

## BIKE REVIEW

# OPEN U.P. on the Unbeaten Path

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**OPEN is not your typical bike brand. Founded by the former CEOs of BMC and Cervelo, their business model is 'working hard to stay small' with a focus on designing the bikes they'd want to ride themselves.**

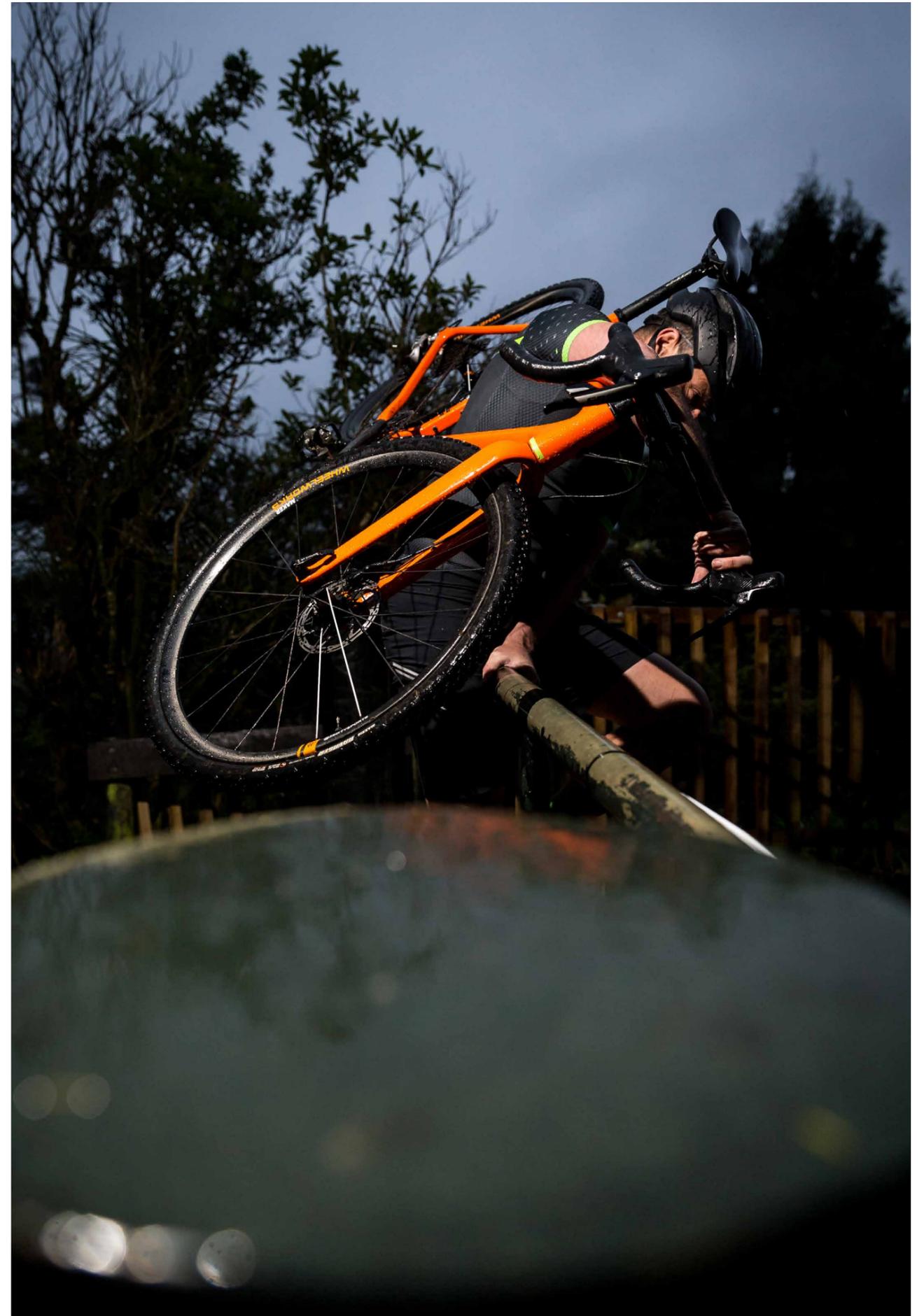
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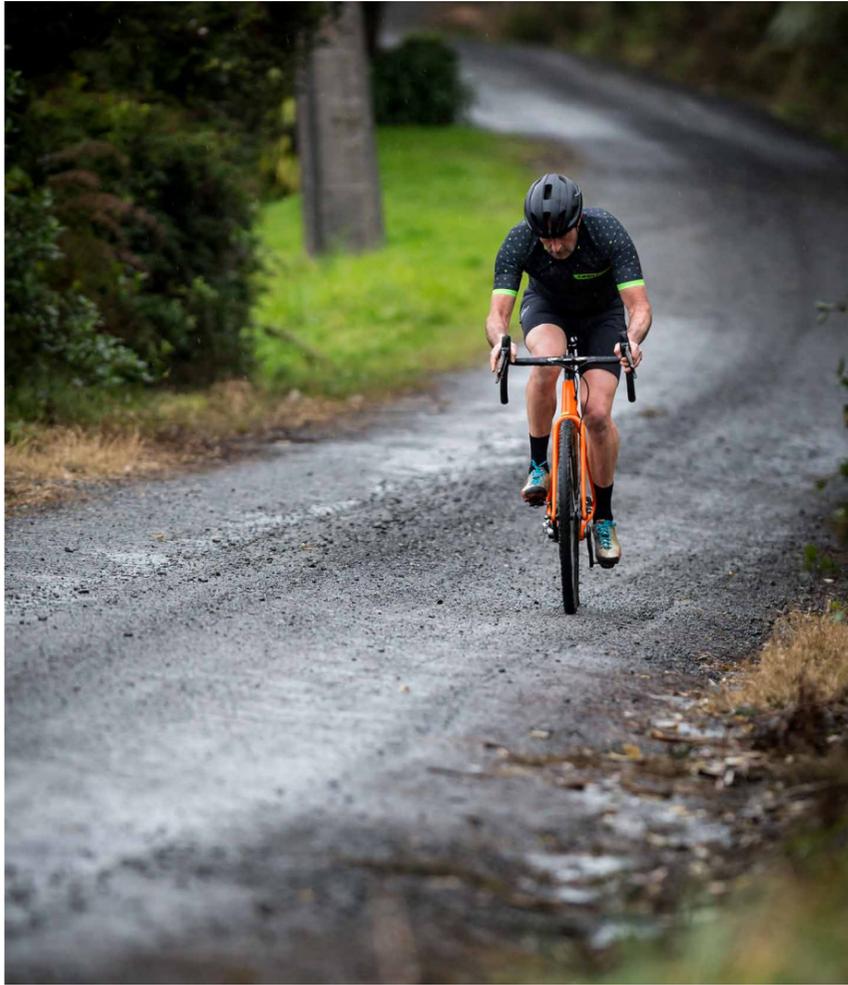
We had the U.P. (Unbeaten Path) on test. Serving as a road, gravel or mountain bike, depending on wheel selection, the U.P. has clearance for 650b MTB tyres, or the widest set of road or gravel wheels your heart could ever desire. Better yet, it's built to work equally well with all of them.

