

# How do you get directions from **here** to **here**?



## Getting the voice directions from your sat nav into your helmet *should* be simple

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**S**AT NAV DEVICES are becoming more common, increasingly being built into cars as part of their standard equipment. If your first experience of a GPS device is on two wheels, you may be happy just looking at the screen, keeping an eye on the distance-to-turn indicator and following the arrows. But if you're used to in-car sat navs, which speak the directions, you may want to hear the directions while you ride as well.

With that in mind, we tested eight Bluetooth headsets, primarily to assess how well they transmit directions from sat navs – using a TomTom Urban Rider, a Garmin Zumo 660 and the latest Garmin

Zumo 350LM. Rider headsets were fitted in a Shoei Neotech flip-front (apart from the Sharktooth).

We also assessed their performance as rider-to-pillion intercoms; as systems for making calls on mobile phones paired to the sat navs; and rated how well they play music when paired directly to an iPhone.

Each one was tested in the same way, for the same length of time, under the same conditions, with the repeatability and accuracy of the results checked by double-testing some units/combinations.

Now, usually that's the kind of bread-and-butter testing we hang the RiDE hat on. It's comprehensive, fair, thorough and repeatable – it'll produce solid results allowing us to confidently name the overall best performer and the best budget products, awarding them Recommended triangles, as well as identifying the product that offers the best balance of price and performance, awarding it out Best Buy triangle for outstanding value for money.

In contrast, this was me spending a week wrestling with unfamiliar gadgets that sometimes did, believe me, appear to be fighting back. Occasionally I would call for help via Facebook, and make some steps in the right direction. But then there would be a fresh setback.

Now, I'm not a total idiot – I have a degree, I'm quite technically minded when it comes to motorcycles – but this took me way outside my comfort zone, dealing with a technology that is both evolving and unclear to the layman. I'm not alone in having these problems.

So treat this as a product guide, assessing how we found these things worked as they came out of the box. It's not a definitive product test in the usual sense, so we will be giving no scores and awarding no triangles, but we will present the results of the most rigorous testing we could devise – and I will share my experience of getting to grips with these products and where I think they fit in the market.

# THE RIDE PRODUCT GUIDE

## CABERG JUST SPEAK EASY

£89.99 [www.feridax.com](http://www.feridax.com)

In the box: Integrated earphones-and-boom-mic Bluetooth unit, charger

Performance	Easy	Fail		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 350LM	●			
Pair to Garmin Zumo 660	●			
Pair to TomTom Urban Rider	●			
Pair to iPhone		●		
Pair to second headset	●			
Sound	Superb	Good	OK	Poor
Sound quality at 30mph		●		
Sound quality at 70mph		●		
Phone call quality			●	
Loudness at max volume		●		
Distortion at max volume	Moderate			
Buttons	N/A			
Usability in winter gloves	●			
Usability in summer gloves	●			



This unit is very simple to use – there's only one button and it sits on the boom

### FITTING AND COMFORT

Pretty simple as there's no external unit to mount on the helmet and the earpieces and the boom mic are all connected. Cheekpads out, stick some Velcro in, detach liner and run the cables behind it. Getting the boom set right is a bit of a pain, as if it's even slightly out of position it gets knocked by the descending chinbar and ends up outside the lid.

### EASE OF USE

It's very simple – there's just one button on the stem of the boom mic which controls the whole thing. It pairs quickly to everything – though after identifying it, the TomTom rejects it (for lacking features – presumably meaning it uses the wrong generation of Bluetooth). It'll only handle intercom and one other thing at a time, but it doesn't claim to do more.

Its major limitation is the lack of an independent volume control – because it defaults to VERY LOUD. Intercom level is actually alright but music and sat nav is a bit fierce. When you try to adjust the volume on the Garmins, both say "Use the Bluetooth headset to adjust the volume". Mercifully, you can adjust phone/music on the iPhone to save your ears.

