

Get a grip, man

When it comes to winter riding cold hands cause an annoyance like nothing else, **Mike Beddows** has tested eight of the best heated grips on the market to help you keep your digits warm when the temperature drops

With winter well and truly upon us, most of you hardy adventure riders will still be out and about on your bikes. The cold at this time of year can really take its toll on the body and one of the most vulnerable areas to the lower temperatures are your hands. There's no getting away from the fact that having two cold hands will really affect your riding performance and could even put you at risk as your reaction times decrease. Winter is a fantastic time to ride, and those seasonal riders who do not ride all year round are really missing out. With a few warm layers and some heated grips a cold weather ride can be just as comfortable as a mid-summer blast.

Heated grips are great additions to any bike, in fact we think motorcycle manufacturers of adventure and touring models should include them as standard. If none are fitted, they are the first things that I add. My hands are very susceptible to the cold throughout the year, and if you're touring in the Alps in the summer it's not uncommon for temperatures at the top of passes to dip below freezing, so I do not consider heated grips to be a seasonal accessory.

Having them permanently on the bike means that if the temperatures do dip, all it takes is the flick of a button and heat will soon warm your hands.

There are a several makes of heated grips on the market, each with different pros and cons as highlighted in this review. The main concern and first hurdle encountered by all is how complicated they are to fit. What I've found from

testing the eight grips in this review is that it is not actually that difficult, and on average, if you don't rush, you can have a pair fitted within 30 minutes.

Some riders do not like the feel of heated grips due to their added thickness (you can buy heating elements that you fit under your existing grips if this is your concern), though I suspect this is usually down to the size of a riders hands. As mine are big I've never found the thickness of the grips an issue.

When I fit heated grips I consider them a permanent fixture, but with care they can be removed safely and easily, though this does, of course, depend how much glue is applied.

When it comes to what to look for in a heated grip, there's no point in fitting a set if they do not transmit enough heat to your hands. Some grips are better than others in this regard, with a few



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Heated grips are essential when the temperature drops

examples really disappointing in their heat output. Other considerations are how easy the controller is to use, especially with thick gloves on.

As well as heated grips you may also consider heated gloves, specialist winter gloves, handlebar muffs, or a combination of all these. My own personal preference is heated gloves with heated grips. Grips are great at warming the palms of your hands but do nothing about the back of them. Obviously having warm blood from the heated grips circulating will help, but heated gloves specifically target the individual fingers and areas where grips can't warm. To have both means a steep financial outlay, and if cost is an issue handlebar muffs and decent winter gloves are a more suitable option. It really all depends on the riding you will be doing. ►

HEAT

The primary function of a heated grip is to keep your hands warm. There's no point purchasing a set of heated grips that do not perform well in this primary function.

A simple test that I performed was to check the temperature of the grips after zero-four minutes. A lot of internet research stated that heated grips could get up to 50C and this normally takes about four minutes. I purchased an IR Micro Infrared non contact thermometer for surface temperature measurement to undertake the test.

The results were interesting and demonstrated that most grips achieved a reasonable temperature in the four minutes. The Oxford Hot Hands achieved a high temperature after one minute, but the Oxford Adventure finally achieved the highest temperature in the time period, getting close to 50C.

HOW TO FIT HEATED GRIPS...

You've made the decision that riding with numb, painful hands isn't how you want to do things anymore so you've gone out and bought a pair of heated grips.

It's now time to fit them. While some instructions say that you need a qualified person to fit them, it's not a difficult job and, as long as you are willing to have a go, you will realise that they can be fitted in no time at all.

The first job is to make sure the grips you have just purchased actually work and are not faulty. You don't want to go through the process of fitting them only to find out that they do not work and you have to take them back off!

1 To test them, simply connect the ring terminals (assuming they come with ring connectors) to your battery, and connect the new grips to any connector blocks, attaching the temperature controller as well. You don't need to route any wire or fit the grips to do this test. Now turn the controller on and make sure the grips get warm. If they don't, then check all the wiring. Turn the ignition and start your bike. Try the grips again. If they don't work then it's possible they are faulty.

