touring and commuting.





Burls Custom TT

£995 frame only (£2500 as tested)
www.burls.co.uk

Frame and forks

Size tested: Custom
Sizes available: Custom
Weight as tested: 8.140kg/17.9lb no pedals
Frame: Plain gauge titanium
Frame weight: 1548g/3.4lb
Fork: Oval A900 Dual-bladed 100% carbon
Fork weight: 458g/1.0lb

Bike dimensions

Top-tube: 53cm/20.9in
Seat-tube (c-c): 44cm/17.3in
Chainstays: 39cm/15.4in
Wheelbase: 98cm/38.6in
Head-tube angle: 73.5°
Seat-tube angle: 74.5°
Fork offset: 4.3cm/1.7in
Trail: 5.9cm
BB height: 27cm/10.6in
Standover height: 73cm/28.7in
Braze-ons: 2 bottles

Frame alignment

Head-tube: Perfect
Rear triangle: Perfect
Fork: Perfect

Transmission

Chainset: Campagnolo Centaur carbon
Bottom bracket: Campagnolo UT two-piece
Freewheel: Campagnolo Centaur
Chain brand: Campagnolo
Derailleurs: Campagnolo Centaur
Gear levers: Campagnolo bar end shifters
Pedals: None

Gear ratio (in)

Chainring	Sprocket									
	12	13	14	15	16	17	19	21	23	25
39	88	81	75	70	66	62	55	50	46	42
53	119	110	102	95	90	84	75	68	62	57

Wheels

Front & Rear: Corima Aero
Tyres: Vittoria CS tubular
Wheel weight: F 859g, R 1376g

Other components

Stem: Oval 9cm
Handlebars: Oval A701 Integrated TT bar
Headset: Hope threadless
Saddle: Selle San Marco Rapide
Seatpost: USE Alien 350 27.2mm
Brakeset: Campagnolo Centaur
Accessories: None



Dolan Tuono

£1080 frame and fork (£1850 as tested)
www.bikes-dolan.uk.com

Frame and forks

Size tested: 55cm
Sizes available: TBA
Weight as tested: 7.1kg/15.6lb no pedals
Frame weight: 967g/2.1lb
Fork: 350g/0.8lb
Frame: Full carbon monocoque, alloy headset inserts, BB insert, replaceable derailleur hanger
Forks: Full carbon fork blades, crown and 1 1/8in steerer, alloy dropout protector caps

Bike dimensions

Top-tube: 54.5cm/21.5in
Seat-tube (c-c): 48cm/18.9in
Chainstays: 40.5cm/15.9in
Wheelbase: 98.5cm/38.8in
Head-tube angle: 73°
Seat-tube angle: 74°
Fork offset: 4.7cm/1.9in
Trail: 5.8cm
BB height: 27.5cm/10.8in
Standover height: 78cm/30.7in
Braze-ons: 2 bottle cages

Frame alignment

Head-tube: Perfect
Rear triangle: Good
Fork: Good

Transmission

Chainset: Campag Centaur carbon, 172.5mm arms, 53/39 alloy rings, Ultra Torque
Bottom bracket: Campag Centaur external type, sealed cartridge
Freewheel: Centaur 12-25 10-spd steel cogs
Chain brand: Campagnolo 10-speed
Derailleurs: Campagnolo Centaur short cage f/r, braze-on front with clamp
Gear levers: Campag Centaur QS carbon Ergo
Pedals: None

Gear ratio (in)

Chainring	Sprocket									
	12	13	14	15	16	17	19	21	23	25
39	88	81	75	70	66	62	55	50	46	42
53	119	110	102	95	89	84	75	68	62	57

Wheels

Front & Rear: Mavic Syrium SL Premium
Tyres: Continental folding GP 4000 S, 700x23
Wheel weight: F 961g, R 1384g

Other components

Stem: Deda Ultra Carbon, 11cm o/s 4-bolt bar clamp, 2-bolt 1 1/8in steerer, carbon wrap alloy
Bars: Alpina full carbon anatomic, o/s 42cm c-c
Headset: Alpina integrated cartridge
Saddle: Prologo Nago gel, Ti rails
Seatpost: Alpina full carbon, 31.8mm dia, 300mm length, single bolt forged clamp
Brakes: Campag Centaur Skeleton, forged alloy
Accessories: Alpina carbon cage, bottle



Van Nicholas Amazon Rohloff

From £2058 (£2174 as tested)
www.vannicholas.com

Frame and forks

Size tested: 58cm
Sizes available: 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60cm
Weight as tested: 11.440kg/25.2lb
Frame: Plain gauge titanium
Frame weight: 1930g/4.3lb
Fork: Carbon alloy
Fork weight: 831g/1.8lb

