

FITNESS



GARE HERNANDEZ/Associated Press

GEAR

Under every great cyclist . . .

It's no surprise that those pointy little bike saddles with the long noses can cause problems for many men and women: Their shapes seem designed to impale you. But the obvious solution — changing the shape — isn't a simple, one-size-fits-all proposition. Casual riders, whose bikes place them in an upright or laid-back position, can get instant relief with a wide, nose-less saddle that spreads the load, somewhat like conventional chairs. But performance riders — who suffer the most seat-related problems — can't use wide seats because they dig into the upper hamstrings on the down-stroke and don't provide enough support in the lean-forward racing position. For them, manufacturers offer racing seats with strategic holes and wedges, with the more radical and effective designs offering larger, more intricate sculpting and soft-tissue-friendly noses.

—ROY M. WALLACK



Comfort for casual riders

Spiderflex: 10-inch wide noseless saddle made of two pads separated by a 1.25-inch gap. Includes a built-in suspension gasket.
Likes: Very comfortable and balanced. The wide seat cradles your rear, and the airy gap eliminates genital pressure. Great for riding in the upright comfort-bike position.
Dislikes: Like other noseless saddles, not practical or comfortable for performance road- or mountain bike-riding.
Price: \$89.99. (204) 745-2922; www.spiderflex.com.



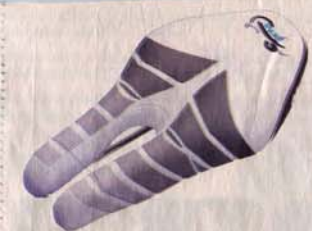
Plushy seat, awkward positioning

EasySeat II: Flat 9-by-6-inch seat for casual riders made of two pads that flex independently.
Likes: Very comfortable. The pads independently pivot down about an inch with each leg push-down. Longer, narrower Pro Hub 2 model (\$89.95), designed for serious riders, has similar characteristics.
Dislikes: The gap between the seat pads is so small (1/4 inch) that your soft tissues still feel some pressure — clearly more than the Spiderflex, ISM and the MoonSaddle. Also, the seat tends to sit you too far forward because its rails are positioned too far back.
Price: \$59.95. (800) 582-8088; www.hobsonseats.com.



The pressure is definitely off

ISM Touring: A 7 1/2-inch wide, toilet-seat shaped saddle for casual riders with a large U-shaped cut-out in the front.
Likes: No private-part pressure at all. Tapered front end does not dig into the hamstrings as much as other casual-oriented saddles when you lean forward. Although not a plush comfort, it has an active feel that high-energy types might like.
Dislikes: Less initial comfort than the other casual saddles. Takes a while for your sit bones and gluteals to find a "sweet spot."
Price: \$49.95. (813) 293-6974; www.ismseat.com.



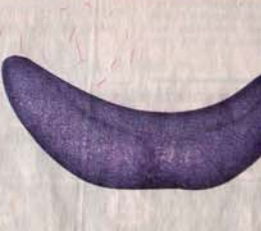
After breaking in, a sweet ride

ISM Adamo Road Saddle: High-performance saddle, for triathletes and bike racers, with a short nose (1.5 inches less than a standard saddle) bisected by a 4-inch long, inch-wide slit.
Likes: Noticeable decrease in soft-tissue pressure versus a standard saddle. After my ride on the Adamo, I switched back to my normal seat, which I had thought was very comfy, and felt as if I were riding on a steel pipe. The manufacturer's claims that laboratory tests showed no blood flow loss in the leaned-over "aero" position seem credible. This clearly is safer in terms of blood flow than a normal saddle. Good-looking too.
Dislikes: Takes a while (30 minutes for me, possibly several days for others) to get used to your inner thighs rubbing against the 2.5-inch wide nose (about an inch over a standard saddle). Also, your "sit bones" ache a bit initially, having more pressure on them.
Price: \$119.95. (813) 293-6974; www.ismseat.com.



Brilliant design comes at a price

Selle SMP Strike Pro Racing Saddle: Intricately sculpted seat for serious riders with a gaping 7-inch hole and full-length center cavity extending from tail to down-sloping beak.
Likes: With the huge hole (you can fit your hand half-way into it) and the 1-inch droop of the tip, there is no discernible squashing of the soft tissue between your legs. It is more comfortable than the Adamo due to its normal-sized length (10 1/4 inches) and narrow, inner-thigh-friendly width (1 1/4 inches at the tip). In fact, after I got used to feeling the edges of the crevasse against my sit bones, I'd say this is the most comfortable saddle I've ever used. (Note: Several same-priced heavier and lighter SMP models are geared toward less- and more-serious racers.) Striking looks.
Dislikes: You could buy two Adamos at this price.
Price: \$239. (805) 385-3179; www.albabcic.com.



Finally, a simple solution

MoonSaddle: Minimalist 11-inch-wide saddle for casual riders that is shaped like a half moon.
Likes: Very efficient pedaling. Your tush perches solidly on the rim. The crescent shape, curving rearward, stays out of the way of your legs on the push-down; among the noseless seats, only the ISM toilet-seat does this as well. Oddly sleek looks.
Dislikes: Too-small gap between the rails and the seat bottom makes it difficult to attach a seat post.
Price: \$86. (406) 859-1963; www.moonsaddle.com.

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