CYCLING GUIDE

Buying Your First Road Bike

How to choose the right bike and avoid wasting money.



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WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

Getting into cycling can feel unnecessarily confusing. Every brand claims its bike is the best. Every shop has different opinions. Every experienced cyclist seems to assume you already understand tire widths, groupsets, and frame material — and why a bike that costs $2,500 can somehow be called "entry level."

This guide has one job: help you choose and buy the *right* first bike — the right type, the right size, at the right price — and walk into a shop knowing what questions to ask. It's the first resource in a short beginner series; the companions cover the gear, the repair kit, and your first ride.

This is not about buying the most expensive bike possible. It's about getting the best bike for *your* goals, *your* budget, and the version of cycling you actually want to do.

PART 01

Start Here

Before looking at a single bike, answer four simple questions:

1. What type of riding do you actually want to do?
2. What is your budget?
3. What size bike do you need?
4. Should you buy new or used?

1.1 What type of riding do you actually want to do?

Start with the obvious question: what do you actually want to do on the bike? Go fast? Ride long distances? Join group rides? Race? Ride pavement and gravel? Train for a triathlon?

You can technically do most of these things on almost any bike. But we're not trying to find a bike that merely works. We're trying to find the *right* bike.

Choose based on the type of riding you expect to do most often — not the one highly specific ride you might do once a year. For most people who want to ride on pavement, improve their fitness, go farther, and maybe join group rides, an **endurance road bike** is the best place to start. We'll compare the different types in Part 2.

> ONE NOTE
>
> If you're specifically looking for a triathlon bike, reach out to me directly. That's a different buying and fitting process altogether.

1.2 What is your budget?

Let's be honest: cycling is an expensive sport. That doesn't mean you need an expensive bike. It does mean buying the wrong things can become an expensive mistake.

If you're anything like me, you're not cheap — you're frugal. You're willing to spend money, but you want the greatest value for every dollar. That starts with being honest about your *actual* budget. And by actual budget, I don't just mean the bike. You may also need a helmet, cycling clothing, pedals and shoes, front and rear lights, bottles and cages, a flat-repair kit, a multitool, a pump or inflator, and a bike computer if ride data matters to you.

THE SIMPLE RULE

Do not spend your entire budget on the bike. Reserve roughly **10–20%** of your total budget for equipment, setup, and unexpected costs.

Total budget	Bike (spend here)	Gear & setup
$1,500	$1,200–$1,350	$150–$300
$2,000	$1,600–$1,800	$200–$400
$3,000	$2,400–$2,700	$300–$600
$4,000	$3,200–$3,600	$400–$800

These aren't strict rules. The point is to avoid spending every dollar on the bike, only to realize you still need several hundred dollars of gear before you can ride it. The bike-only price tiers in Part 4 assume you've already set this money aside — and the companion Gear Guide breaks down exactly what to buy.

1.3 What size bike do you need?

Bike fit is genuinely a game of millimeters. That may sound insane when you're new, but small differences become very noticeable after a few hours on the bike. The wrong size can cause numb hands, saddle discomfort, neck or back pain, poor handling, and a riding position that makes you think you dislike cycling — when the real problem is simply that the bike doesn't fit.

A size 56 from one brand may fit completely differently from a size 56 made by another. The number on the frame is only a starting point.

Height is the crudest input there is, but it's where everyone starts — so use the table below to figure out which *sizes to test ride*, not which size to buy. What actually decides your size is your inseam and torso-to-arm proportion, your flexibility, and the specific model's stack and reach numbers. Two riders the same height regularly end up two sizes apart on the same bike.

Your height	Sizes worth comparing on a given model
5'0"–5'3" (152–160 cm)	**47–51 (XXS–XS)**
5'3"–5'6" (160–168 cm)	**49–53 (XS–S)**
5'6"–5'9" (168–175 cm)	**51–55 (S–M)**

Your height	Sizes worth comparing on a given model
5'9"–6'0" (175–183 cm)	**53–57 (M–L)**
6'0"–6'3" (183–191 cm)	**55–59 (L–XL)**
6'3"+ (191 cm+)	**58–62 (XL–XXL)**

READ THIS BEFORE YOU USE THAT TABLE

This does not tell you which size to buy. It tells you which sizes to compare on the exact model you're considering.

