

Take a seat

We rode a range of saddles for a day each on the 2010 RACV Great Victorian Bike Ride. **Simon Vincett** reports on our findings.

Choosing a saddle is scary – you can do without pain in that part of your anatomy. Then there are the suggestions that the wrong saddle can cause genital damage of one form or another. This is not a decision to be taken lightly.

Fortunately, bike shops understand and will take pains to help you find the saddle for you. Manufacturers offer many models each to cater for all our different body shapes and sizes. Take a few likely models for a test ride before you buy.

We asked a range of manufacturers to take part in this unique test opportunity. Some opted not to be involved.

SADDLE BASICS

An effective saddle provides a stable and sufficiently cushioned platform for your sit bones. Conventionally there is also a nose pointing forward, which may aid you staying centred on the saddle.

The type of bike you ride – more precisely, the position you ride in – determines what saddle you'll find comfortable. Some saddles are broader and softer to suit the upright position of path-riding hybrid bikes where more weight is set on the seat. Other saddles are narrower to suit the aero position of riding a road bike where there is more bend at the waist. In this position a larger proportion of the rider's weight is shared by the hands and also the feet, making seat cushioning less crucial.

WIDTH

Interestingly, despite great difference in overall sizes, the average distance between the sit bones only varies by



Photo: On Track Images

15mm, meaning a large person has sit bones only 15mm further apart than a small person.

CUT-OUTS

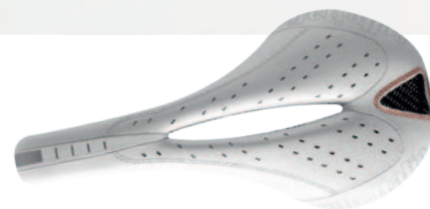
Since the introduction of the cut-out this style has become popular, with some brands reporting these are now 60% of sales. Some means of reducing the material beneath the perineum (the region between the anus and the genitals) aims to minimise the uncomfortable numbness that can result from pressure restricting blood flow. However, some people prefer a flat saddle to provide a large variety of sitting positions.

CUSHIONING

Ample cushioning seems desirable in a saddle but it usually isn't. A greater contact area means more friction and less freedom of movement for the legs. The more upright you sit the more cushioning you'll want. A gel cover can provide helpful cushioning providing it doesn't make the saddle too large.

MATERIALS

More expensive saddles have lighter-weight, hollow rails in titanium. Chromoly steel is a more affordable quality material. Nylon is a superior base to plastic and the lightest saddles will have a carbon fibre component. The surface must be smooth and will sometimes be leather or lycra but most often a synthetic fabric.



SELLE ITALIA FLITE GEL FLOW \$259.95

- One size: 239 grams, 130W x 285L
- Unisex road and mountain bike saddle
- Leather surface, gel cushioning, hollow titanium rails, nylon and carbon fibre composite base
- This is a popular model in Australia for this brand
- Test comments: "Firm but very comfortable, particularly when riding in an aero position. Reasonable value for the comfort it provides."

More info www.selleitalia.com
For retailers contact Cassons (02) 9684 1210 enquiries@cassons.com.au

Thanks to the testers Dietmar Dinges, Fran Bartholemew, Russell Edwards and Tony Penz who put their bums on the line for this test.

Thanks also to the saddle brands for supplying one model from their range to give a sense of what they offer. Customers are encouraged to explore the whole range to find the best saddle for their comfort.

Another saddle to consider is the ISM Adamo Road noseless, which was reviewed favourably in the Dec 2010 – Jan 2011 issue of Ride On.



SERFAS CARMA \$104.95

- One size: 303 grams, 155W x 270L
- Serfas' top women's performance saddle for road and mountain biking
- Synthetic surface, gel cushioning, hollow chromoly rails, nylon base
- Abrasion-resistant edge at all extremities
- 90-day return period
- Test comments: "Seemed narrow but in fact shape and cushioning are good. Worth the money."

More info www.serfas.com
For retailers www.velovita.net.au



CHARGE SPOON \$59.95

- One size: 287 grams, 145W x 280L
- Unisex utility commuting, touring and mountain biking saddle
- Synthetic surface, foam cushioning, hollow chromoly rails, nylon base
- Test comments: "Excellent value for money. Firm but fine cushioning. Shape is more comfortable when sitting more upright rather than an aero road bike position."

More info www.chargebikes.com
For retailers www.monzabicycle.com.au



ALLAY RACING 1.1 \$169.95

- Two sizes: medium and large
- Medium size: 272 grams, 142W x 292L
- Unisex road bike saddle
- Synthetic surface, foam and air chamber cushioning, hollow titanium rails, nylon base
- Pump secured to seat post inflates AirSpan chamber mid-way along saddle. Air chamber is also removeable.
- Test comments: "Complicated. Too soft when not inflated; tricky to settle on correct pressure. Pump mounted on seat post catches on knicks."

For more www.allaysaddles.com
For retailers contact Cassons (02) 9684 1210 enquiries@cassons.com.au



ERGO THE SEAT ULTIMATE \$89.95 + \$12 POSTAGE

- One size: 400 grams, 230W x 150L
- Unisex utility commuting and touring saddle
- Lycra surface, gel cushioning, nylon base, noseless
- Test comments: "I'm getting to an age when you have to think about options for riding after a prostate operation. At first it felt odd but it's the ideal way to take all the pressure away from the scrotum region. Being a gel seat it is very comfortable. I personally am converted."

For more and to buy www.ergotheseat.com.au



BROOKS B17 IMPERIAL \$180

- Mens' and ladies' versions
- Mens: 550 grams, 175W x 285L
- Traditional leather touring saddle
- Handmade in England
- Leather surface, no cushioning, chromed steel rails, no base
- Imperial range with "registered cutting" first found in the Brooks 1890 catalogue, described as "a sure preventive to all perineal pressure".
- Test comments: "Hard but good shape. Cut out is effective but not as much as modern designs, even with anticipating softening. I'm concerned about it getting wet and sagging. A bit heavy."

For more www.brooksengland.com
For retailers www.solasport.com.au



SPORTOURER ZOO GEL FLOW \$69.95

- One size: 312 grams, 160W x 280L
- Economical women's recreational saddle by Selle Italia
- Synthetic surface, gel cushioning, alloy rails, nylon base
- Test comments: "Bulky. The cushioning is soft but ends up feeling hard."

More info www.sportourer.com
For retailers contact Cassons (02) 9684 1210 enquiries@cassons.com.au



SELLE SMP DYNAMIC 2011 \$299

- One size: 279 grams, 140W x 275L
- Unisex road bike saddle
- Leather surface, foamed elastomer cushioning, stainless steel rails, nylon and carbon fibre composite base
- Handmade in Italy
- Test comments: "Too much cut-out to provide enough material for support. Too much weight left on sit bones on quite firm cushioning."

For more and for retailers www.smpselle.com



THRONE OLD BOY \$160

- One size: 219 grams, 132W x 292L
- Unisex road bike throne
- Six designs to dress up your machine
- Conceived and tested in Melbourne as a genuine club racing contender
- Synthetic surface, foam cushioning, hollow titanium rails, nylon and carbon fibre composite base
- Test comments: "Very flat. Very firm cushioning. More comfortable in an aero road bike position."

For more and retailers www.bikethrones.com

