

REVIEW

H A R D W A R E ♦ S O F T W A R E



Move Over, Spandex

And make way for a variety of threads appealing to cyclists of every tread **By Dan Wildhirt**

TIME WAS, TIGHT-FITTING CYCLING clothes were limited to the actual act of cycling—you didn't dare wear them anywhere after a ride. No longer. Now suiting up for a spin isn't a toss-up between black spandex shorts and...black spandex shorts. The nineties mountain-bike boom finally liberated cycling fashion, giving us a multitude of choices in fabric, style, and function.

Stretchy synthetic shorts are still with us, but they now share rack space with designs made of wool and cotton. Sometimes

they're not even black. They can be sewn into loose-fitting surf trunks or a skirt, adding a certain sense of street style without sacrificing functionality. Indeed, modern shorts offer the practicality of pockets, the versatility of cinch straps, and the convenience of machine-washable chamois; easy-care synthetics like Ultrasuede and CoolMax have replaced fussy natural pads. These new fashions are more comfortable too, especially for women, who no longer need settle for unisex (read men's) shorts.

Jerseys have also seen improvements, such as fabrics with refined wicking ability, looser-fitting silhouettes, and zippered pockets for stowing valuables.

The result is that these days, you can assemble a cycling wardrobe broad enough to accommodate your riding style on any given occasion, whether you're headed for back-country canyons or an open-air flea market. So whatever your tastes, you're sure to find several suitable ensembles in the following collection of summer bike wear.

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**Nike jersey, Dirt Designs shorts,
Nautica vest**



Louis Garneau jersey, Nema trunks



**Sugoi jersey, Bellwether shorts,
Koulius Zaard bra**

SHORTS

There's probably not a better model for conventional bike shorts than **Bellwether's 8-Panel Women's Short** (\$45): The fabric's Supplex-Lycra blend provides elasticity and durability, the eight-panel (rather than six-) construction prevents the legs from sagging, and the soft Microsuede chamois is lined with CoolMax, the softest and airiest of polyesters. Shorts need to match your shape as well, which according to a source close to the author, these do pretty well, with fuller hips and a slimmer waist.

Mountain biking—specifically, crashing your mountain bike—can shred ordinary spandex. Which is why **Dirt Designs** places swatches of Spandura II, a combination of stretchy Lycra and abrasion-resistant Cordura, at the rear and sides of its **CORE 8 Short** (\$70). The Core 8 is also comfortable, thanks to a unique, molded, synthetic chamois that places no irritating seams between you and the saddle.

If I had to choose one pair of shorts for all my riding—whether to Kinko's or on singletrack—it would be **InMotion's Rock Short** (\$65). The synthetic chamois is lined with

CoolMax and has InMotion's proprietary HFS liquid-bladder padding, which provides an extra modicum of cush. Cavernous cargo pockets stay shut with hook-and-loop flaps, while cinch straps keep the legs from scooping air when you're zooming downhill. There's even a zippered fly—a novelty for any bike shorts.

Nema's Crown Jewel shorts (\$75) meld surfer style with bona fide bikeworthiness. Wear the stylishly stitched trunks to Waimea Bay or pedal up into the overlooking hills—a feat made more pleasant by a liner not unlike conventional spandex bike shorts, complete with an Ultrasuede chamois. Nema's real trick, though, is a mesh gaiter at the leg openings that joins inner and outer shorts, preventing the shell from billowing in the breeze.

If you're sick of your tan telling folks that you're a cyclist well before you do, consider **Pearl Izumi's** women's **Journey Short** (\$40), with its cropped, five-inch inseam. It combines cotton and polyester for a soft texture and easy care, and has a synthetic chamois.

Before Lycra, we had sheep, and cyclists were perfectly happy in their breathable,

wicking wool shorts. They fell out of fashion in the late seventies, but **Swobo's Merino Wool Deluxe 6-Panel Short** (\$75; men's and women's styles) updates this classic, blending in just enough Lycra to keep them from drooping. Although the smooth knit is said to be machine washable, we suggest laundering by hand. Either way, the merino wool won't get gamy like synthetics can.

The **Skort** from **Zoic** (\$60) combines demure looks with bike-friendly function. What appears to be a midlength-length skirt is in fact a flap that buttons across the front of brushed cotton twill shorts, which in turn have a CoolMax liner and Microsuede chamois. You'll also appreciate the gusseted, stretchy crotch that won't bind when you're pedaling. Who needs a girl's bike?

JERSEYS

Cotton, once the bane of outdoor activity for its reputation of staying damp, has returned to the mainstream, thanks to casual designs such as **Cannondale's Basic Essential Herringbone Jersey** (\$35). Combining cotton and polyester in a handsome weave, it breathes well and dries in good time—quickly enough, at least, to manage the sweat you've worked up en route to the local coffee lounge.

The **Dirt Designs New Vision Top** (\$40) proves that a woman's form and bikewear's function are not incompatible. A scoop neck, cropped sleeves, and loose-fitting silhouette add up to casual appeal. As for active utility, the cotton-CoolMax piqué-knit keeps you cool and dry, while a zippered rear pocket holds your valuables.