Ranges overlap on purpose, and brands label sizes differently — a "56" from one company is not a "56" from another, and many now use S/M/L instead of a stated centimetre size. Proof it isn't formulaic: I'm 6'1" and ride a 56, which most height charts would call a size too small for me. Take the range to a shop, ride the sizes at each end, and let the bike decide.

> Be careful with any shop that insists the only size it currently has in stock just happens to be the perfect size for you. **The right bike in the wrong size is still the wrong bike.**

1.4 Should you buy new or used?

For most beginners, I recommend buying new from a reputable local bike shop. Not because used bikes are bad — a lightly used bike can offer incredible value — but because buying used only makes sense when you know what you're looking at, or have someone experienced enough to inspect it for you.

A used bike can have problems that aren't obvious in photos: hidden crash or carbon damage, worn drivetrain components, damaged wheels or bearings, overdue maintenance, incorrectly installed parts, expensive proprietary components, the wrong size, or a price that isn't actually as good as it looks. If you're new to cycling, you probably don't know how to assess all of that yet. That's completely normal.

Buying new from a good shop usually gives you help with sizing, proper assembly, warranty coverage, initial service, and somewhere to return when something doesn't feel right. You may spend more upfront, but you're also buying confidence — and reducing the chance of an expensive first-bike mistake.

WHEN USED MAKES SENSE

- An experienced cyclist can inspect it
- A reputable shop has inspected it
- You already know the model and size you need
- You understand the likely repair costs
- The savings are significant enough to justify the risk

For your first bike, "used" should not mean buying whatever looks like a good deal on Facebook Marketplace. A cheap bike that immediately needs $1,000 in repairs was never a cheap bike.

PART 02

Choose the Right Type of Bike

Once you know what type of riding you want to do, the next step is choosing the bike designed for it.

There are countless models, but most bikes you'll consider fall into one of four categories: endurance road bikes, performance (or aero) road bikes, gravel/all-road bikes, and triathlon bikes. The differences mainly come down to riding position, handling, tire clearance, comfort, and speed.

2.1 Endurance Road Bikes

For most people buying their first road bike, this is where I recommend starting. An endurance road bike is designed to be fast without forcing you into an overly aggressive position. You'll sit slightly more upright than on a performance bike, which makes it more comfortable, more stable, and easier to adapt to. That makes endurance bikes ideal for fitness riding, longer rides, group rides, centuries, your first cycling event, your first triathlon, and riding fast without seriously racing.

Do not mistake "endurance" for slow. A good endurance bike is still more than capable of going fast. The difference is that it prioritizes a position you can comfortably hold for hours, rather than one designed entirely around aerodynamics and racing. Unless you already know you want something more specialized, this is likely your best option.

2.2 Performance & Aero Road Bikes

Performance road bikes are designed with speed in mind. Within this category you'll also see bikes called **race bikes** or **aero bikes**. The terms are often used interchangeably, though there are differences — some performance

bikes prioritize low weight and climbing, while aero bikes are shaped and positioned to reduce wind resistance. For choosing your first bike, the important thing is that these bikes typically place you in a lower, longer, more aggressive position than an endurance bike.

That position can make the bike faster, more aerodynamic, more responsive, and more exciting to ride — but less comfortable over long distances. Performance and aero bikes make the most sense if you care heavily about speed, want to race or join faster group rides, are athletic and relatively mobile, are comfortable in a lower position, know you'll quickly want more performance, and are willing to trade some comfort for speed.

> Let me be clear: you can still ride an aero bike for extremely long distances. I've only ever owned aero or performance-focused road bikes. On them I've completed nearly a dozen rides over 100 miles and cycled from Chicago to New York. Were they the most comfortable bikes for those rides? Absolutely not. Would I have been more comfortable on an endurance bike? Almost certainly. But it was still completely possible — and for me, the added speed from the lower position made more sense across the majority of my riding.

