

WITH RENÉ BUEMAN



# Bright new things

Now in its third year, the annual *Ride On* lights test auditions the freshest front and rear lights to forecast the bright new things of this winter

I feel great safety and comfort in knowing my bicycle lights help drivers see me and play a major role in helping cyclists avoid collision. And it's a pleasant surprise to find that the price of safety can be so small.

So what are the best basic bicycle lights available? How do they perform? We conducted an extensive test on sub-\$100 lights just before the onset of winter 2008, with 15 head lights and 15 tail lights.

As in previous years we focused on compact lights – mostly flashing LEDs – designed to make you visible on your bike. (See *Cyclephernalia* p20 for a review of lights with external batteries to see by.)

Essentially the test involved a panel of judges standing at a uniform distance from the lights, which were mounted on a broomstick held by a bike maintenance stand. The location was Canning St, Carlton – a popular Melbourne bike-commuting route – and the light conditions were post-twilight darkness. The lights were displayed consecutively in their most-visible mode (discussed below) and were rated on a scoresheet by each judge for perceived visibility.

## TEST PROCEDURE

We decided that the flashing mode was the most appropriate test mode as it is the one most used by cyclists, because it appears to be more noticeable than a constant beam. Some lights had up to four flashing modes and one constant beam, so we made a subjective decision about which flashing mode was the brightest and used that mode for the judging.

For the test, the mounted lights were placed in the stand and shown to the judges in a pre-determined order. The judges were first shown the winning light from 2007 in order to set the standard by which they would assess the new batch of lights. This means the winning front and rear lights from last year were not included in the test this year.

Our test program involved: first, judging the lights head on from a distance of 200 metres; then, judging the light at a 45° angle from a distance of 50 metres. The reason for the angled view was to test the effectiveness of a bike light when seen side on, for example when a cyclist crosses the path of a car. This was done for the front lights and then for the rear lights. Each of these two observations was given a rating out of 10. The perceived effectiveness of the flash mode was given a separate assessment and rated out of 10. The winning lights were the lights with the highest average score out of 300 of these subjective assessments.

## MOUNTING LIGHTS TO YOUR BIKE

All of the lights came with an adequate number of rubber spacers so that the lights would fit most normal and round handlebars and seatposts/rear stays (and broomsticks). However, only a couple of headlights (with flexible straps) can be fitted to the latest road-racing handlebars, which have a large flat section close to the headstem.

Most of the front and rear lights can be easily unclipped from their brackets in order

to prevent theft but removal of the rear brackets almost always requires a screwdriver, precluding a quick removal of the mount. In contrast, none of the front lights require screwdrivers to remove the mount, using mostly thumbscrews instead.

The placement of bicycle lights is important. Rear lights need to be placed high on the seatpost so they are not obscured by wheels or mudguards. Front lights also need to be high and central. Placing them below handlebar height means they may be obscured when viewed from an angle.

## WORTH NOTING

As the flash mode for front lights had its own discrete category with a score out of 10, those lights which lack a flash mode were handicapped. The BBB BLS-23 did not rate well in the overall score for this reason. However, despite the lack of a flash assessment, it performed well in the visibility stakes and was a close rival to the three flashing lights that ranked immediately above it.

The single-LED Powerbeam PL2C mini-light was a standout performer again this year. These key-sized lights are excellent as a secondary or emergency light. They require watch batteries rather than AA or AAA batteries.

*René Bueman's history includes being co-founder of the St Kilda Cycling Club, being the first full-time manager of a privately owned Australian pro-cycling team (Drapac Porsche), and publishing his own bike magazine.*



## FRONT LIGHTS

RANK	BRAND	MODEL	SCORE/300	RRP*
1	BBB	BLS 30	188	\$69.95
2	Basta	Polaris BA3	184	\$39.95
3	Powerbeam	MLF 9	176	\$39.95
4	Akslen	AO 40 (extra light-head for HL40)	174	\$35
5	Akslen	HL 40	172	\$40
6	Cateye	EL 450	161	\$115
7	Knog	Toad	159	\$44.95
8	Cateye	EL 320 Power Opticube	158	\$99.95
9	Knog	Gekko	155	\$34.95
10	Fluid	1 watt, alloy	153	\$49.95
11	Tioga	LH5 Superbright	152	\$29.95
12	Adder	RHL 06	129	\$35
13	Basta	Minilight BA-2E FX-5	127	\$29.95
14	Knog	Frog	122	\$19.95
15	BBB	BLS 23	120	\$44.95

## BEST IN TEST

Want the best you can get? These are the lights for you.

### BBB BLS 30 \$69.95\*

With 9 LEDs and great light dispersal, this little number is a star performer.

### S-Sun SSL 310R (Eaglefly) \$39.95\*

Also with 9 LEDs, this light made number-one fans of eight of our 10 judges.



## BACK LIGHTS

RANK	BRAND	MODEL	SCORE/300	RRP*
1	S-Sun	SSL 310R "Eaglefly"	223	\$39.95
2	Tioga	"600" TCL 54	196	\$19.95
3	Powerbeam	PL2C	185	\$25 for front and rear combo
4	BBB	BLS 32	180	\$19.95
5	BBB	BLS 34	179	\$19.95
6	Akslen	TL 60	176	\$40
7	Superbright	SPN 56	175	\$15
8	Planet Bike	Blinky Superflash	173	\$39
8	Cateye	TL LD 610	173	\$59.95
9	Akslen	TL 30	166	\$35
10	Topeak	Redlite UFO	164	\$49.95
11	Cateye	TL LD 1100	160	\$89.95
12	Smart	RL 318R	158	\$29.95
13	Basta	BA 208	157	\$24.95
14	Superbright	TL 360	156	\$15

\* Prices may vary between retail outlets

## BEST VALUE

These lights give you your money's worth when you're comparing performance and price.

### Basta Polaris BA3 \$39.95\*

You can't go wrong with this year's runner up, the new half-watt Polaris, for \$39.95.

### BTioga "600" TCL 54 \$19.95\*

Four out of five of the winning rear lights are \$20 or under. This year's runner up is well-priced at \$19.95.



Adder, S-Sun, Smart and Tioga lights are distributed by BikeCorp 1800 810 155 | Akslen lights are distributed by BikeBox 1800 228 229 | Basta lights are distributed by Zipp Australia (07) 3392 9863 or contact terry@zippoz.com.au for stockists | BBB is distributed by BikeSportz 1800 808 181 | Cateye is distributed by Pacific Brands customer.service@pacbrands.com.au | Fluid is distributed by Anaconda www.anaconda.com.au | Knog is distributed by Apollo Bicycle Company www.apollobikes.com | Planet Bike is distributed by Cycling Connections. Contact Brett Dutton 0416 257 985 | Powerbeam, Superbright and Topeak are distributed by Cassons matthewr@cassons.com.au

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