2 If they work, it's now time to remove your existing grips, whether these are heated or not. First, you may have to remove and hand guards or bar ends. Once off you can get to the grips. The chances are most grips will have been glued on, therefore removing may require cutting (if you're removing old heated grips, make sure that you have removed any connectors to the battery before starting). Take it steady, try to twist and turn to see if the grip comes loose. If not, carefully slide a blade between the bar and the grip to cut through any glue. Failing this, carefully cut the grips and remove. You will then need to remove any glue residue from both bars before fitting the new grips.



3 The final stage is to fit the newly purchased heated grips. The first step is to connect the wires to the battery and then route them through your frame towards the handlebars. You may need to remove panels, or possibly the tank in order to do this. Cable tie the wires to your frame to keep them in position.

4 The next step is to 'dry' mount your grips. Make sure they are in the correct position, check the instructions if unsure. It's important that the brake and clutch levers can both operate without the grips hindering movement.

5 They may need trimming at this stage, this is easily done with a sharp knife once in place. Make sure you don't remove too much, or cut into the heated element, consult the instructions to see if there is an acceptable 'cutting range'.



4

6 Next mount the controller. Do not rush this part as it is important that you mount it in the best possible place on your bike.



5



6



7



8

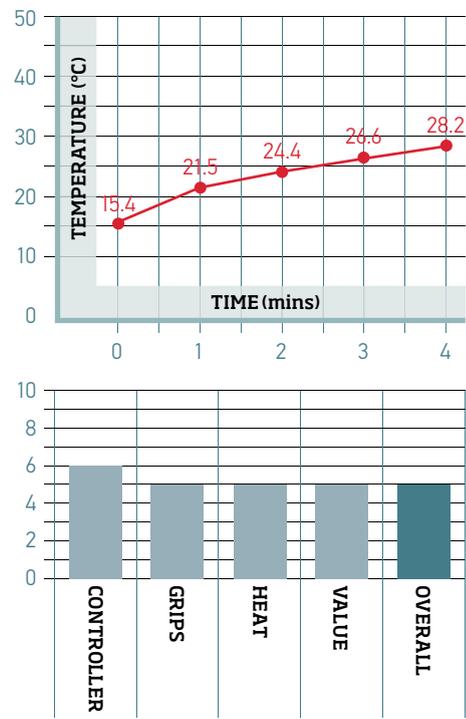
7 If you are happy with how everything is set up it's now time to glue the grips in place. Work quickly and carefully as you don't want to get glue everywhere or permanently fix in the wrong location. Remove the grips, apply the glue along and around the bars. Now slide the grips back into position.

8 Finally you will be left with a lot of cables. After installing the Oxford Adventure grips I was left with three cables, one from each of the grips and one from the controller. I routed these along existing wiring, cable tying along the way. Pick a suitable place where you want all the extra wire to go and aim to get everything there as neatly as possible. Once all together apply electrical tape and create a neat bundle that can be tied out of the way.



Congratulations, you have just fitted heated grips to your bike that will really benefit you on the colder days!

Bikeit Heated Grips

£35
www.adventurebike.co.uk
ABR Rating: 5/10


The packaging for these grips is fairly basic and this sets the tone for the enclosed product. A major concern for me was the lack of instructions as there are none enclosed. Of course, this isn't a problem if you know what you are doing, but everyone has to start somewhere and fit their first set of grips, so I'd be at a loss if I had to go about starting the fitting process without decent instructions to back things up.

In my preliminary research I discovered that the grips had a claimed heat range of up to 40C, though testing revealed that these were the poorest grips in this group review for heat output, only managing 28.2C after four minutes (for comparison, other grips were above 40C after the same amount of time). With that in mind, if you want a grip that heats up quick and offers a good amount of warmth (and who doesn't?), then this isn't the product for you

(unless the grips I was testing were faulty in any way).