That doesn't mean everyone should make the same decision. If comfort is your highest priority, you have limited mobility, or you simply want the easiest bike to adapt to, an endurance bike is probably the smarter choice. But if you're athletic, care about speed, and already know you'll want the faster, more aggressive option, there's nothing wrong with starting on a performance or aero bike. Just understand the trade-off you're making: some comfort and versatility in exchange for a faster position.

2.3 Gravel & All-Road Bikes

A gravel bike is designed to handle more than smooth pavement — roads, gravel, dirt paths, rough bike trails, and other surfaces where a normal road bike feels limited. Gravel bikes typically have wider tires, more tire clearance, stable handling, a more comfortable position, and additional mounts for bags and equipment.

They make sense if you want to explore gravel roads, ride rough paths, carry equipment, or own one bike that handles a wide range of riding. The trade-off is that they're generally heavier, less aerodynamic, and slightly slower on smooth pavement than a true road bike — a difference that may not matter to you at all. If your priority is versatility rather than maximum road speed, a gravel or all-road bike may be the better choice. You can also make many gravel bikes feel considerably faster on pavement by installing narrower, smoother tires.

2.4 Triathlon Bikes

A triathlon bike is designed around one goal: helping you hold an aerodynamic position for long periods. That can make it extremely fast on open roads and help preserve energy for the run afterward. It also makes the bike more

specialized — generally harder to handle, less versatile, poorly suited for many group rides, highly dependent on proper fitting, and harder for beginners to get comfortable on.

For most people completing their first triathlon, I recommend starting with a normal road bike. It's easier to handle, more versatile, and works for group rides, training, and everyday cycling. You can also add removable aero bars later. A triathlon bike begins to make more sense when you're committed to the sport, plan to race regularly, and understand exactly why you need one. If you're considering one as your first bike, I strongly recommend getting professionally fitted before you buy.

Which one should you choose?

Choose the bike designed for the riding you expect to do most often.

Your primary goal	Best place to start
Fitness and recreational riding	**Endurance road bike**
Long rides and centuries	**Endurance road bike**
Group rides	**Endurance or performance road**
Maximum speed or racing	**Performance road bike**
Pavement and gravel	**Gravel or all-road bike**
First triathlon	**Road bike**
Serious triathlon racing	**Triathlon bike**
One bike for almost everything	**Endurance or all-road bike**

> Still unsure? Base your decision on the riding you expect to do **80% of the time**. Do not buy a bike around one highly specific ride you may or may not do in the future. For most beginners, an endurance road bike is the safest recommendation — but if you're athletic, care heavily about speed, and understand the comfort trade-off, starting on a performance or aero bike can make complete sense.

PART 03

What Your First Bike Should Have

This is where buying a bike can quickly become overwhelming — frame materials, groupsets, brakes, wheels, tires, and enough technical spec to make you feel like you need to become a mechanic before you buy. You don't.

For your first bike, focus on: the correct size, the right type of bike for your goals, a position you can comfortably maintain, reliable components, and a bike that fits within your total budget. Everything else matters far less right now.

Aluminum or Carbon?

Most bikes you're considering will have either an aluminum or carbon-fiber frame. Aluminum is typically more affordable and offers tremendous value — at the same price, an aluminum bike will often come with better components, because less of the cost is spent on the frame. Carbon bikes are generally lighter, can feel smoother, and are often more aerodynamic. They're also more expensive.

You do not need carbon to become a serious cyclist. That said, if you can comfortably afford carbon *without* sacrificing the correct fit, necessary gear, or overall quality, I'd personally consider it — it'll likely give you a more refined bike that takes longer to outgrow. But don't stretch your budget simply to say you own a carbon bike.

> **A good aluminum bike that fits is always better than a carbon bike that doesn't.**

Disc Brakes

Let's make this concise. Most new road bikes come with disc brakes. Just get disc brakes.

Mechanical or Electronic Shifting?

Mechanical shifting uses cables to change gears. Electronic shifting uses buttons and small motors. Electronic is faster, smoother, and more refined — I personally love it and would have a hard time going back. It's also completely unnecessary for getting into cycling. If your budget supports it, great. If it doesn't, mechanical shifting works extremely well and will not hold you back. Do not choose the wrong bike simply because it has electronic shifting.