Koulius Zaard's Competition

EXTRAS ROUNDING OUT THE TWO-WHEELED WARDROBE

A FEW ACCESSORIES SELECTED IN THE NAME OF COMFORT CAN MAKE CYCLING MUCH MORE pleasant. Rarely do I ride without **Pearl Izumi's Sleeveless Base Layer** (\$25), a perforated polyester tank top with phenomenal wicking ability. To protect your hands, consider **Louis Garneau's Ergofit Route** gloves (\$25), with gel cells that disperse road and trail shock. For your feet, nothing pampers like **Smartwool's** plush merino socks (\$12.50). **Koulius Zaard's KZ Sports Bra** (\$29) features mesh straps and a breathable blend of cotton, polyester, and spandex for comfortable support on even the hottest days. And while KZ specializes in women's wear, longhaired folks of both genders will appreciate the **Ponyband** (\$12), an absorbent headband with a strategically placed hole to keep one's ponytail in check. —D.W.



LIDS THAT FILL THE BILL

EACH YEAR, HELMETS GET SAFER, LIGHTER, and more comfortable. This makes choosing one mostly a matter of style, and the current point of decision is visor or visorless. Although visored helmets are often thought to be strictly for trail use, a duckbilled lid—albeit slightly heavier—can handily do double duty, since most visors detach easily. Herewith, three helmets that get our top billing.



Bell's 10.3-ounce **Image Pro** has been around awhile, gaining refinements like a vented visor while losing something else: price. It's now \$60, down from \$80. As with most worthy hard hats, a plastic-elastic band hugs the occipital bone, ensuring your helmet stays put. Most welcome, however, is an easily manipulated system of straps and buckles that makes adjusting your helmet a breeze.



Specialized's 10.4-ounce **Air Banshee** (\$100) offers extended protection for the base of your skull, but without looking too motherly. (Racy design and graphics solve that.) Cleverly constructed vents channel wind directly onto your forehead and actually accelerate the air. As for the bill, Specialized employs hook-and-loop tabs to attach it, rather than temperamental plastic pegs.



Though its most popular color resembles that of sharp cheddar, Giro's 11-ounce **Exodus RL** (\$150) is more akin to Swiss cheese, with no fewer than 21 vents to cool your cranium. A bonded outer shell covers the entire foam liner, making it a skosh heavy for exclusive road use, but the protective coating ensures that this good-looking lid will stay that way. —D.W.



Wild Woolies jersey, Swobe shorts

Sleek T-Back (\$44) provides women with a flattering fit as well as comfort. Cut from a snazzy, ribbed polyester-Lycra fabric, it features an integral CoolMax bra with a velour-faced elastic band. A single rear pocket easily accommodates your sunscreen—you'll need it wearing this tank.

Louis Garneau's Retro Waffle jersey (\$51) is equally hip to a cruise along the boardwalk or an off-road jaunt. The loose-fitting all-poly jersey, a fashionable redux of your old long Johns, employs a drawstring at the waist to keep it from flapping and features a roomy, zippered rear pocket.

The wispy **Nike MTB Short-Sleeve Jersey** (\$54) uses Nike's own DRI-F.I.T. microfiber polyester to manage moisture and features dirtworthy details. An oversize chest-zipper ring makes it easy to grasp when hurtling down a creekbed; the hemline, cropped in front, prevents annoying bunching when you're hunched over the handlebar; and a zippered minipocket in back (in addition to two open pockets) keeps your keys from ejecting.

The subtly sassy **Sugoi Women's Go-Go Jersey** (\$50) has a relaxed shape, but it won't sag if you load the three rear pockets with a trailside picnic—the medium-weight Coretech polyester stretches horizontally



Koulius Zaard tank, Pearl Izumi shorts


but not vertically. You'll also appreciate the wide elastic hem that doesn't bind.

Disciples of Fausto Coppi and other European racing greats will coo over the **Wild Woolies Classic** (\$60), which faithfully emulates the cycling jersey circa 1930—right down to the soft merino wool. Featuring buttons fashioned after period Liberty-head dimes—no newfangled zippers here—and throwback chest pockets, the Classic does make one concession to modernity: A scabbard in back secures a minipump.

OUTERWEAR

The ultimate in versatility is **Bouré's Wool Full Zip Vest** (\$90). Three rear pockets and wool's natural wicking ability mean you can wear it alone as a sleeveless jersey in warm weather or with a long-sleeved jersey as a toasty insulating layer for foggy mornings on the coast. Bouré thoughtfully prewashes each one to inhibit shrinkage.

Nautica's Bike Vest (\$95) is an essential for alpine riding: Wear it half-open on a long, sweaty climb, then zip it up to protect your chest from chilling wind on the way down. A well-designed large-tooth zipper makes it easy to work with one hand. Bonus: The polyester fabric is treated with a reflective coating that's visible several New York City blocks away.

Patagonia's trim-fitting Velocity Shell (\$98; men's and women's styles) uses an Activent-like membrane that breathes easily and repels moderate rain, making it an ideal stow-away for riding in iffy weather. Best of all, weighing in at a compact seven ounces, it won't hog all the room in your lumbar pack—or even your jersey pocket. 

Dan Wildhirt lives and rides—on and off road—in Colorado.

WHERE TO FIND IT

Bell, 800-456-2355; **Bellwether**, 415-863-0436; **Bouré**, 970-247-0339; **Cannondale**, 800-245-3872; **Dirt Designs**, 800-269-6641; **Giro**, 800-969-4476; **InMotion**, 800-552-2976; **Koulius Zaard**, 415-364-9575; **Louis Garneau**, 802-334-5885; **Nautica**, 212-541-5757; **Nema**, 714-841-8384; **Nike**, 800-238-2775; **Patagonia**, 800-638-6464; **Pearl Izumi**, 800-877-7080; **Smartwool**, 800-550-9665; **Specialized**, 408-779-6229; **Sugoi**, 604-875-0887; **Swobo**, 800-796-2648; **Wild Woolies**, 707-986-1096; **Zoic**, 800-241-9327