### Frame

The U.P. is available in two variants; the U.P. tested here (weighing 1100g in size Medium and featuring a 3T Luteus carbon fork), or the U.P.P.E.R which gets a high modulus carbon upgrade (weighing 880g and comes specced with OPEN's own carbon fork).

Fully internal cable routing keeps everyone happy with reduced cable wear for cyclocross duties and increased aerodynamics for peloton punishing. A 386Evo bottom bracket allows fitment of most brands of cranks, including some of the more boutique ones, while through axles front and rear keep any unwanted flex at bay. Disc brakes are the stoppers of choice with the frame accommodating 160mm rotors.





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As benefits such a bike, the beauty is in the details. Wire thin seat stays keep the bike somewhat compliant, while offset chain stays counteract this to keep pedalling extra stiff and provide clearance for wide wheels.

But those features are to be expected in a modern performance bike. It's the other details that impress me. The U.P. has four different points on the frame to mount water bottles, bags or anything else that catches your fancy so you don't need to resort to a backpack.

The seat tube has a little port allowing you to see if you have the minimum insertion of seat post in the frame even if you're using a heavily cut down post. The geometry is built around a zero-setback seat post, because they're lighter than other alternatives. These might seem like minor details, but it's the little things that show thought has gone into every aspect of a bike's design and elevates it above the rest.

The U.P.'s geometry suits its do-it-all attitude. 420mm chain stays are responsive without getting too short to sacrifice stability off-road, while my size medium has a total wheelbase of 1008mm. This is about on par with most endurance-oriented road bikes and helps aid stability when things get a little rougher.

