

Stayer Groadinger UG

A bike for more than just gravel

Words **JAMES SPENDER**

Why is it you can spend all afternoon alone smashing muddy tracks like a pro, then when you do finally see a person – an actual human capable of awe and praise of your abilities – it's right by a puddle that is significantly deeper than anticipated?

Yet even that wasn't enough to dampen what a brilliant ride with the Groadinger that was – one in a long line of brilliant rides in fact. This is not a bike that claims to be fast, light or aero, but it is immense fun in the right situations.

Come again another day

It has been raining a lot at the time of writing, and some of the trails I go to for my gravel fix are less mud and more clay-based gravy. I see tyre tracks and half expect to look ahead and see the sunken top of someone's helmet with an arm waving from the depths. I don't know who's riding these things besides me and the Stayer Groadinger UG, to give it its full name.

Made in a workshop in east London by partners in life and business Sam and Judith, the Groadinger is a portmanteau of a word and of a bike. The *G* comes from gravel, the *road* from road and the *inger* I'll say could be the

tail-end of humdinger. The UG stands for Ultra Grav Grav Kitchen Sink, meaning of the two Groadingers Stayer builds (the other is the OG – Original Grav), the UG is the more hardcore one, designed to be ridden over long miles and potentially loaded to the hilt with luggage.

Accordingly the UG has a slack front end and long 1,019mm wheelbase in this size medium – tried and tested territory for gravel bikes. But that's not the full story because unlike almost every other brand Stayer builds the UG around 650b wheels (built in-house on DT Swiss 350 hubs), with 700c the secondary option. Usually it's the other way round but Stayer reasons 650b affords fatter rubber and more reactive handling, because smaller wheels corner in smaller arcs.

The UG will run up to 2.1in tyres on 650b wheels when built up with a Ritchey ADV fork, although here it came specced with 47mm tyres. But even then it had me rubbing my eyes looking for that blurred line. This bike is just one and a half evolutionary steps away from a mountain bike, and that is absolutely a good thing.

MTB FTW!

From a roadie perspective the UG serves its time on the tarmac with dignity, but it's safe to say

The spec

Model Stayer Groadinger UG

Price £1,650 frameset, approx £4,500 as tested

Weight 10.12kg (medium)

Groupset Shimano GRX 810

Wheels Stayer Gravel/Adventure Disc 650b

Finishing kit Ritchey WCS Ergomax handlebars, Ritchey WCS 220 stem, Ritchey WCS seatpost, Ergon SMC saddle, Hutchinson Touareg 47mm tyres

Contact stayercycles.com

Highlights

- 1** Stayer builds around 650b wheels, arguing smaller-diameter wheels with wider tyres handle best off-road
- 2** The Shimano GRX groupset here is 2x, but the frame also readily accepts 1x
- 3** The UG is available in various stock finishes or it can be custom-painted or delivered 'ready to paint'



I was never going to win my local TT. Yet once up to speed it bowled along much quicker than I anticipated, and ultimately it got me to the forest on time. At which point everything about the UG was drawn into the sharpest focus.

First, I felt I could throw this bike down anything. It's made from Columbus steel and although that seatstay yoke looks spindly, all that seatstays really do is brace the rear triangle against folding. Here that wide, curved yoke affords the tyre clearance.

Second, once I'd thrown it down said anything the huge-volume tyres made up for any errors in my bike handling (of which there is a litany). Tyres this big essentially offer suspension, they're tubeless so you can smash into roots and rocks and not worry about flats, and at low pressures they lent excellent traction. Well, until the rain came.

I'd prefer 38mm knobblies to cut through mud, but that isn't the tyres' or the bike's fault, that's just the nature of the off-road beast. Some

Pick of the kit

Rapha Classic Winter Jacket, £270, rapha.cc

There's nothing better to coax you outside on a grim day than a good jacket, and this Rapha number is excellent. Using Gore-Tex's Infinium fabric, the Classic Winter Jacket is windproof but not waterproof, only water-resistant. However – and I say this having worn this jacket in some biblical conditions – you wouldn't notice the difference.

It kept me dry, and although I'd argue that it isn't the most breathable it is very warm, and the front vent zips did a magnificent job of adjusting temperature. It sounds odd, but I almost welcomed the rain so I could wear it.



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of my time with the UG was dry, and during those rare moments I nailed technical trails faster and with more ease than on any gravel bike I've ridden to date. The Pinarello Grevil+ comes close to the UG – notably also shod with 650b wheels and 47mm tyres – but I always felt I was holding back a touch, what with the Grevil+ being carbon and incredibly expensive. The UG didn't feel like I needed to cosset it in any way.

And this is the nub – this bike will only shine for you if you come at it with the right expectations. Me? I wanted something to ride through technical singletrack and over drops and trails, but on which I could also get home quickly. That's precisely what the UG is, a road-going mountain bike, but this is the problem I'm worried it will face: a lot of riders who say they want a gravel bike really want an off-road road bike. Yet this is also precisely what I love about the UG: it is doing its own thing in the gravel market and arguably highlighting an area few brands have realised exists. Perhaps we'll call it the road-mountain sector, or maybe *rountain bikes*. It'll be niche, but the UG will be its star. 🍌

Shimano is so powerful that the arrival of its GRX gravel-oriented groupset in 2019 helped to legitimise the off-road sector. The Groadinger comes with 2x gearing but GRX can be set up to run 1x as well

Alternatively...



Hardcore hitter

Rondo's titanium Ruut T1 (from £4,000) has a go-big-or-go-home feel, with changeable fork inserts allowing for geometry between mtb-slack and cyclocross-sharp. It'll fit up to 57mm tyres on 650b wheels too.



Fly through forest

London-designed and made in Italy, the Condor Bivio-Gravel (£1,400 frameset) can take up to 47mm tyres on 650b wheels and has lots of mounting options, so you can devour trails as you bikepack around Europe.