MY RECOMMENDATION

Do not obsess over every spec on the product page. You do not need premium wheels, the lightest components, or the most expensive groupset. You need a reliable bike in the correct size that matches the riding you want to do. **Fit first. Bike type second. Everything else can wait.**

PART 04

Bikes I'd Actually Consider, by Budget

By now you should have a clear idea of the type of bike you want and roughly what you're willing to spend. Let's narrow hundreds of options down to a short list I'd actually consider.

READ THIS FIRST

The prices below are for the **bike itself**, not your total starting budget. Make sure you've already reserved money for the helmet, kit, lights, bottles, and other gear — the companion Gear Guide covers exactly what to buy. Applying Part 1's rule: a **$1,200** bike suits roughly a **$1,400** total budget; a **$1,499** bike lands closer to **$1,750–$1,850** once gear is included. Read each tier with that math in mind.

A few more notes. Bike companies don't release new models on one universal schedule — some models below are labeled 2026, some 2027, and others don't advertise a model year at all. What matters is that these are the current models and prices available in the U.S. as of **July 2026**. And don't assume the newest model is automatically the best purchase: previous-year bikes, floor models, discontinued colors, and remaining inventory are often discounted when something new arrives — sometimes enough to move a bike from one budget category into another entirely.

HOW TO READ THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Current** — current model at its normal listed price.
- **Sale** — a current or previous-year bike actively discounted by the manufacturer.
- **Deal to hunt for** — may be available through individual dealers; inventory and pricing vary.

Prices are rounded when the difference is a dollar or less. The same bike may appear under two categories where the line between performance and aero has blurred.

Under $1,500

At this price you're primarily looking at aluminum frames with entry-level mechanical components. That's completely fine — these bikes are more than capable of getting you into the sport, improving your fitness, completing long rides, and helping you decide whether cycling is something you want to pursue more seriously. Prioritize fit, reliable brakes, a reputable shop or seller, and a bike in good condition you could resell if cycling doesn't stick. Avoid random online brands with no local support, bikes with unclear sizing, bikes that need expensive repairs, and buying something just because it "looks like a race bike." A good used bike is often better than the cheapest new bike — but only buy used if you know what to inspect or can bring someone who does.

Type	Bikes I'd consider
Endurance	Trek Domane AL 2 — **$1,200**; Giant Contend AR 4 — **$1,200**; Cannondale Synapse 3 — **$1,039 sale**; Canyon Endurace AllRoad — **$1,499**
Performance	Specialized Allez — **$1,200**
Aero	None new that I'd recommend
Gravel	Cannondale Topstone 4 — **$1,175 sale**; Giant Revolt 2 — **$1,400**; Scott Speedster Gravel 40 — **$1,500**
Triathlon	None new. Start with a road bike or shop used.

The Domane AL 2, Allez, Contend AR, and sale-priced Synapse are all legitimate entry points. The Endurace AllRoad is another interesting option, though current size availability may be limited. On the gravel side, the Revolt 2, Topstone 4, and Speedster Gravel 40 are where I'd begin.

MY PICK

For a traditional first road bike, I'd start with the **Trek Domane AL 2** or **Specialized Allez**, depending on whether comfort or a slightly more performance-oriented feel matters more to you.

$1,500 – $2,499

This is where the market opens up, and the sweet spot for many first serious bikes. You'll find better aluminum frames, stronger component packages, hydraulic disc brakes on many models, a capable drivetrain, and even a few carbon options — bikes you can ride for years with reasonable resale value. This is also where local-shop support delivers a lot of value for a first-time buyer. If you're already near the top of this range and know you'll ride consistently, stretching toward a better frame or a more future-proof build can make sense.