Reach is 376mm which is on par for a gravel bike. Head angle is size specific, measuring up at 71 degrees for my medium test bike. This is on the steeper end for mountain bike usage, but on the slacker side for road and cyclocross. As an intermediary between the different styles it's a good choice.

Overall, this a suitably modern bike that will have the perfectionists squealing with delight.

### Build

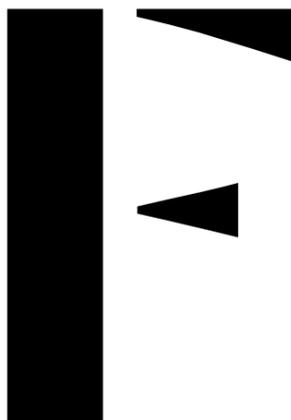
OPEN don't offer out-of-the-box builds; you've got to do it yourself. That said, for the sake of this test we had a build designed to make the most of the 'one bike to do it all' approach.

SRAM took care of drivetrain duties with a mixture of Rival and Force group components. While a familiar setup from the mountain biking side of things, 1x11 on the road was a novel experience.

An 11-36t cassette for road usage and 10-42t for off-road keeps the range at acceptable levels. I alternated between a 46t and 44t Oval chainring up front during this test and found them to be sufficient, getting me up some big climbs and spinning me out at around 50kph.

I love hydraulic disc brakes, and SRAM's take on them worked flawlessly during this test. The first generation of SRAM road discs had some teething issues, especially at low temperatures, but the current iteration performed exactly how I'd want them to.

I was spoiled for choice with wheels. Enve's AR Discs oversaw road duties shod with wide but fast Schwalbe S-One tubeless tyres in a 30c width. A set of Wheelworks Maker AR Carbon wheels support 40c tyres with sweet, puncture free tubeless performance for gravel and off-road use. Remember, should you so wish, a set of 650b MTB wheels could also be crammed in there for even more traction and cushioning (although I didn't get the chance to try during this test). Safe to say, I was the limiting factor on this bike, not the wheels.



**finishing kit** was a mixture of Zipp and Fabric, all good quality stuff I've had positive experiences with before. I swapped the 120mm stem for a 70mm model to suit my height a bit better and adjust the handling closer to that of a mountain bike for off-road use. After that I set the seat height to match my regular bike and went to find out what the U.P. was capable of.

### The Ride

The massive clearance at the fork and single front chainring may try to trick you into thinking otherwise, but the U.P. can hold its own on the tarmac.

It makes for a stable platform when mashing away on the pedals without being overly harsh; a trait born of necessity when grinding your way along a gravel gradient simply for maintaining traction, let alone to save your rear. Given the quality of the chip seal roads on my test loops this was more than welcome. Smooth doesn't have to mean slow

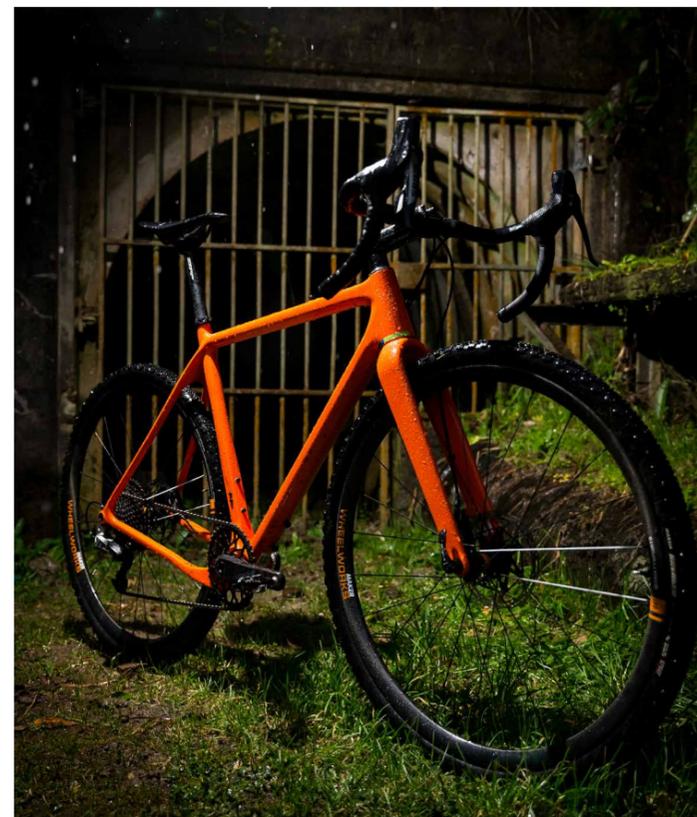
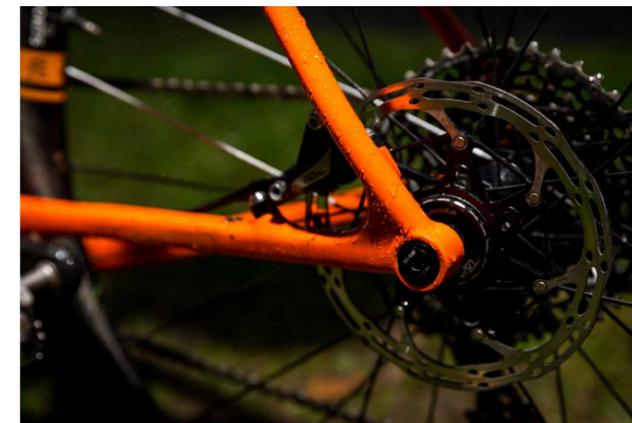
though; on the U.P. I matched my PB on one of the local hill sprints that I use as a benchmark for test bikes... at the end of a ride. The lessons learnt from BMC and Cervelo were evident in designing the U.P.