Heat output is controlled via a dial so that you can control the temperature from a low to high setting. In use you the controller is big and bulky and it's not really something I would want on my bike. It's too large for a simple heat controller and I struggled to find a place to attach it.

The ends of the grips require cutting to size if you have hand guards on your bike, though there is not much spare grip to cut off (without damaging the heating element) which created an additional problem. My throttle did not move freely due to the poor sizing and I was reluctant to try cutting more off as I didn't want to break the element.

There are easy-to-install ring connectors to attach the grips to your bike's battery terminal and the wires are coated in a durable plastic which will help prevent damage from

PROS AND CONS

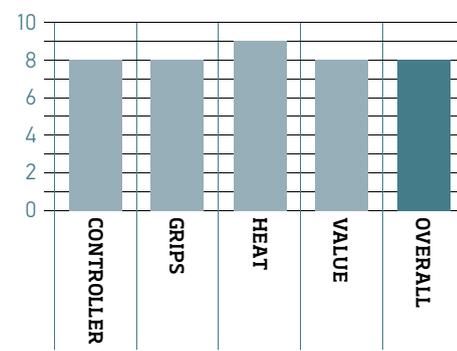
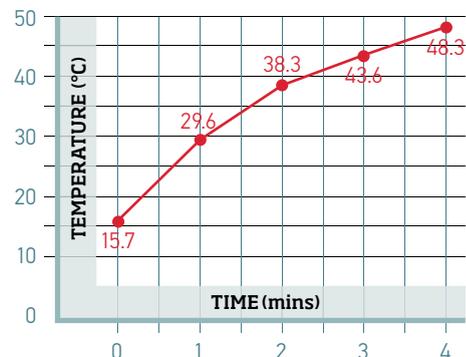
- ✓ Adjustable heat controller
- ✗ No instructions
- ✗ Poor heat
- ✗ Bulky controller

extended use. The labelling on the connectors is confusing. There are three connectors coming from the battery loom, and you attach both grips and the controller to these. All connectors are the same size and colour which means in theory you can plug any end to any other end. The connectors have labels on, a controller, and a positive and a negative symbol. But without any instructions it is not straight forward to understand what plugs into what.

In a line: A good price point, but difficult to fit and not much warmth



Bike Tek Heated Grips

£36
www.adventurebike.co.uk
ABR Rating: 8/10


Coming in at £36 we have the Bike Tek Heated Grips. These have an excellent heat output, third highest on test behind the two Oxford Products grips, which is a major selling point especially if you want warm hands really quickly, and let's face it, you buy these to get warm hands. This and the low price make these a really good choice.

I'm not keen on the brand name on the actual grips, but this is only a minor gripe. They do look good and have one of the lowest diameters (34mm) making them an ideal choice for those with smaller hands, or those who prefer thinner grips. When fitting, they were easy to slide onto the handlebars, but this isn't always a good thing as easy on means easy off, so they will require more glue to secure than other, tighter fitting grips.

The controller is small and compact and it is operable via two simple, easy-to-use buttons that allow you to increase or decrease the temperature. I especially like controllers like this, rather than those with sliders or dials, as they're easier to operate when gloved up. The Bike Tek grips have four heat settings and these are displayed by different coloured LEDs from blue (lower setting) to red (getting warmer). The controller bracket is very easy to mount, though the controller is only fixed to the bracket by a double sided sticky pad, a method which could be improved upon as sticky pads have a habit of becoming 'un-sticky' over time.

The instructions are on a single sheet of A4 and are clear and concise. They do state that the grips need to be fixed in place with glue, but no glue is included which is a shame.