## SHARK SHARKTOOTH

£199.99 [www.shark-helmets.com](http://www.shark-helmets.com)

In the box: Integrated unit of boom mic, earpieces, battery and control unit, charger, instructions and quick-start guide

Performance	Easy	Fail		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 350LM	●			
Pair to Garmin Zumo 660	●			
Pair to TomTom Urban Rider		●		
Pair to iPhone	●			
Pair to second headset	●			
Sound	Superb	Good	OK	Poor
Sound quality at 30mph		●		
Sound quality at 70mph			●	
Phone call quality			●	
Loudness at max volume		●		
Distortion at max volume	Moderate			
Buttons	Good	OK	Poor	Awful
Usability in winter gloves				●
Usability in summer gloves			●	



Internals fit neatly inside the helmet, though the buttons need a firm push

### FITTING AND COMFORT

Simple. It's designed to go into Shark helmets and it does – very simply. The battery slips into a precast recess at the back of the EPS liner, the rest of the integrated loom slipping into place easily and the slim control unit sticking to the outside of the helmet. Mic is on a boom, even when fitting into a full-face helmet.

### USE

Pretty simple to work, though you can't really feel the buttons – at all with winter gloves on, and only just with summer ones. The compact shape of the unit and the simplicity of the layout saves it: you feel for the unit, work out which end is which, then push accordingly. If nothing happens, you adjust your grip and try again.

The frustration is that it's one thing at a time: intercom or sat nav or music. Headset to headset works OK, though it did clip a little off the start of most sentences. Ditto GPS directions. Never enough to be ambiguous though. Music quality is pretty decent and well audible up to 60mph, with only a little distortion at max volume.



## CHATTERBOX DUO

£99.99 [www.oxprod.com](http://www.oxprod.com)

**In the box:** Bluetooth unit, backplate, internal mic, boom mic, 2x chargers (UK and US plugs), instructions

Performance	Easy	2 tries		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 350LM	●			
Pair to Garmin Zumo 660	●			
Pair to TomTom Urban Rider	●			
Pair to iPhone	●			
Pair to second headset		●		
Sound	Superb	Good	OK	Poor
Sound quality at 30mph			●	
Sound quality at 70mph				●
Phone call quality			●	
Loudness at max volume				●
Distortion at max volume	Minimal			
Buttons	Poor	OK	Poor	Awful
Usability in winter gloves				●
Usability in summer gloves			●	

### FITTING AND COMFORT

Backplate mounts easily and earpieces go in simply. The boom mic is very long and it can't use the point where I've mounted others, or it runs right across the mouth like a brace. Instead I have to mount it almost on top of the earpiece, which is quite awkward and noticeable enough to compromise comfort.

### USE

Rubber-topped buttons take a really stiff press, for a long time: it's a proper work out for the thumbs. Hence an initial fail at pairing the two headsets. Pairs swiftly to all the other devices, but I can only get it to do sat nav or phone, not both.

Music is pretty decent but I can't get the volume button on the unit to do anything; I have to adjust

the volume on the phone. But you can't adjust the GPS volume on the unit – it says “use the Bluetooth headset to adjust” and it's simply too quiet. Barely audible at 30mph, inaudible at 70mph.

This had minimalist instructions and I may have missed a subtlety of set-up, so I hesitate to condemn it.



Chunky buttons are difficult to operate, even when wearing summer gloves

## BLUETRONICS EVO HEADSET/INTERCOM

£55 [bluetronics.co.uk](http://bluetronics.co.uk)

**In the box:** Bluetooth unit, external mount, 2x earpieces, boom mic, instructions and quick-start guide, screwdriver, charger

Performance	Easy	Fail		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 350LM	●			
Pair to Garmin Zumo 660		●		
Pair to TomTom Urban Rider		●		
Pair to iPhone	●			
Pair to second headset	●			
Sound	Superb	Good	OK	Poor
Sound quality at 30mph		●		
Sound quality at 70mph		●		
Phone call quality			●	
Loudness at max volume		●		
Distortion at max volume	Moderate			
Buttons	Good	OK	Poor	Awful
Usability in winter gloves		●		
Usability in summer gloves	●			

### FITTING AND COMFORT

This is very simple to fit. The mount is adjusted by crosshead screws and grips the side of the lid securely. The unit plugs in, earpieces and boom mic are straightforward enough, without too much excess wire, plugging in with a simple mini-USB socket. It's unnoticeable when worn.

### USE

What I like about this is the simple wheel to adjust the volume – and skip songs when listening to music. Easy to find and operate, even with thick winter gloves on. And it really works – much better than any of the button-based volume adjusters here.