Type	Bikes I'd consider
Endurance	Trek Domane AL 4 — **$1,800**; Domane AL 5 — **$2,100**; Giant Contend SL — **$1,850–$2,300**; Giant Defy Advanced 4 — **$2,300**; Cannondale Synapse 2 — **$1,799**; Synapse 1 — **$2,099**; Scott Speedster 10 — **$2,000**; Canyon Endurace CF 5 — **$2,299**
Performance	Specialized Allez CUES — **$1,600**; Allez Sport — **$1,600 sale**; Allez Comp — **$2,100**
Aero	None new that I'd recommend over the performance options
Gravel	Trek Checkpoint ALR 3 — **$1,600**; ALR 4 — **$2,000**; ALR 5 — **$2,300**; Specialized Diverge 3 Alloy — **$1,600**; Diverge 4 Sport Alloy — **$2,100**; Canyon Grizl 6 RAW — **$1,799**; Grizl 6/7 RAW — ~**$1,999**; Giant Revolt — **$1,500**; Revolt Advanced 3 — **$2,350**; Cannondale Topstone 3 — **$1,599**; Topstone Carbon 4 — **$2,349 sale**; Scott Speedster Gravel 30/20/10/ Team — **$1,600–$2,000**
Triathlon	Shop used. I wouldn't buy a new dedicated tri bike in this range.

The endurance standouts are the **Defy Advanced 4** and **Endurace CF 5** — both move you onto a carbon frame without a $3,000-plus budget. The Domane AL 5 remains a strong local-shop option, but compare it carefully against discounted carbon bikes first. The gravel market is especially strong here, with legitimate options from Trek, Specialized, Canyon, Giant, Cannondale, and Scott.

MY PICK

For road riding, the **Giant Defy Advanced 4** is hard to ignore at $2,300 because it gets you onto a carbon endurance platform. For gravel, compare the **Giant Revolt Advanced 3**, discounted **Cannondale Topstone Carbon 4**, and whichever Canyon Grizl fits your intended use.

$2,500 – $3,499

This is where things get really interesting. At this price you can buy a good carbon endurance bike, a legitimate performance bike, or a well-equipped carbon gravel bike without immediately feeling like you need to replace it. Potential upgrades in this range include a carbon frame, a better wheelset and drivetrain, and electronic shifting on some models. It's also the range where discounted models can completely change the answer.

Type	Bikes I'd consider
Endurance	Canyon Endurace CF 7 — **$2,699–$2,999**; CF 7 AXS — **$2,999 sale**; CF 7 Di2 — **$3,299 sale**; Specialized Roubaix SL8 Tiagra — **$2,800–$3,000**; 2025 Roubaix SL8 Sport 105 — **$3,500**; Giant Defy Advanced 2 — **$3,300**; BMC Roadmachine THREE — **$2,899**; Scott Addict 50 — **$2,800**; Addict 40 — **$3,400**; Cervélo Caledonia 105 — **$3,300**

Type	Bikes I'd consider
Performance	Trek Madone SL 5 Gen 8 — **$3,000**; Cannondale SuperSix EVO 6 — **$2,999**; Canyon Ultimate CF 7 — **$2,999**; Ultimate CF 7 Di2 — **$3,299 sale**; Specialized Tarmac SL7 Sport — **$3,500**; BMC Teammachine SLR THREE — **$2,899**; Orbea Orca M30 — **$2,834**
Aero	Trek Madone SL 5 Gen 8 — **$3,000**; deal-priced previous-gen Madones; Giant Propel Advanced 2 — ~**$3,500** (varies by model year/inventory)
Gravel	Trek Checkpoint SL 5 AXS — **$3,500**; Specialized Diverge 4 Comp Alloy — **$2,700**; Diverge 4 Sport Carbon — **$3,500**; Canyon Grail CF SL 7 — **$2,599 sale**; Grail CF 8 1by — **$2,999 sale**; Grizl CF 6 — **$2,599 sale**; Grizl CF 7 ESC — **$3,399**; Giant Revolt Advanced 2 — **$2,800**; Revolt Advanced 1 — **$3,200**; Scott Addict Gravel 40 — **$2,800**; Addict Gravel 30 — **$3,500**
Triathlon	Quintana Roo Service Course Tri — **$3,253 sale**; otherwise shop used for a dedicated tri bike

Current pricing makes the Madone SL 5, SuperSix EVO 6, Ultimate CF 7, Teammachine SLR THREE, and Orbea Orca M30 legitimate carbon performance options at roughly $3,000. The endurance category is equally competitive, with options from Canyon, Specialized, Giant, BMC, Scott, and Cervélo.