I was impressed at how easily the wires

PROS AND CONS

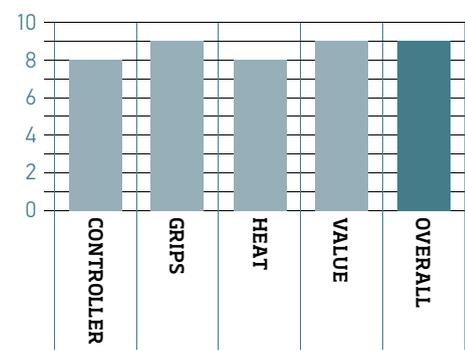
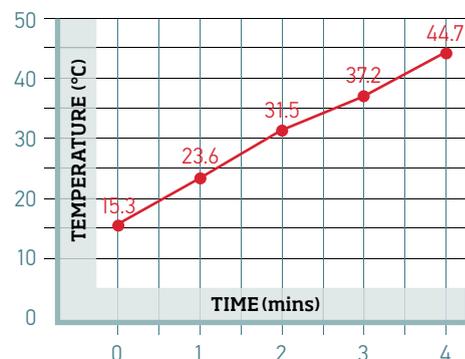
- ✓ Easy-to-use controller
- ✓ Good heat
- ✓ Low price
- ✗ Controller attaches to mount with sticky pad
- ✗ No glue included

connected to the battery and each other during the installation process (all being good, chunky connectors). The main wire that had to be routed through my bike's frame and fairing was coated in plastic for extra durability.

In a line: Good grips with a low profile.



R&G Heated Grips

£39
www.rg-racing.com
ABR Rating: 9/10


The R&G Heated Grips are a fantastic price when you consider what's on offer. They look great (as much as heated grips can) and the packaging is very professional, while the contents don't let things down either. They have the lowest profile of any of the other grips on test at only 33mm, making them great for riders that do not like large grips or have small hands.

There are five heat settings on the controller and these are easily selected using a single large button to navigate between them. You press it each time you want to get to the next heat setting and it's easy to use with a gloved-up hand. The sixth press turns the controller off, and the seventh back on to the first setting, and so on. The controller is small and compact and can be mounted using a very simple clamp around the bars, although the screws to attach this are very small, and with

extended, hard use I'd be concerned about the robustness of the controller mount. The controller attaches to the mount using a sticky pad, but there are extra screws if you want a permanent attachment. You can also attach the controller to any flat surface on your bike using the supplied sticky pad.

All of the connectors are of a good quality and are very robust. The negative battery terminal has a ring connector but the positive wire does not which is both odd and a shame. The wires leading from the battery end have an added coating of plastic covering to protect them as they are routed through your bike's fairing to the handlebars.

The instructions are clear and concise and are supplied on a single sheet of A4 paper. Unfortunately there is no glue provided to help attach the grips, even though the instructions suggest an adhesive may be required. As

PROS AND CONS

- ✓ Simple to use
- ✓ Price
- ✗ No ring connector on live feed

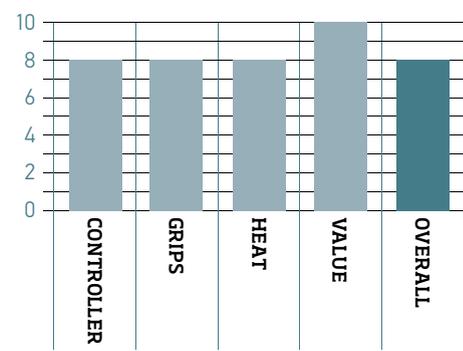
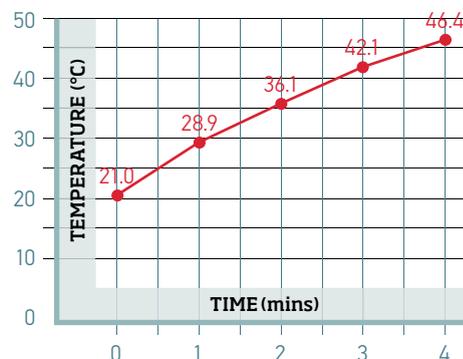
the grips were fairly easy to get onto my bars additional glue would be required for a permanent fit.

In terms of warmth, the R&G heated grips had the fifth hottest heat output, measuring 44.7C on our thermometer after four minutes. Compare this with the 49.8C of the Oxford Adventure grips and it's pretty impressive when you consider the price of these, and the fact that if you shop around you can get them far cheaper.

In a line: Fantastic product at a fantastic price.



