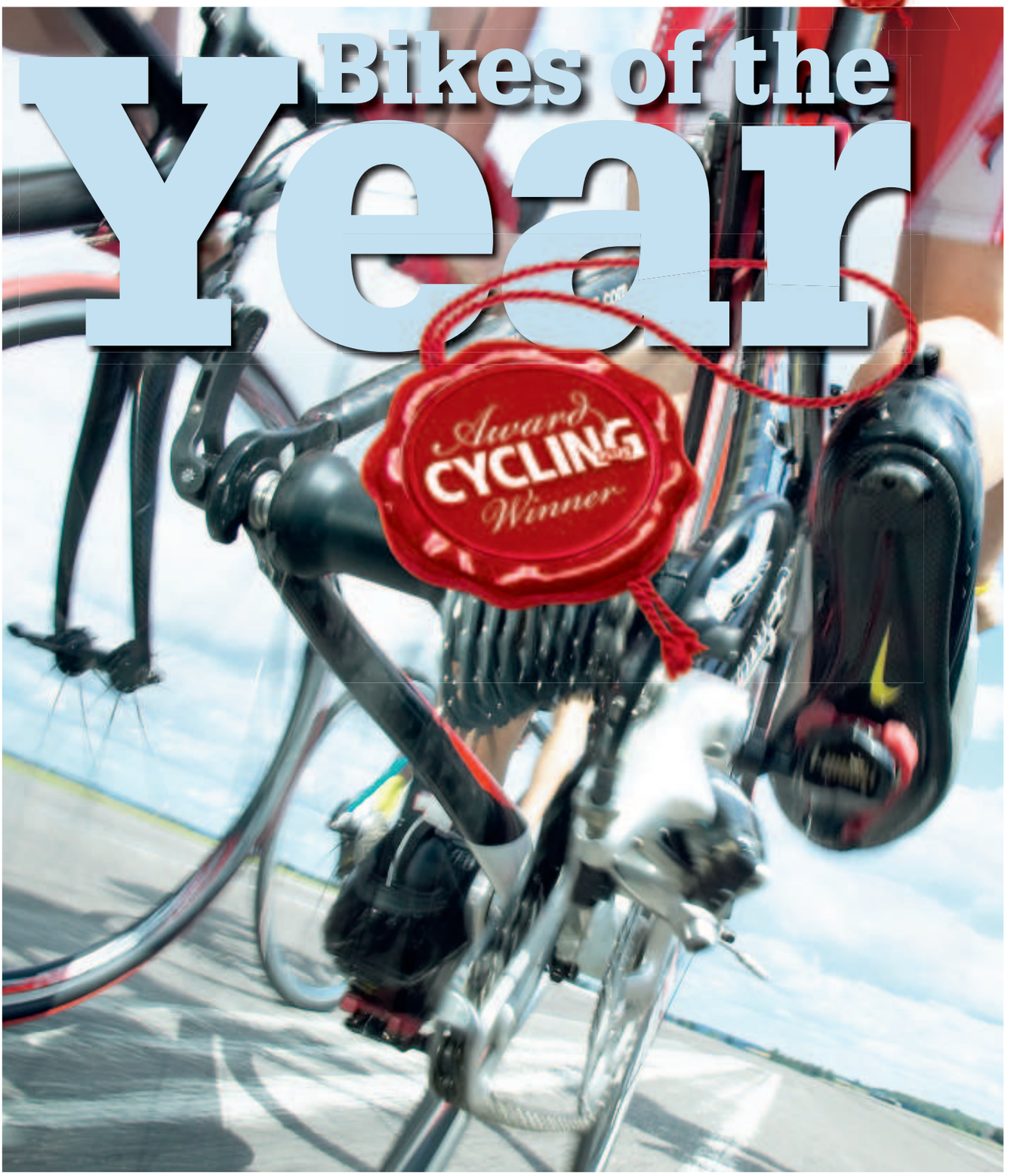
Bikes of the Year



Over the past 12 months we've tested 87 bikes in *Cycling Plus*, but which have really excelled? We reveal the very best…

You're now getting more bike for your cash than at any time in the past. Ever. It's an incredibly competitive marketplace out there for the bike manufacturers and they're each having to up their game constantly to impress and entice you… which is why the last year has been such a great one for all types of rider.

Carbon frames have got cheaper; there's more choice of both fixed and folding bikes; new long distance models have really upped the ante; commuter bikes are getting increasingly user-friendly; more brands are getting serious about their women's bikes; high end technologies are trickling down through the ranges faster than ever before… And the end result is that, plain and simple, bikes have got better.