In terms of features and spec, this little unit is pretty basic – phone or GPS, not both (unless phone

is paired to GPS). Sound quality is pretty good, but there's a little distortion at maximum volume. It clips the start of each sentence when you're talking and when the GPS kicks in. Music has some momentary clips, but not in the countryside, so perhaps its susceptible to interference around buildings or other electronic devices.



Jog wheel surrounding the phone button makes it easy to adjust the volume



# THE RIDE PRODUCT GUIDE

## INTERPHONE F4

£169.99 [www.nevism.co.uk](http://www.nevism.co.uk)

In the box: Bluetooth unit, 2x external mounts, 2x earpieces, boom mic, wire mic, instructions, charger

Performance	Easy	Fail		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 350LM	●			
Pair to Garmin Zumo 660	●			
Pair to TomTom Urban Rider	●			
Pair to iPhone	●			
Pair to second headset	●			
Sound	Superb	Good	OK	Poor
Sound quality at 30mph	●			
Sound quality at 70mph		●		
Phone call quality		●		
Loudness at max volume		●		
Distortion at max volume	Moderate			
Buttons	Poor	OK	Poor	Awful
Usability in winter gloves				●
Usability in summer gloves			●	

### FITTING AND COMFORT

The clamp is fiddly to fit (I lost half the screws before getting it to feel secure) but the wires are OK, if on the long side, so there's a fair bit of excess to tuck out of the way. It has a boom mic or wire mic – I've fitted the internal mic in a full-face helmet. Comfort is reasonable – earpieces are slim and not too large.

### USE

The F4 pairs fairly easily to everything, but I couldn't get it to stream music off the phone and give sat nav directions and work as an intercom.

The blurb suggests it can do four things at once. In the end I accepted that I could make it do intercom and one other thing at a time (dialling on the phone through the sat nav doesn't count as

two – it's only paired to the sat nav, not the phone), so I judged it on what I could make it do. It's a decent unit with good sound quality and decent headset comfort, let down slightly by small, hard-to-find buttons. But I find it hard to forgive the frustration and confusion it caused. No product should ever make a man as cross as this made me.



Bulky unit has good sound quality but is let down by the small, hard-to-find buttons

## MIDLAND BT NEXT

£399.99 (twin pack) [www.feridax.com](http://www.feridax.com)

In the box: 2x Bluetooth units, 2x backplate/boom mic assemblies

Performance	Easy	Fail		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 350LM		●		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 660	●			
Pair to TomTom Urban Rider		●		
Pair to iPhone	●			
Pair to second headset	Pre-paired			
Sound	Superb	Good	OK	Poor
Sound quality at 30mph	●			
Sound quality at 70mph		●		
Phone call quality			●	
Loudness at max volume		●		
Distortion at max volume	Moderate			
Buttons	Good	OK	Poor	Awful
Usability in winter gloves			●	
Usability in summer gloves		●		

### FITTING AND COMFORT

This unit is a bit of a pain to fit: the backplate has a chunky clasp with short Allen bolts, one of which escaped when fitting (it also comes with a stick-on option). The boom mic mounts internally but, like the earpieces, has miles of wire making it fiddly. Comfort is very good once it's all crammed in.

### USE

Frankly I was surprised how little this unit managed: two of the GPS units identified it then said it was "not a Bluetooth headset". While it paired with the phone so it could receive calls, it wouldn't play music despite being on the A2DP music channel. You can plug a lead in to connect a music player, which at least confirmed that the speakers are

decent, though there is distortion at max volume.

The intercom was good, with decent volume and clarity, without clipping much speech or passing on much wind noise. Phone call quality was also pretty good. It has other features, including an FM radio with a stand-up aerial – though if the aerial was up, it got in the way of the Neotech's drop-down visor.