MY PICK

For an athletic rider who cares about speed, the **Trek Madone SL 5**, **Cannondale SuperSix EVO 6**, and **Canyon Ultimate CF 7** top my list. For endurance, the **Canyon Endurace CF 7** offers excellent value, while the **BMC Roadmachine THREE** is a strong local-dealer alternative when available.

THE JACK EXAMPLE

This is the exact price range where I helped my friend Jack. He initially planned to spend around $2,000 and was looking at the Trek Domane AL 5. Jack is extremely athletic, wants to complete Ironmans, and is the type of person I knew would quickly want more performance. The Domane AL 5 would have worked, but I encouraged him to look at carbon options first.

The obvious progression was the Domane SL 5. But here's the thing: a previous-year Madone SL 5 had been discounted to around $2,900 after the newer Madone launched — and we got it for slightly less than that through the local shop. For roughly the same price as the carbon Domane, he got a faster, more aggressive bike much closer to what he'd want long-term.

Was it the newest bike in the store? No. Was it the better purchase for him? Absolutely.

$3,500 – $4,999

At this point you should be able to buy a genuinely excellent bike. Carbon frames become the expectation, electronic shifting becomes common, and discounted bikes may begin including carbon wheels. This is also where differences in fit, dealer support, brand preference, and intended use begin to matter more than whether one bike is objectively "better."

Type	Bikes I'd consider
Endurance	Trek Domane SL 5 — **$3,800**; Specialized Roubaix SL8 Sport — **$3,800**; Roubaix SL8 Comp 105 Di2 — **$4,500**; 2025 Roubaix SL8 Comp — **$4,000 sale**; Canyon Endurace CF 7 AXS/Di2 — **$3,799**; CF SLX 7 Di2 — **$4,399**; CF SLX 7 AXS — **$4,999**; Cannondale Synapse Carbon 2 LE — **$3,600 sale**; Synapse Carbon 4 — **$4,199**; Synapse Carbon 3 SmartSense — **$4,999**; BMC Roadmachine TWO — **$3,599**; Roadmachine ONE — **$4,199 sale / $4,799 current**; Scott Addict 30 — **$4,000**; Cervélo Caledonia 105 Di2 — **$4,500**; Caledonia Rival AXS — **$4,850**
Performance	Specialized Tarmac SL8 Comp — **$4,700**; Canyon Ultimate CF 7 Di2 — **$3,799**; Ultimate CF 7 Di2 AERO — **$4,199 sale**; BMC Teammachine SLR TWO — **$3,599**; SLR ONE — **$4,799**; Scott Addict RC 30 — **$4,250 sale**; Orbea Orca M35i — **$4,199**
Aero	Canyon Aeroad CF SLX 7 Di2 — **$4,699 sale / $4,999 current**; Aeroad CF SLX 7 AXS — **$4,999**; Trek Madone SL 6 AXS — **$4,999**; Giant Propel Advanced 2 — ~**$3,500**; Quintana Roo Service Course — **$3,555 sale**
Gravel	Trek Checkpoint SL 5 AXS — **$3,500**; SL 6 AXS — **$4,200**; Specialized Diverge 4 Sport Carbon — **$3,500**; Diverge 4 Comp Carbon — **$4,200**; Canyon Grail CF SL 7 AERO — **$3,999 sale**; Grail CF SLX 8 Di2 — **$4,999 sale**; Giant Revolt Advanced 0 — **$4,500**; Scott Addict Gravel 30 — **$3,500**; Addict Gravel 20 — **$4,300**; Cervélo Áspero GRX 610 — **$3,550**; Áspero Apex XPLR — **$3,750**; Áspero GRX 820 — **$4,250**; Áspero Apex XPLR AXS — **$4,550**
Triathlon	Quintana Roo X-PR — **$4,221 sale**; used or remaining prior-gen Cervélo P-Series, Felt IA, Giant Trinity, or similar

The Tarmac SL8 Comp, Ultimate CF 7 Di2 AERO, Aeroad CF SLX 7, Madone SL 6 AXS, Teammachine, and Orca M35i cover nearly every version of fast road riding at this price. The QR X-PR is one of the few new dedicated carbon tri platforms that enters this category.