But OPEN sell the U.P. as a 'GravelPlus' bike, and it's off-road that the fun really begins. The great thing about riding a bike like this is it's a literal head turner; the U.P. certainly drew a lot of looks with narrow tyres (by MTB standards) and drop bars. But there's no greater test for a do-it-all bike than doing it all, so to the trails we went.

It takes a change in wheels and riding style to take a bike like this off-road. You need to think about hand placement, pumping the bike through dips and bumps, hopping the wheels over roots, and getting a grip when mud tries to suggest otherwise.

Without suspension, you don't have the margin of error that a modern mountain bike offers, and drop bars mean you can't spread your arms as far as a set of risers would allow

► The U.P. is the bike equivalent of the world's most expensive Swiss Army knife



for stability during descending. But you know what? Once the cyclocross wheels were fitted, riding the U.P. down a technical trail was some of the most fun I've ever had on a bike. Period.

There's something exciting about riding right on the edge of what you feel should be possible for two hours straight, but the U.P. facilitates this with ease. Although my terrified screams as I shot through a rooted section may suggest otherwise, the U.P. was never truly out of its depth.

It's telling when your legs are only the second most tired part of you after a ride, behind the muscles in charge of supporting your stupid looking grin for hours on end.

Slower than a mountain bike? Debatable - as some of my riding friends were surprised to find.

Tubeless tyres kept all punctures at bay, the single chainring and clutch derailleur stopped dropped chains from ruining my day, and hydraulic disc brakes were a welcome and arguably necessary addition to facilitate my forest based honing. I have a feeling that with proper MTB wheels fitted the U.P.

would become even more capable. Exciting.

OPEN have nailed the geometry for this bike and should be commended for that.

It's worth mentioning that while I love SRAM's 1x drivetrains for MTB, on road I still require a bit more convincing. While the range is sufficient, the jumps between each gear are larger than most riders will be used to. This isn't a problem off-road or when riding alone, but when trying to maintain cadence in a bunch it could feel a bit out of place, always trying to find 'the right gear'. It also bothers me that SRAM use the same left hand hood for 1x and 2x levers, as there's a gap on the underside where the shift lever would once have lived - which is rather inconveniently right where my fingers want to grip while I'm riding. It feels a bit weird, like walking down stairs where the steps are at irregular intervals.

### The verdict

The U.P. is the bike equivalent of the world's most expensive Swiss Army knife. It's loaded up with gadgets and tools to get you through just about anything you can think

of, and while you might not use everything available it's nice to know they're all there.

I don't think we'll see bikes like this at Le Tour just yet, but I believe the U.P. offers a glimpse into the future of what consumer road bikes could become; ultra-versatile machines that can balance speed and light weight with the ability to take any beating handed out to them.

Simpler drivetrains, more powerful brakes, higher volume tyres galore - some traditionalists may scoff, but if this is where the future is headed I'm all for it.

If you appreciate the finer things in life and think you might like to own a glimpse of the future, then the U.P. is the bike for you. Treat yourself to a few sets of wheels for different types of riding, and see the new horizons this bike takes you to.

Ride anywhere, and ride fast; that's OPEN's promise, and they deliver.

RRP \$4850  
opencycle.com