

Rivet Independence Saddle

Model tested: Independence, titanium rails
 Weight: 385 g
 Tested on: Specialized Diverge, Grand Bois Urban Bike
 Price: \$ 295
 Made in Taiwan
 Availability: www.rivetcycleworks.com

Traditional leather saddles have made a remarkable comeback in recent years. I still recall the turn of the 21st century, when Brooks was the only surviving maker of these saddles. When Sturmey-Archer, Brooks' parent company at the time, went bankrupt, I bought a good supply of Brooks saddles, fearing that I might not be able to get more.

Fast forward fifteen years, and many companies are offering traditional leather saddles again. Rivet Cycle Works sells leather saddles in three widths and in a variety of colors. The company is owned by Debra Banks, an avid randonneuse, who has ample opportunity to test her own prod-

ucts. She sent us the medium-width (160 mm) Independence model with titanium rails.

When the saddle arrived, I was impressed with its craftsmanship. The leather was smooth and of even thickness. The plastic underframe reminded me of Berthoud saddles, but it's simpler and, in my eyes, more elegant. The rivets have the company's logo cast into them. They are machine-set and don't display the hand-crafted beauty of Brooks' hand-set copper rivets.

The minimalist leather upper wraps around the underside of the saddle, where the two halves are riveted together. This detail is reminiscent of classic Brooks Swallow saddles. A long cut-out in the top of the saddle is intended to relieve pressure in the rider's pubic area. The saddle also is available as the "Allroad" model without the cutout.

On *Bicycle Quarterly's* precision laboratory scale, the Rivet Independence weighed 385 g. While that is 25 g more than Rivet's claimed weight, it still is very light. For purposes of comparison, a Brooks Professional with titanium rails weighs 422 g.

I first installed the saddle on my Urban Bike to break it in. I noticed that the rails are very long, which may allow riders with poorly fitting bikes to get a proper saddle position. My bike fits fine, so the seatpost's clamp ended up with room in both directions on the flat portions of the rails. I found the slot in the top very handy to adjust the bolts of my old Campagnolo seatpost, since I could reach them from above. (Most riders probably use modern seatposts that adjust from the side.)

The Rivet is about 20 mm taller than the Berthoud saddle that was on the bike before. No problem, I lowered





Top: Low profile exposes much of the seatpost head.

Bottom: Toward the end of this test, the saddle had stretched significantly. Re-tensioning the saddle for the second time straightened the top again.



the seatpost accordingly. Like the old Brooks Swallow, the Rivet leaves much of the seatpost exposed, resulting in a racy "British" look.

I prefer traditional leather saddles not because of their aesthetics, but because of their ride comfort. Over time, the leather conforms to my anatomy, which eliminates the pressure points I experience on plastic saddles. The flip side is that traditional leather saddles can be somewhat uncomfortable until they are broken in.

The Rivet surprised me, because it felt comfortable almost from the get-go. Perhaps it helped that I was riding it on short commutes at first, where I didn't spend enough time on the bike to develop true discomfort.

When I encountered the first rain with the Rivet, I noticed that the leather had not been treated and was not water repellent. According to Rivet's web site, this is particular to the "chestnut" color, which uses vegetable-based tanning agents. I liberally treated the saddle with Oberauf's Leather Preservative, and it has resisted the elements fine ever since. As an added bonus, the saddle has acquired a beautiful reddish tint.

Once I was confident in the comfort of the Rivet, I moved it to the Specialized Diverge test bike (see p. 32). The "racy" appearance nicely complemented the superlight Diverge, where a larger leather saddle might have looked slightly incongruous.

The Rivet saddle was comfortable for the first day of my two-day rides. On the second day, I started to feel slight discomfort from rubbing on the rear of the saddle. Back home, I noticed that the saddle's leather had stretched. The saddle looked like it had been ridden more than the 1000 km (650 miles) that I had logged on the Rivet. I re-tensioned the saddle twice, which surprised me considering the relatively low mileage. Each time, the top straightened out. I wonder whether the cutout is responsible for the stretching, since it removes much of the top that stiffens the saddle's shape. Debra Banks from Rivet confirmed that Rivet saddles with cutouts do stretch, but that they eventually settle down and no longer need tightening.

The sagging was uniform, so it does not appear to be a problem of the leather itself. Since I don't suffer from pubic area discomfort when riding, I would opt for the "Allroad" version of the Independence saddle, without the cutout, which might maintain its shape better.

Rivet saddles provide great alternatives to the more common leather saddles. If our test saddle does not stretch much further, it may be one of the best leather saddles available today. —JH

This article was reviewed by Debra Banks (Rivet). Disclosure: Rivet advertises in *Bicycle Quarterly*.