This unit comes with acres of wires, which means getting a neat fit can be tricky



## SENA SMH-10 TWIN

£329.99 (twin pack) [www.senablueetooth.com](http://www.senablueetooth.com)

In the box: 2x Bluetooth units; 2x backplate/boom mic assemblies; 4x earpieces, 2x minijack input cables, 2x 12v charger leads, 2x mains chargers, instructions

Performance	Easy	Fail		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 350LM	●			
Pair to Garmin Zumo 660	●			
Pair to TomTom Urban Rider	●			
Pair to iPhone	●			
Pair to second headset	●			
Sound	Superb	Good	OK	Poor
Sound quality at 30mph	●			
Sound quality at 70mph	●			
Phone call quality		●		
Loudness at max volume	●			
Distortion at max volume	None			
Buttons	Good	OK	Poor	Awful
Usability in winter gloves		●		
Usability in summer gloves	●			



Sena boasts superb sound quality and doesn't lose any clarity at max volume



### FITTING AND COMFORT

The backplate is secured by small Allen bolts and is tall, so it can't go too far forward because of the flip-front. The mic's boom is on the base of the backplate, so it gets knocked when shutting the flip and ends up outside the helmet, making it a battle to position the mic in the right place. Once it's in place, comfort is good.

### USE

Sound quality is superb, especially for music. This latest version of the SMH-10 is a Bluetooth 3.0 Multipoint unit, which can handle phone and GPS and multiple headsets. Initially, I got intercom and GPS levels too low with the music loud; then voice levels were OK but the music was deafening; then I got all the levels right. The other headset was

better balanced from the off.

My only gripe is the way the boom mic starts outside the helmet, rather than being mounted internally. It's a directional mic but it can be twisted, as I constantly had to poke it inside after closing the flip front helmet (my pillion, with a full face, moved it aside before donning the lid).

## CARDO SCALA RIDER G9

£379.95 [www.cardosystems.com](http://www.cardosystems.com)

In the box: 2x Bluetooth units, 2x baseplate/boom mic assemblies, 4x earpieces, 2x cloth bags for units, 2x minijack inputs, 2x 12v charger leads, 2x mains chargers, instructions

Performance	Easy	Fail		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 350LM		●		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 660	●			
Pair to TomTom Urban Rider		●		
Pair to iPhone	●			
Pair to second headset	Pre-paired			
Sound	Superb	Good	OK	Poor
Sound quality at 30mph	●			
Sound quality at 70mph		●		
Phone call quality		●		
Loudness at max volume	●			
Distortion at max volume	Minimal			
Buttons	Good	OK	Poor	Awful
Usability in winter gloves				●
Usability in summer gloves			●	



Fiddly buttons make this unit difficult to operate

### FITTING AND COMFORT

Uses an Allen key to mount the baseplate (it also has a stick-on option) but it's hard to mount in a position where the external boom could reach the middle of the mouth, without the backplate fouling the flip-front. Slim earpieces make comfort excellent.

### USE

This twin set comes with the units already paired. The basic intercom – which could be either voice or button activated – was perfect most of the time, but sometimes randomly missed the first half of a sentence, or left the mic open after speaking – the manual says it stops “after 30 seconds of silence”. That's a lot of wind noise to listen to.

Overall sound quality is very good, with only minimal distortion to music and a slight sibilance to speech at max volume. It delivered the clearest sat nav directions of the Bluetooth units and phone call quality was excellent. However, I could only get intercom and one other connection: phone for music or GPS.



# THE RIDE PRODUCT GUIDE

## AUTOCOM SPA KIT-2 + BTM-02 BLUETOOTH MODULE

£299 + £79 [www.autocom.co.uk](http://www.autocom.co.uk)

In the box: SPA unit; 2x boom mics, 2x internal mics, 4x earpieces, ambient noise sensor, headset extension leads, stereo music leads, fitting kit. BTM-02 comes with power lead, connection lead and fitting kit

Performance	Easy	Fail		
Pair to Garmin Zumo 350LM	●			
Pair to Garmin Zumo 660	●			
Pair to TomTom Urban Rider	●			
Pair to iPhone	●			
Pair to second headset	●			
Sound	Superb	Good	OK	Poor
Sound quality at 30mph	●			
Sound quality at 70mph	●			
Phone call quality		●		
Loudness at max volume	●			
Distortion at max volume	Moderate			
Buttons	N/A			
Usability in winter gloves	●			
Usability in summer gloves	●			



Autocom system offers more than the helmet-mounted units but can be tricky

### FITTING AND COMFORT

This kit arrived without instructions – which apparently is not how it should come; they were however, easy to find online. If you can fit heated grips, wiring the SPA unit into the bike is straightforward: neutral to the battery, live spliced into a switched live on the bike's loom. Where you site the box and where you run the cables does matter – too near the engine and it may pick up interference. I may have got lucky fitting it to the Trophy: one rerouting of the power wire cured the ticking interference.

