

Whyte Wessex

The Wessex claims to be the road bike that most British riders need



Words **STU BOWERS**



THE SPEC

Model

Whyte Wessex

Groupset

Shimano Ultegra 6800

Deviations

Shimano ST-685 shift

levers and BR-805

hydraulic disc brakes, FSA

Gossamer Pro chainset

Wheels

Easton AR-21

Finishing kit

Whyte Road compact alloy

handlebar, Whyte alloy

stem, Whyte alloy seatpost,

Whyte saddle

Weight

9.73kg

Price

£2,250

Contact

atb-sales.co.uk


As road bikes go, the Whyte Wessex seems to be a bit of a paradox. Dressing what appears to be a fairly aero carbon frame up with full mudguards, disc brakes and 30mm tyres suggests it's a little confused about its identity. But is it confused, or are we? After all, us road riders are the ones fixated on categorising bikes and unable to make up our minds about what we want to do on them. According to Whyte, the Wessex is simply a bike built to cope with our indecisions about riding.

'It's never been our thing to worry about getting nine blokes around France in July,' says Whyte's chief designer, Ian Alexander. 'We're more about aiming for the middle of the bell-curve, appealing to a big chunk of the UK's riders who don't necessarily want to own more than one bike and therefore need something with more capability – something they can train on, commute on, race on, do a sportive on or whatever else, really. We believe it's probably what most people need. It's not

a gravel bike, it's not a race bike, it's not a sportive bike – it's a road bike. A very capable road bike.'

Home grown

Whyte is a British brand and Alexander was himself an accomplished Elite-level road racer, so he knows well the rigours of putting in the miles at the mercy of UK roads and weather. As such, the Wessex's contemporary design was born from a very pragmatic approach. 'It's a year-round bike with a focus on British conditions and road surfaces,' Alexander says. 'That's its primary design element and why we added features like the weather-sealed seat clamp and designed the frame around mudguards with clearance for 30mm tyres.'

Far from being a slack and sloppy steed, the geometry is classic road – 73° head and seat tube angles, with a 570mm top tube (size 56cm frame). Only the 175mm head tube length adds sufficient generosity to the front end to keep this from being firmly in the race-bred 



SEATPOST CLAMP

This picture sums up the Whyte Wessex well – where practicality such as the weather-sealed seatpost clamp meets modern aero trends in the carbon frame design.

FORK

The way the Wessex's fork tessellates with the down tube is a clever feat of engineering, looking aero and stylish but also neatly concealing the fact it has to be taller and wider to house the mudguards and 30mm tyres.

The frame was equally sturdy when it came to out-of-the-saddle efforts on the flat or attacking a climb

camp. For me, the plus side of the tall head tube was being able to run with the stem totally slammed (no spacers), which not only looked pro but also ensured maximum stiffness for fork and front-end stiffness. The result was a truly solid feel whenever I wrenched on the drops to eke out a few more watts.

The frame was equally sturdy at the rear when it came to out-of-the-saddle efforts on the flat or attacking a steep incline, and further evidence of its solid build quality was the absence of disc rub. Only its overall mass – a tad porky at 9.73kg – tempers the Wessex's agility. I found it took a few more seconds of effort than I'd have

liked to get the bike up and running, but beyond that the speed came easily and the Wessex cruised with a smooth and surefooted disposition. The wide tubeless tyres (the Schwalbe S-One 30mm measured closer to 32mm on the wide Easton AR-21 rims) may have been responsible for sapping some of my energy under acceleration, but they undeniably paid back with a sublime road feel once I was up to speed, with oodles of grip when things got slippery.

Taking the tube

Alexander speaks candidly about how current new road technologies are at the heart of the bike's success: 'It simply doesn't ride the same without the tubeless tyres. We've taken full advantage of the new wheel and tyre dimensions [Easton's AR-21 wheels are 21mm internal width], which means the 30mm tyres sit with an optimal profile for lower rolling resistance but also improved comfort and grip. Disc brakes too were crucial, as you simply couldn't achieve this bike with calliper brakes.'

Out of curiosity I switched the wheels for some lighter Zipp 303 Firecrests, shod with 25mm Schwalbe Pro One tubeless tyres – a lighter and considerably pricier substitute. Although there was a tangible improvement in initial acceleration, any performance benefits beyond that were much less marked, suggesting the Easton wheels and 30mm tyres were a very capable combination to start with. Most significantly it was evident the wider tyres were not heaps slower than a much racier 25mm set-up, but were much more stable, grippier and more comfortable. A 28mm tyre might well hit the sweet spot, if you can't decide between speed or comfort. 🚲





BOTTOM BRACKET

On a frame where every other modern trend has been addressed, Whyte chose to shun the current propensity for pressfit bottom bracket shells, instead choosing a standard threaded version. Bravo.

In adverse weather the Wessex flawlessly dispatched each and every mile

▶ Having the Wessex undoubtedly motivated me to head out a lot more in adverse weather, and it flawlessly dispatched each and every mile. Whether it was a two-hour blast, my club's 100-mile reliability trial, or even a gravel excursion, I always returned feeling positive about the experience. It certainly hammered home the benefits of disc brakes in wintry conditions, where their predictability and performance was as good after six hours as it was the moment I rolled off the driveway.

If I were to suggest a way Whyte could improve the Wessex it would be to look at increasing seatpost flex, as my experiences on bikes such as the Canyon Endurace and Cannondale Synapse have shown that a compliant seatpost can make for a more forgiving mount without compromising performance. It's not that the Wessex was overly harsh – the tubeless tyres take care of most of the vibrations and bumps, especially run at around 80psi – but any additional comfort that's not at the expense of performance seems like a no-brainer, and would also maintain comfort levels irrespective of your tyres choice.

In the context of a pure road bike the Wessex is unique. The carbon chassis is stiff enough to race, so if your ride home from the office is when you plan to do your training and maybe even some Strava bashing, the Whyte definitely has a lot to offer. If you threw on some well-considered component upgrades over time, mainly to shed a bit of weight, and maybe had a second set of racier wheels, it would be simple to convert the Wessex from day-to-day commuter into Sunday best. Whyte has been extremely successful in delivering its one-for-all concept. But let's be honest, one bike is never enough... 🍁



The detail



Whyte's designer, Ian Alexander, tells *Cyclist* that while the flat-mount standard for the rear disc brake calliper was primarily designed around a 140mm rotor size (if you wish to use a 160mm rotor it usually requires an additional calliper spacer underneath) he has purposefully designed the Wessex for direct flat mount and 160mm. He is adamant that the larger rotor size is just a better choice all round, and although it sacrifices a bit of aesthetic form to its smaller, neater brethren, it does at least mean improved performance – especially for heavier riders – and, more importantly, improved heat dissipation.