Bike dimensions

Top-tube: 54cm/21.3in
Seat-tube (c-c): 52cm/20.5in
Chainstays: 42cm/16.5in
Wheelbase: 103.5cm/40.7in
Head-tube angle: 72°
Seat-tube angle: 74°
Fork offset: 4.5cm/1.8in
Trail: 6.6cm
BB height: 28.5cm/11.2in
Standover height: 81cm/31.9in
Braze-ons: 1 bottle cage

Frame alignment

Head-tube: Perfect
Rear triangle: Perfect
Fork: Perfect

Transmission

Chainset: Truvativ Stylo GPX 175mm 42-tooth
Bottom bracket: Truvativ 2-piece
Freewheel: 16-tooth cog
Chain brand: KMC 3/32
Derailleurs: n/a
Gear levers: Rohloff twistgrip-type 14-speed
Pedals: None

Gear ratio (in)

Chainring	Sprocket									
	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16
42	20	22	25	29	33	37	42			
42	48	55	62	71	80	92	104			

Wheels

Front & Rear: DRC wide 700c 32/32 three cross, butted stainless spokes
Tyres: Continental Sport Contact 700x32
Wheel weight: R 3.19kg, F 1624g

Other components

Stem: Van Nicholas 12cm 0-60 degrees
Bars: Van Nicholas o/s 22in width
Headset: FSA ahead-type
Saddle: Brooks B17 Normal model
Seatpost: Van Nicholas Ti setback 27.2mm
Brakeset: Shimano cantilevers
Accessories: None



Focus Merluza

£749.99
www.wiggle.co.uk

Frame and forks

Size tested: XL
Sizes available: S, M, L, XL
Weight as tested: 12.050kg/26.6lb
Frame: 7000 series Aluminium
Frame weight: 2240g/4.9lb
Fork: Carbon/alu
Fork weight: 871g/1.9lb

Bike dimensions

Top-tube: 60cm/23.6in
Seat-tube (c-c): 55cm/21.7in
Chainstays: 44.5cm/17.5in
Wheelbase: 107.5cm/42.3in
Head-tube angle: 73°
Seat-tube angle: 74°
Fork offset: 4.5cm/1.8in
Trail: 6cm
BB height: 28.5cm/11.2in
Standover height: 84cm/33.1in
Braze-ons: one bottle cage

Frame alignment

Head-tube: Perfect
Rear triangle: Perfect
Fork: Perfect

Transmission

Chainset: FSA Gossamer triple 50/39/30
Bottom bracket: FSA Mega EX
Freewheel: Shimano 10-speed
Chain brand: Shimano
Derailleurs: Shimano 105
Gear levers: Shimano 105
Pedals: None

Gear ratio (in)

Chainring	Sprocket									
	12	13	14	15	17	19	21	24	26	28
30	68	62	58	54	48	43	39	34	31	29
39	88	81	75	70	62	55	50	44	41	38
50	113	104	96	90	79	71	64	56	52	48

Wheels

Front & Rear: Fulcrum Racing 7
Tyres: Schwalbe Road Cruiser 700x32
Wheel weight: R 1982g, F 1562g

Other components

Stem: Unbranded angle-adjustable forged, 11cm, 0-60 degrees
Bars: Concept semi-anatomic oversized 47cm
Headset: Semi-integrated budget-type cartridge headset
Saddle: Fizik Pave Sport CX
Seatpost: Concept SL setback 27.2mm
Brakeset: Tektro RX5 V-type
Accessories: Alu rear rack, mudguards, reflector

CYCLING PLUS Verdict

Using simple online correspondence, Burls has succeeded in achieving what it set out to do in providing a frame that fits, and is a more affordable alternative to other titanium time trial frame designs from Van Nicholas and Enigma.

Ordering the Dolan Tuono online was a pretty basic experience but we got what we asked for and the new frame technology and the level of kit and wheels package has resulted in a ride that's hard to better below the two grand scale.

Top marks go to the Van Nicholas site with its easy-to-use system. The Amazon Rohloff has bags of street

cred and while there are more affordable ways of entering into the experience of owning a bike with this hub, the Amazon frame's resistance to casual knocks and the sheer beauty of those dropouts makes it worth the stretch.

The Focus Merluza fills the previously unoccupied soft, luxury end of the touring market. Its lighter kit and wheels limit its use to recreational purposes such as day-long rides in the countryside and general commuting – it's marketed as 'commuter ready' in the City Bikes section of Focus's website – but it's certainly great value for the level of equipment on offer here.

Burls 9/10

Highly recommended and affordable high end time trial frame

Dolan 9/10

Spectacularly good Anglo-Continental road bike

Van Nicholas 9/10

Practical street commuter with bags of charisma

Focus 8/10

A competent light tourer/commuter that's well specced for the money