The instructions for fitting the headsets were comprehensive, with lots of troubleshooting tips to get the best out of the slim earpieces. It was slow to fit/adjust following the guidelines, especially as the final wire out of the helmet is very chunky, but the headset is very comfortable. This is a wired-to-the-bike system, but it doesn't diminish comfort.

### USE

Set-up is everything. There is no volume control on the headsets, there are no buttons... everything is set and adjusted on the unit. This meant it took about three hours to get it properly set up before we could start testing... though of course, those three hours ARE part of the testing process.

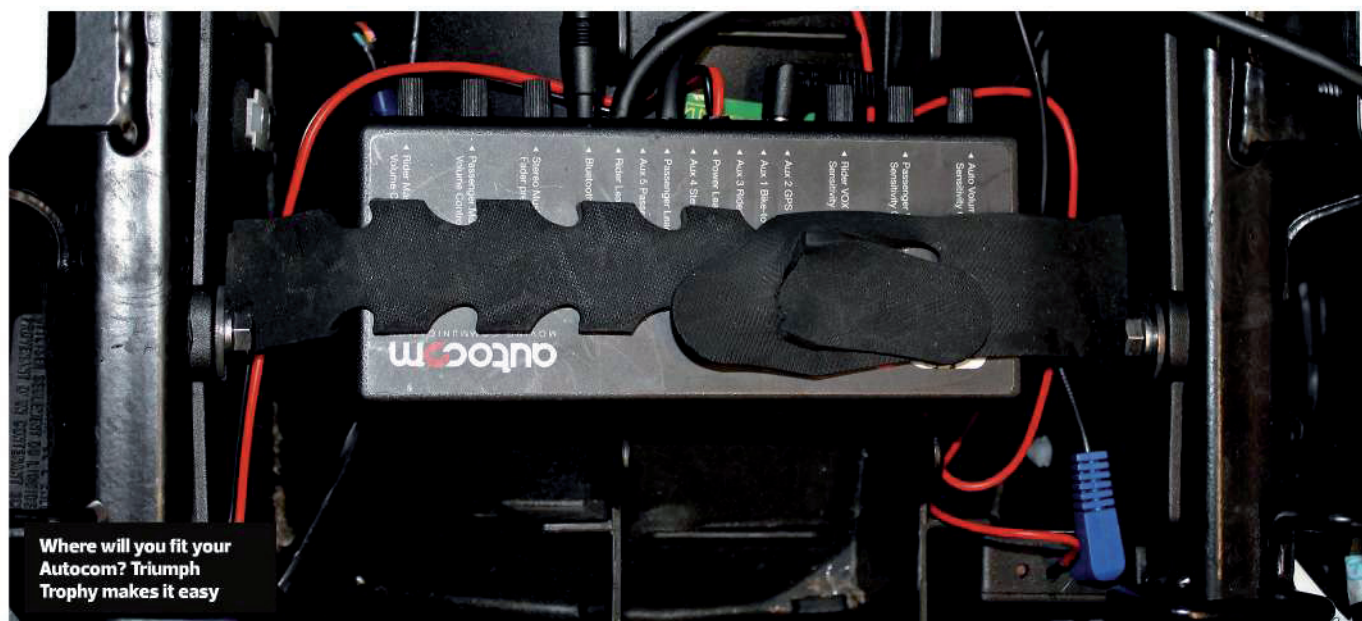
It's just a case of being methodical, turning the small adjusters in small movements. It's worth taking the time because when it is right, the sound quality is outstanding – definitely the best here. The unit uses an ambient noise sensor in the rider's helmet to compensate for increases in the level of wind noise as your speed changes. You can set individual volume levels for rider and pillion. It handled the music superbly.

The voice-activated intercom was crisp and clear, though it would generally clip the first half a word (you soon start every sentence "Now" or "OK" to

compensate). However, it never clipped sat nav directions and they were always crisp and clear. The quality of the phone calls was excellent too.

That's the good stuff – its performance is excellent. For me, the downside was the set-up stuff. OK, my kit came without instructions, which was an error – but even after finding them and fitting the unit I still had a box full of mysterious leads that are presumably meant to plug into some of the holes on the unit – sockets for MP3 players or for rider's phone and pillion's phone. Potentially very clever and useful, but there's no guidance on how to make sense of this bit.