MY PICK

For most performance-focused riders, I'd compare the **Tarmac SL8 Comp**, **Canyon Aeroad CF SLX 7**, and **Ultimate CF 7 Di2 AERO** first. For endurance, the discounted **Cannondale Synapse Carbon 2 LE** and

BMC Roadmachine sale models deserve serious consideration. For triathlon, the **Quintana Roo X-PR** is the clear new-bike starting point.

$5,000 – $6,999

At this level you're no longer buying a beginner bike — you're buying one that could realistically serve you for years without needing meaningful upgrades. The largest jump is often the inclusion of carbon wheels, a higher-tier electronic groupset, a power meter, or some combination of the three.

Type	Bikes I'd consider
Endurance	Trek Domane SL 6 — **$5,100**; SL 7 — **$6,800**; Specialized Roubaix SL8 Expert — **$6,000**; Canyon Endurace CF SLX 8 Di2 — **$5,499 sale / $5,999 current**; Cannondale Synapse Carbon 2 — **$6,499**; BMC Roadmachine 01 THREE — **$6,999 sale**; Scott Addict 20 — **$5,500**; Addict 10 — **$6,700**; Cervélo Caledonia Force AXS — **$6,500**
Performance	Specialized Tarmac SL8 Expert — **$6,600–$7,000**; Canyon Ultimate CF SLX 8 Di2/AXS — **$5,999**; Cannondale SuperSix EVO 4 — **$5,499**; EVO 2 — **$6,499**; EVO 3 — **$6,999**; BMC Teammachine SLR 01 SEVEN — **$6,199**; Cervélo Soloist Rival AXS — **$6,800**; Orbea Orca M20i TEAM ED PWR — **$5,788**; Orca M22 TEAM — **$6,614**
Aero	Trek Madone SL 6 — **$5,300**; SL 7 — **$6,000**; Canyon Aeroad CF SLX 8 AXS — **$6,499**; Giant Propel Advanced 1 — **$5,300**; Scott Foil RC 10 — **$5,900**; Foil RC Team — **$7,000**
Gravel	Trek Checkpoint SL 7 AXS — **$6,500**; Specialized Diverge 4 Expert Rival XPLR — **$6,000**; Diverge 4 Expert GRX Di2 — **$6,500**; Canyon Grail CF SLX 8 Di2 — **$4,999 sale**; Grail CF SLX 8 AXS — **$5,499 sale**; Giant Revolt Advanced Pro 1 — **$5,600**; Scott Addict Gravel 15 — **$5,400**; Addict Gravel 10 — **$5,900**; Cervélo Áspero Rival XPLR AXS — **$5,800**
Triathlon	Canyon Speedmax CF 7 Di2 — **$5,999**; Cervélo P-Series 105 — **$5,300**; P-Series 105 Di2 — **$6,700**; P-Series Rival AXS — **$6,950**; Quintana Roo IRONMAN X-PR — **$5,159**; discounted X-PR electronic builds when available

For road riding, the value question here becomes less about whether the bike is good and more about whether the frame, geometry, component package, dealer, and overall experience are right for you.

MY PICK

For aero performance, compare the **Madone SL 7**, **Aeroad CF SLX 8**, and **Scott Foil RC**. For all-round performance, the **Ultimate CF SLX 8**, **Tarmac SL8 Expert**, **SuperSix EVO**, and **Cervélo Soloist** are all

excellent. For triathlon, compare the **Speedmax CF 7 Di2**, **P-Series 105 Di2**, and an appropriately configured **Quintana Roo X-PR**.

$7,000+

Once the budget exceeds $7,000, there's no objectively correct answer — every major brand makes an exceptional bike here. The purchase becomes much more personal: fit, geometry, dealer relationships, component preferences, wheel choice, aesthetics, and simply wanting a particular bike all matter. Rather than listing every $12,000 component variation on the same frame, these are the premium platforms I'd consider.

