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BIKE TESTS **18 / 04 / 06**

Thorn Raven Tour Step Through tested



By Bex Hopkins



Ready for action!

Sometimes only a touring bike will do when you fancy a comfortable ride with the ability to carry your gear in a stable and efficient manner. The Raven Step Through is a new frame design based on the popular Thorn Raven frame, only with a dropped top tube that allows for masses of stand-over space and ease of use. Thorn have always accommodated women cyclists well and although the step though frame is a new venture they don't plan on stopping short of providing a good fit and set-up.

Frame

Thorn have an excellent reputation as quality frame builders amongst touring fans and the step through version of the Raven sees a new take on how to make a dropped top tube frame stiff and lightweight. The cross-tube connecting the seat tube to the down tube stiffens the frame near the bottom bracket area, right where you could potenially suffer from flex due to pedal power - but thankfully none of that here! This cross tube joins the top and down tube to the seat tube without hindering any stand-over room. There's enough space in the frame for two bottle cage positions, ideal for longer distance riding. The head tube is large and tall by women's standards, usually they are more compact on female specific frames, but this design allows for good height for the stem and promotes a comfortable riding position.

The frame offers plenty of rack and mudguard fitting options and the cable routing is fully catered for too, this frame is ready to accessorize with racks, lights and guards, it's built for practical life on the road.**Frame 7/10**

Components



Step-through frame design

The spec is good quality and with the many upgrade options available when you pruchase the Raven Tour you can spec your bike to fit your exact budget. Ours came with a Rohloff Speedhub 500 and Gripshift shifter which makes for a reliable gearing system and one that needs no fuss either. All the moving parts are kept well away from the open air, a great choice for winter riding.

You get to choose what size sprocket and front chainring you'd like so you can set the Rohloff's 14 gears to the best use for you. Cranks are offered in a choice of 8 lengths from 140mm to 175mm, giving all riders, not just women, more choice than other bike manufacturers.

For the first couple of rides the hub sounded a tad bit noisy, especially over the higher ratio gearing, but these hubs are well known for bedding in and improving with use. Weight is a common downside to this type of gearing and although the hub setup isn't actually that much heavier on paper, it is all on the back wheel rather than being spread around the bike. However the hubs best asset is it's longevity and reliability, and Rohloff are good at supplying spare parts if needed.

Thorns Twin Plate Crown fork is real tough fork, capable of carrying front panniers with ease, and is equipped with the relevant braze ons to make life easy with a rack. Thorn offer a couple of other fork upgrade options too should you fancy a carbon version!**Components 7/10**



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Meet the Team

Bex Hopkins - Editor
Bex has plenty of experience riding bikes of all descriptions over the last 10+ years, both locally and internationally.
> Read more about her background.

Top 5 Features

Buyer's Guide: Women's road bikes
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Rohloff hub means no derailleur damage!

Wheels

We've already said plenty about the Rohloff hub so we won't repeat all that, the front hub is Shimano Deore for a well matched hardwearing and reliable mate to the rear. Rims are Sun CR18 26" with 32 holes, that's basically as tough as a sturdy mountain bike wheel, well built and strong enough to withstand hauling a loaded bike around on pretty much all touring terrain. This wheelset is one of Thorns lighter wheel options and most women riders will benefit from losing weight in this region, making long journeys much easier. The Rohloff hub needs little or no maintenance except perhaps a yearly oil change and chain clean.**Wheels 8/10**

Ride

Although based around an expedition bike the Raven Tour Stepthrough would be equally at home on the town streets or country lanes as a hardwearing commuter bike. Kitted out with mudguards and panniers it is a great workhorse for daily riding, especially for longer commutes. Comfort is key with the setup, a high stem and big riser bars with plenty of adjustment for reach and the height gives a good viewpoint of the road and is comfy on the back and neck too. The Velo Plush saddle gives a soft ride with plenty of padding but no real specific support, experienced bottoms may require something firmer and narrower for a more sporty and lightweight saddle option but again comfort is the key here.

We've only had the luxury of riding a few touring bikes in our time but the Thorn exceeded our initial expectations more than any other bike. On first glance it looks a bit heavy and you'd expect to be pushing hard on the hills, but we were pleasantly surprised at the turn of speed we got when pulling away from traffic lights and on open roads. Unloaded the bike feels nimble and agile, corning is precise and predictable with a confidence inspiring feel, making it suitable for round town use as well as long hauls. When loaded up on the rear the bike feels stable and well balanced, and although we didn't get chance to load up the front, we found the bike handled well loaded with moderate-heavy weights and would be a good option for carrying a child seat too.



Comfortable bar set-up

Gearing took a short while to get used to , the Gripshift is easy to use and the 14 gears were well spaced, we found all terrain had an appropriate gear choice.

Braking is good thanks to the Shimano Deore V brakes and levers, you can adjust the reach of the levers to suit smaller hands and braking was highly efficient working well with the Panaracer Pasela TourGuard tyres that provided enough grip to stop quickly even in the wet.**Ride 8/10**

- **Value: 8**
- **Overall Performance: 8**

- **Good:** A hardworking bike that will last for years has to equal good value for money
- **Bad:** The stepthough design is not everyone's taste but there is a traditional diamond frame option too

- **Specification**
- Price £1199 (£499 frame, fork and headset)
- Frame sizes: 390 S-T 420S-T
- Size tested: 420S-T
- Frame tubing: Thorn Alloy Eccentric
- Fork: Thorn Twin Plate Crown fork R 531
- Headset: FSA Orbit XLII
- Chainset: Thorn Alloy crankset with single chain ring
- Shifters: Gripshift
- Saddle: Velo Plush Gel Tech
- Handlebar: Thorn Comfort riser
- Stem: Thorn alloy 80mm, 6 degree
- Grips: Thorn Cork grips for Rohloff
- Brakes: Shimano Deore V-brakes
- Wheels: Rohloff Speedhub 500/14 rear hub, Shimano Deore front hub with Sun CR18 rims
- Tyres: Panaracer Pasela TourGuard 1.75"
- Contact: www.thorncycles.co.uk

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