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Howard Yeomans

Editor and publisher, *Velo Vision* magazine.

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Parallel posts

We try two suspension seatposts which work on the parallelogram principle: the Thudbuster LT and the Suntour SP6. Which gives the best bounce for your budget?



BACKGROUND

Suspension seatposts are a relatively easy way, it would seem, to add comfort to almost any upright bicycle, and they're especially popular for the rear seats of tandems. I was keen to try one on the Villiers, to go with its relatively narrow tyres. But all seatposts are not created equal.

Most suspension seatposts operate using a simple telescopic action. There's a spring (and sometimes a damper too) inside the post, and a shaft which holds the saddle.

But we're testing a different type – parallelogram seatposts. These have a linkage system, in a roughly parallelogram shape, to support the saddle, and this, says the marketing blurb, aims to overcome a number of shortcomings of the telescopic type.

The first problem is friction. With your weight pressing down on the saddle, there's a considerable force pushing any moving shaft against the

stationary seatpost attached to the bike frame. Annoyingly for designers, there's not much room in inside the seatpost for the bearings, so many use plastic bushings of one sort or another. This tends to make the seatpost unresponsive to small shocks – they don't give enough force to break the friction. Then, when a larger shock does make the system move, it can swiftly wear out the bearings because of the high sliding forces – especially if dirt has made its way in, too. This can in turn



lead to play and the disconcerting feeling that your saddle isn't securely attached to the bike.

Parallelogram versions can also wear out too, but the pivot systems they use tend to be less susceptible to dirt, and simpler. And the rotating pivots offer much less resistance to motion than a sliding system, so they should be more responsive to even small bumps.

The other way in which parallelogram seatposts should trump straight ones is in the direction they move. When your bike hits a bump, your weight tries to go down and back – which is exactly the motion the parallelogram types offer. Straight posts move down and forward, in line with the seatpost.

Our two test seatposts are at different ends of the price and design spectrum. First up we have the bargain Suntour SP6-NCX-D4: what it lacks in a snappy name it makes up for with the bargain price of just £24. Against that we've set the Thudbuster LT, originally intended for mountain bikes and with a recommended retail price in the UK of £139.99.

It could be correctly argued that a fairer comparison with the Suntour might be the short-travel (ST) version of the Thudbuster. But I had a lightly used LT post to hand, on one of my tandems, so it was roped in for the comparison.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Suntour post is squat, black and heavy in the hand: it weighed 741 g according to my scales. The links all appear to be forged aluminium. The suspension is provided by a stack of springs within the seatpost, pushed in by a small metal roller attached to the front link. What looks like another roller on the rear link is a rubber bumper, controlling how far it can rebound. The saddle attachment system is simple and solid, using a single bolt. The minimum clear space you need between saddle rails and the top of

your seatpost is around 110 mm, and the maximum is around 275 mm.

Travel is a claimed 48 mm, in an arc which moves the saddle attachment point 40 mm down and 25 mm back. The preload should be adjusted, say the instructions, so that your weight compresses the system by up to about a quarter of the travel, or

soft and extra hard versions are also available. The travel available is claimed to be 76 mm, and the overall weight of mine was 597 g.

The minimum clear space needed between saddle rails and the top of your seatpost for the LT is around 142 mm, and the maximum is around 300 mm (an extra-long

The two systems had a lot in common. Like all suspension seatposts, both made it very marginally harder to get on the bike – the saddle is just a bit higher, until it sinks down to your normal saddle position under your weight. Both felt solid in all directions except the suspension motion, with no

– perhaps more damped, perhaps just firmer. After a few days of that I changed it to using a slightly softer elastomer combination: my weight is quite close to the threshold between two of the bands set out in the instructions. That improved the cushioning substantially, to as good or better than the Suntour, but I was getting some pedal bounce. Adding extra pre-load on the bolt made little difference, and I was left thinking that perhaps a more fine-grained elastomer selection would be good so that the ‘hardness’ could be tuned more exactly. I may just have been unlucky to fall right between two weight bands, though.



10 mm. To set this you use an Allen key at the bottom of the seatpost, simply turning an adjuster clockwise to increase the preload. The settings should suit riders from 65 to 100 kg.

The Suntour comes with a two year manufacturer’s warranty – but the instructions suggest dismantling, cleaning and re-greasing the spring system every six months.

The Thudbuster LT is a nicely finished post in all aluminium, with a neat scale etched on the side of the post and large links carved from big lumps of alloy. The pivot bushings are replaceable, and a ‘Rebuild Kit’ is available from Cane Creek should it be needed. Suspension is provided by two elastomers, sandwiched between the links and held in place by an M5 bolt, which can be tightened for some extra pre-load. Six elastomers are provided in varying grades to cover riders between 45 and 115 kg – extra

version is also available). The seat post clamp is lightweight but a bit more fussy, using two bolts.

The Thudbuster comes with a one year guarantee, and the only maintenance required is occasional greasing and oiling. A neoprene ‘Crudbuster’ cover is a recommended optional extra to protect the mechanism (DIY options are also possible!)

Both posts were the correct diameter for the Villiers frame, 27.2 mm. The Thudbuster is also available in various other diameters, and of course both posts can be fitted to most bikes using shims if necessary.

THE RIDE

I used the seatposts on the Villiers bike for my 5-mile commute to work for a few weeks, changing between the two every few days, and experimenting with the settings as I went along.

sideways play at all. And both were completely silent in use.

And over the bumps? Both systems are visibly moving as you ride along, but it’s often hardly perceptible. The suspension action is much more obvious on the larger ‘hits’ – like when your rear wheel drops into a pothole, or coming off a speed bump. Without suspension, the impact would jar up your spine through the saddle. With either of these systems, the impact is much muted, as they squash down then gently rebound.

I found the Suntour pretty much spot on with the sag set at 10 mm, as per the instructions. At this setting it compressed well over big hits, soaked up smaller ripples but didn’t bounce annoyingly with my pedal strokes.

When I first swapped to the Thudbuster after the Suntour, it did seem somewhat less responsive

CONCLUSIONS

Both seatposts added plenty of ride comfort – much more than the 50mm Big Apple tyres on my other bike. But the balance between effective suspension and excess bounce is critical. I was particularly impressed by the budget Suntour, which really didn’t concede much if anything to its more expensive competitor in performance. While the Thudbuster is arguably more pretty, more versatile (in terms of rider weight and seatpost diameter) and lighter, I think for sheer value my recommendation has to be for the Suntour.

It would be interesting to try these posts against a really good telescopic type seatpost, to see if the advantages of the parallelogram type are as significant as the marketing would suggest. Does any reader have a recommendation?

Peter Eland

AVAILABILITY

Thudbuster: available widely via Cane Creek distributors and dealers. Manufacturer: www.canecreek.com
Suntour SP6: The only UK source I could find is Spa Cycles: Tel 01423 887003 or see www.spacycles.co.uk.
Manufacturer website: www.srsuntour-cycling.com