Type	Premium platforms
Endurance	Trek Domane SLR; Specialized Roubaix S-Works; Canyon Endurace CF SLX 9 / CFR; Giant Defy Advanced Pro / SL; Cannondale Synapse Carbon 2 SmartSense, Carbon 1 or LAB71; BMC Roadmachine 01; Scott Addict Premium; Cervélo Caledonia-5
Performance	Specialized Tarmac SL8 Pro / S-Works Tarmac SL9; Canyon Ultimate CFR; Giant TCR Advanced Pro / SL; Cannondale SuperSix EVO 1 / LAB71; BMC Teammachine SLR 01; Scott Addict RC; Cervélo Soloist / R5; Orbea Orca premium builds
Aero	Trek Madone SLR; Canyon Aeroad CFR; Giant Propel Advanced Pro / SL; BMC Teammachine R 01; Scott Foil RC; Cervélo S5
Gravel	Trek Checkmate / Checkpoint SL 7; Specialized Diverge Pro; Canyon Grail CFR; Giant Revolt Advanced Pro / SL; Scott Addict Gravel RC; Cervélo Áspero-5
Triathlon	Trek Speed Concept; Canyon Speedmax CF SLX / CFR; Cervélo P-Series premium builds or P5; Quintana Roo V-PR / V-PRi; BMC Speedmachine; Scott Plasma

Current premium pricing ranges from roughly $7,000 to well over $15,000 depending on the platform and component package. At this price I strongly recommend getting professionally fitted before purchasing — especially for a triathlon bike or a bike with a highly integrated cockpit.

Don't ignore discounted bikes

Before buying any bike, ask: Are there previous-year models available? Any discontinued colors discounted? Floor models in my size? Demo bikes? Is a newer generation about to be released? Can the shop include accessories, service, or a fitting? Is there a better bike just above my budget that's been discounted into it?

As of this writing, manufacturers are offering meaningful discounts on bikes such as Canyon's Endurace, Ultimate, Aeroad, and Grail models; Cannondale's Synapse and Topstone models; BMC Roadmachines; Specialized prior-year Roubaix builds; and several Quintana Roo triathlon bikes.

THE TAKEAWAY

Do not buy the wrong size simply because it's discounted. But if the bike fits, matches your goals, and a discount moves a significantly better bike into your budget — **take the deal seriously.**

My final advice

Use these tables to build a shortlist of three to five bikes. Then compare: which are available in your size? Which can you test-ride? Which shop provides the best support? Which geometry best matches your intended riding? And — which bike are you genuinely most excited to own? That last question matters more than people admit. The bike you can't stop looking at is often the bike you'll find excuses to ride.

PART 05

Final Buying Checklist

Before you hand over the money, confirm the following. If you can check these boxes, stop researching — you've made the decision that trips up most beginners.

- [ ] I know what type of bike matches my riding
- [ ] I confirmed the correct size
- [ ] I compared current and discounted models
- [ ] The bike fits within my bike-only budget
- [ ] I reserved money for the equipment I'll need
- [ ] I test-rode the bike when possible
- [ ] I understand what's included with the purchase
- [ ] Any used bike was inspected by someone qualified

> You do not need the perfect bike. You need a good bike that fits your body, matches your goals, falls within your budget, and makes you excited to ride. **The rest comes with experience.**

What to grab next

Choosing the bike is step one. The other resources in this beginner series pick up where this one leaves off — pulled out on purpose so each stays short and does one job well:

- **Cycling Gear Guide + Recommendations** — exactly what equipment to buy (and what can wait), in Budget, Best-Value, and Premium setups.
- **What Every Cyclist Should Carry** — what to carry for tubed or tubeless tires so a flat twenty miles out doesn't strand you.
- **Before Your First Ride** — a one-page checklist to prep the bike, your skills, and your route so ride one goes smoothly.

NEED HELP CHOOSING?

If you've narrowed your options but still can't decide, send me your budget, your height and inseam, the type of riding you want to do, links to the bikes you're considering, your local terrain, and any future goals (racing, long-distance events, triathlons). I'll help you compare options, assess used listings, narrow down sizing, and figure out which bike makes the most sense for you.

christomshack.io

Welcome to cycling. Now go get fitted — and ride.