But which ones are the best of all? Read on and all will be revealed…

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CARA COOLBAUGH
Cycling Plus kit tester, one-time elite triathlete and big-mile riding tourer, Cara lives her life on two wheels

My pick of the year

The **Hewitt SE** (*Cycling Plus* 186, £1,940, ☎ 01772 424773, www.hewittcycles.co.uk) was my bike of choice for several Sustrans rides, where it was equally at home carving descents in the Pennines as it was cruising down unpaved bicycle paths. It was set up so well – I didn't even touch the saddle height – and felt luxuriously comfortable. Several hundred miles in, it's as smooth as ever, with those Royce hubs seeming to roll on forever. A true jack of all trades, my own **Surly Cross Check** (f&f £299, www.ison-distribution.com) has taken the roles of tourer, commuter and grocery hauler and also seen me through the odd 'cross race. My favourite bike of 2006 was **Giant's TCR Composite W** (£1,800, ☎ 0115 977 5900, www.giant-bicycles.com). I got well acquainted with it during training and riding the Étape this summer. It's a true performance rocket made just for women and perfect for cyclosportives. Check out our review of the 2007 model on p82 in this issue.



The Hewitt SE: smooth as you like



RICHARD HALLETT
Globe-trotting bike tester and racer, Rich has years of experience putting bikes and kit through its paces

My pick of the year

Three bikes tested in *Cycling Plus* stand out for me this year. Cannondale's CAAD 8 is surely the US firm's best all-aluminium design yet. It combines stiffness, resilience and affordability in one lightweight package. The **R800** (*Cycling Plus* 187, £1,300, ☎ 00 41 61 487 9380) boasts the CAAD8 frame, Slice fork and Shimano 105 groupset. Bargain of the year.

A traveller's delight, **Ritchey's Break-Away** (*Cycling Plus* 190, £700 f&f plus case, ☎ 01202 330011, www.paligapltd.co.uk) frame concept is a fine lightweight road frame that can be split for packing within the small hard shell case offered as part of the package. My top choice, however, has to go to **Cervelo's R3** frameset (*Cycling Plus* 186, *Superbikes*, £1,999 f&f, www.ultimatepursuits.co.uk). Designed to find the ideal balance of weight and stiffness, the R3 weighs well under 900g, but was robust enough to carry Swiss powerhouse Fabian Cancellara to victory in this year's Paris-Roubaix. Some recommendation.



Cervélo's R3, an ideal balance of weight and stiffness



1st Touring

Thorn's Raven Tour, our top touring workhorse



The Hewitt Cheviot SE impresses in its highest spec to date

2nd Touring



For touring on a budget, you can't beat the Revolution Country

3rd Touring

Touring bikes

As you would expect, we're judging these bikes primarily on what tourers are built for: load carrying. This means emphasis is shifted away from the scales to matters of strength, reliability and comfort. Within this criteria, it's worth noting that some bikes are more suited to extended rides over rough roads, while others are better at faster, European tours on quality tarmac. Since many will inevitably be used for general duties much of the year as well, we've considered them unladen too when making our decisions.

This year, our touring bikes have taken all shapes and sizes, sporting a range of wheel and tyre sizes: 20in, 26in and 700C. No doubt 29ers will be next…

As restrictions with luggage on air travel increases, we can see a real growth in separable or folding bikes in the pipeline too – whether they're frames fitted with S&S couplings or purpose built models from the likes of Dahon and Bike Friday.

3rd Revolution Country

With a strong field and several specialists at the top of their game – including the likes of legendary Longstaff – picking our top three bikes was no easy decision. But decisions have to be made and in third place, Revolution's Country picks up our Bronze award. This bike scored an 8 in our bike test (*Cycling Plus* 184), and we don't think there's a better way of discovering the world of touring on a budget. Well thought out and ready to ride, it leaves even more change in your pocket now that the price has dropped too. www.edinburghbicycle.com ☎ 0845 257 0808

2nd Hewitt Cheviot SE

At the other end of the scale, Hewitt's Cheviot SE (*Cycling Plus* 186) is no stranger to the podium and in its highest spec to date, earns a Silver. For the 700C fraternity, it follows a formula that's hard to beat. Solid frame apart, we were particularly impressed with its excellent attention to detail, quality wheel build and, most of all, the spot-on sizing service that Hewitt offers. ☎ 01772 424773, www.hewittcycles.co.uk

> With an overbuilt frame and a whole range of sizes and spec options, the Thorn Raven Tour is an excellent workhorse…

1st Thorn Raven Tour

This year's Gold goes to Thorn's Raven Tour (*Cycling Plus* 184), still the most economical way of investing in a Rohloff geared bike. We've been impressed with this ultra low maintenance, internally geared Germanic hub for touring duties, and highly recommend it to those who expect heavy use out of their bike or tough, expedition conditions. With an overbuilt frame and a whole range of sizes and spec options to choose from, the Tour is an excellent workhorse. It won't just get you to the other side of the world – it'll take you to work and back when you're home again. Slot in a suspension fork and it will even handle mountain biking duties very capably too. ☎ 01278 441521, www.sjscycles.com

TOURING BIKES OF THE YEAR		
1st	Thorn Raven Tour	£1,199
2nd	Hewitt Cheviot SE	£1,940
3rd	Revolution Country	£359.10

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