

A VERSATILE PACKAGE

When you buy this women's bike, you're buying into a community as well

ROAD RIDERS often look to the pros for insights into trends and technology. Disc brakes, by comparison, benefit regular riders more than hardened competition types. As many racers eagerly await a rule change allowing discs in competitions, they're likely to be looking at some of the recreational bikes on offer with envy of their own.

Mechanical disc brakes are a new and welcome addition to the alloy Liv Avail Disc 1. In comparison to rim brakes, they offer better performance in the wet and more modulation without locking up the wheels in the dry. A plus for women is that they require

less hand strength for a controlled and reliable braking feel.

Like many other features of this bike, the discs point to rider goals and experiences that have little to do with chasing start guns and finish lines, at least in the short term. The alloy Avail won't break the bank if you choose to upgrade later, the geometry and spec is designed to enhance control, and options for wider tyres and rack mounting points make it equally well suited to commuting or light touring.

The 22-speed Shimano 105 groupset is snappy and classy. It boasts a wide gear range with a compact crankset on the front and a roomy 11-32t cassette at the back.



Dished rims, an eye-catching paint job and sophisticated aluminium forging techniques give this Liv an appearance easily mistaken for a more expensive carbon model, or cyclocross bike.

A second set of levers allow riders to pull on the brakes from the more familiar horizontal area of the bars. These are something you won't find on the comparative men's model, the Giant Defy. This points to Giant's sister company's careful user experience analysis. Many women new to road cycling report that reaching the brakes on the hoods can disrupt confidence rather than adding to it.

The frame geometry, too, draws on research into the body shapes, riding styles and experiential goals of the riders likely to choose this bike. This women's endurance





PRICE

\$1799

WEIGHT

9.1kg (Small)

model, with its tall-ish head tube and relaxed frame angles, encourages comfort and stability.

Out on the road, the ride position and handling felt comfortable and instinctual from the get-go. Some endurance designs feel light or waxy at the front. This one felt well balanced; one aspect of the bike has not been sacrificed to achieve performance in another. Whether climbing, descending or cruising along on the flats, the Avail achieves its goals with nice, even handling across the board.

It had a slightly heavier ride feel than expected, largely due to extra weight in the wheels. The D-shape seat post and carbon bladed fork absorb some vibration from the road, although the Avail didn't feel as compliant as designs that use additional materials in the fork and seatstays. Given the excellent handling and well thought out women's component selection, riders craving a more spritely, absorbent ride will find it easier to justify the jump to a carbon model.

Another important feature of

this bike is one that has nothing to do with spec or performance. Free, regular Liv rides now take place in most Australian capital cities and an increasing number of regional cities. These provide an instant sense of community, which makes the world of difference to someone getting into the sport. Like the disc brakes, the package as a whole provides a more versatile and encouraging ride experience than any race steed, and that's precisely what makes it so compelling.

– Kath Bicknell

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN WALTON