

What type of bike is best?

Normally we recommend hybrid bikes. They are very versatile: ideal for everyday commuting and weekend leisure rides, but also perfectly capable of carrying home loads of shopping, doing longer-distance cycle holidays, or a little off-road riding. As long as it's of reasonable quality, a hybrid is a very good all-rounder, and the wide range of gears and good brakes on a modern hybrid make it ideal for a hilly city like Bristol. There are various different sub-types available: some are lighter and faster but less practical (sometimes called flat-bar road bikes or fitness bikes), some are heavier with fatter tyres and suspension forks (trekking bikes), some are based around mountain bike dimensions but are fitted with slick tyres for road use (urban mountain bikes or comfort bikes). The potential disadvantages of a hybrid are: wheel rims which wear out in a few years or a few thousand miles, a drivetrain which wears out similarly quickly, the inability to fit a full chaincase, and the difficulty of making the frame small enough for shorter riders, especially women.

Alternatives to a hybrid bike include:

Mountain bikes: normally heavier and slower on-road, but if fitted with slick tyres and no suspension some can be as good as a hybrid, and are particularly suited to shorter people because of their smaller wheels.

Folding bikes: ideal for trains and easier to store, but normally more expensive than an equivalent non-folding bike, able to carry less luggage, and the small wheels and tyres will wear out quicker with daily use.

Touring bikes: more expensive than a hybrid, but just as versatile and practical, and good for long distances

Road bikes/racers: lighter and quicker, but often with limited options for mudguards and luggage capacity, and generally not as comfortable or practical for everyday city riding in traffic, wet weather, etc.

City bikes: normally come fully-equipped with mudguards, rack, lights etc. so are in some ways more practical than a hybrid, especially if fitted with hub brakes and hub gears which are very reliable and long-lived, but city bikes are often heavy and have a smaller range of gears which can make hills difficult.

Once you've decided roughly what type(s) of bikes would suit you, the price is generally a pretty good indication of whether you're getting a model of suitable quality or not. Nowadays most big-name brands offer many different categories of bike, so it's not really possible to say "Dawes make good bikes" or "Raleigh are low quality": in truth they both offer everything from very cheap to very expensive models. See the next section (overleaf) for guidance on how much to spend on a bike that will best suit your purposes.

But first a warning: *please, please, please* do not buy a bike from a supermarket, mail order website, or department store for £59.99 or £99.99 or even £149.99. It will be heavy and uncomfortable, will start rusting in a few months, and if used regularly many parts will be broken and dangerous after only a year or two. At this price point, your money is much better spent on a good second-hand bike. Don't just take our word for it, see e.g. <http://www.whycycle.co.uk>, <http://bicycleshapedobject.wordpress.com> or <http://tinyurl.com/actbso2>

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USED BIKE PRICE GUIDE

- **£125 used bike:** If you're on a very tight budget, £125 or £150 will get a basic but fully serviced and mechanically sound bike perfect for use around the city – much more reliable and cost-effective, and less theft-vulnerable than spending e.g. £129.99 on a brand new mail order or supermarket bike.
- **£200 used bike:** For around £200 we can sell you a good quality fully reconditioned second-hand hybrid bike which would have been £350 to £450 when new. A bike in this price bracket would probably be ideally suited to regular commuting and some longer rides at the weekend.
- **£350 used bike:** A budget of £300 or £400 will buy a quality hybrid, or a basic tourer, road bike or mountain bike, originally worth upwards of £700 when new. These sorts of bikes would be ideal for longer rides, cycle touring, off-road riding etc. Used folding bikes usually start at this sort of price.
- **£500+ used bike:** A budget of £500 or more should allow you to get a more specialist bike which was around £1,000 when new. We do not sell a huge number of used bikes in this price range, and when we do they might typically be a good quality touring bike, serious road bike, or a quality folding bike.

NEW BIKE PRICE GUIDE

- **£300 new bike:** Basic commuter and hybrid bikes start at this price, and although you don't get as much your money compared to a used bike, the advantages of buying new are that you can get the right size, get it straight away, and it will come with a 12-month warranty. At this price point, avoid any extras like suspension: far better to get an honest, no-frills bike with basic but good components. We always recommend you should never spend less than £300 on a new bike, anything cheaper is likely to be a false economy because soon you'll end up spending more on repairs and upgrades.
- **£450 new bike:** Spending say £450 or £500 on a new hybrid bike usually means the components and specification will be better than on a £250 model. This can make the bike lighter or nicer to ride, and at this price point it can also help ensure it lasts longer and could even be cheaper to run, for example because of stronger wheels and hubs, better bearings, or puncture-resistant tyres.
- **£600+ new bike:** We recommend you should not spend less than £600 on a new mountain bike or tourer if it is going to be used hard, anything cheaper is likely a false economy because you'll spend more on servicing or upgrades. However, don't assume that more expensive always means more reliable: for example, above say £600 or £700 many hybrids will be lighter and faster, but possibly more fragile, more expensive to repair, and more of a theft-risk than a £300 or £400 model.

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