That sounds like a big gripe, and it is. However, a lot of Autocom systems are sold and fitted by bike dealers – who will not only install it quickly and help you set it up properly, but will also help you configure it to suit you and get the best out of it.



Where will you fit your Autocom? Triumph Trophy makes it easy



## WHAT ABOUT BUILT-IN BLUETOOTH?

### TRIUMPH TROPHY SE

£14,299 [www.triumphmotorcycles.co.uk](http://www.triumphmotorcycles.co.uk)

Triumph's Trophy SE tourer comes with an audio system designed to link to Bluetooth devices. You can pair two devices to it – two headsets; one headset and a Garmin Zumo 660; a phone and a headset; or you can connect your MP3 player through the USB slot in the fairing pocket, hook your phone up to the sat nav and get directions, music and phone calls in your helmet. The sat nav can be wired into the audio system, to give directions and music through the speakers or headset. Or some combination thereof...

In use, it's pretty simple. Setting it all up needs

**“Volume adapts to velocity, so it's clear at lower speeds too”**

to be done when the bike is stationary – it's easily handled by the main information rocker and pushbutton that also control the trip computer. Pairing is simple and fast, with options displayed on the dash.

What's the sound like through the bike's



Quick and easy to use: the Trophy system works as a hub

speakers? Loud enough to make directions audible, even at 70mph, though clarity is better at 60mph. Volume adapts to velocity, so it's still clear without being over the top at lower speeds. The appeal of the system is its flexibility, with the option of having music on speakers or in the

helmet. You need to connect the sat nav to the audio system and use the USB-connection in the fairing pocket for the MP3 player get full benefit, but it's great with a two-headset intercom, for those who don't want to ride past primary schools with Rage Against The Machine blaring.

### Q WHEN IS BLUETOOTH NOT SO SMART? A WHEN IT'S THE WRONG BLUETOOTH

We had a few problems with units not wanting to do what we wanted them to do.

The problem is that there are different versions of Bluetooth, with different abilities. Most headsets will be Bluetooth 2.0 or 2.1, though the smart ones will be 3.0. For devices to communicate, the version on the headset must be compatible with the version on the phone or sat nav. On top of which, there are different profiles of Bluetooth. The main one to look for is A2DP – which allows dual-channel (stereo) audio, which is what you need to play music.

And then you have the number of channels on the device, which is where we really struggle to get a handle on what's going on. Basically, the majority of headsets can handle two other devices at once. The smart ones can handle multiple inputs – so they can pair to several other headsets, a phone and a sat nav. The trouble is, most of them seem to promise to do the lot... when in fact they can really only do two things at once.

## What I learnt

THESE ARE COMPLICATED devices that generally have confusing – if not downright misleading – supporting material, appearing to promise more than the unit can actually deliver.

I did eventually reach the point of picking a couple of favourites out of the pack: the basic Bluetronics Evo isn't the best performer here but it is functional, affordable and easy to use. The more expensive Sena SMH-10 is the all-singing, all-dancing best performer and also has by far the best sound quality if you like listening to music on motorways.

However, even that one is pipped at the sound-quality post by the traditional wired-into-the-bike Autocom system. And as well as sounding best, it's the easiest to use. I wasn't blown away by the supporting information to help you get to grips with it, but I was blown away by the quality and ease of use once it's installed. The product's great, but you'll need to buy it from a dealer if you want customer service too. It is expensive, but if you do a lot of two-up miles and quality matters, the Autocom does still make sense.

Two caveats: I didn't assess the bike-to-



Intercoms are great for keeping pillions happy

bike capabilities of these units. Many offer it (though the Autocom requires expensive bike-to-bike radios). And, as I said at the very outset, this is unfamiliar technical territory for me and I don't discount the possibility that one of these may have outwitted me, making itself look bad in the process. So my final recommendation is this: if one of these units appeals to you, don't buy it off the internet – find a dealer who can talk you through its features, show you how to set it up or, better still, set it up for you when you buy it. [ride@ride.co.uk](mailto:ride@ride.co.uk)

How about you? Tell us about your experiences – good and bad – with fitting and using intercoms. Email us at [ride@ride.co.uk](mailto:ride@ride.co.uk)