Motopro Snug Grips

£40
www.motohaus.com
ABR Rating: 8/10


The MotoPro Snug Grips are a fantastic purchase at a great price. They look fantastic and everything comes pre-attached in the box meaning it is extremely easy to figure out how to fit them to your bike.

There are instructions on the rear of the box rather than a separate sheet of paper and I'm a fan of doing it this way. It's far better to have the instructions as part of the packaging as it means you can easily see what you are letting yourself in for when buying.

The ends of the grips are open meaning you do not have to cut anything which is great, and superglue is included which may be required to secure the grips to stop them spinning. The downside to these grips is

that the live battery feed exists as a bare wire. I'd much prefer to see a ring connector pre-attached but for the price it's only a minor gripe. The instructions point out that the live wire is best soldered, but this also points to the wire having to be 'soldered' elsewhere (ignition feed) as you would not solder directly to the battery. I added a ring connector and connected it directly to my battery.

The controller is compact and robust looking while also being extremely easy to fit to the handlebars. You have to open the bracket up and slide it over the bars. It's then a simple case of a single bolt to secure it. Additional features include a dial allowing you to adjust the temperature and an LED light on the controller to show that the grips

PROS AND CONS

- ✓ Good price point
- ✓ Easy to mount controller
- ✓ Fully adjustable heat control
- ✗ No ring connector on live wire

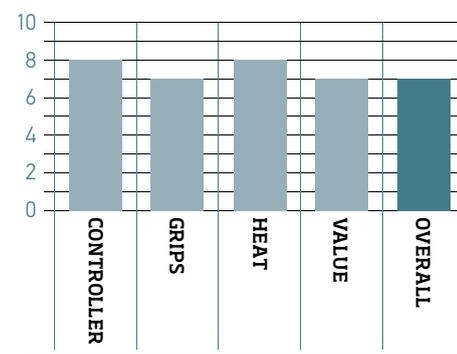
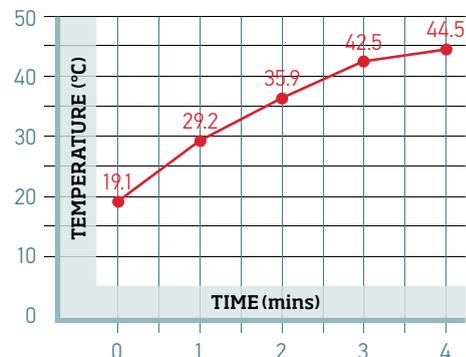
are switched on.

For the price I don't think you can go wrong with these grips. At less than half the cost of the most expensive on test these are without doubt the best budget buy, they're easy to fit and they warm up quickly and to a satisfactory temperature.

In a line: A great product that won't break the bank.



Gear Gremlin FHG-1

£50
www.thekeycollection.co.uk
ABR Rating: 7/10


Coming in at £50 are the FHG-1 grips from Gear Gremlin. They are fairly plain and could really do with more of a pattern on them to provide more grip in wet conditions as the smooth surface can become quite slippery.

The instructions are relatively poor; just a single A4 sheet of paper and these do not explain how to actually fit the grips. If I hadn't previously fitted several sets I wouldn't know where to start as most of the information is regarding the four different types of controllers that are available even though only one is included. There are also bullet points describing artificial rubber which hardly helps when it comes to fitment.

Additionally, the live wire feed doesn't have a ring connector and even though there are some people who wire their grips to the ignition feed (advantage being

when the ignition is off it turns the grips off automatically) and solder, many people will simply want to connect direct to their battery for ease (I'm one of these). To do this with these grips means you will have to have access to spare ring connectors and crimps. Not a big job, but at the price I'd expect a ring connector as standard.

The ends of the grips will require cutting for anyone with hand guards as they only have a hole for bar ends. Leaving the end in place will result in them not fitting correctly and will hinder throttle movement. They are easy enough to cut though. Be aware not to cut into the heating elements as you will ruin the grips, something that's not highlighted in the instructions.

The controller is fairly chunky and robust which I like, and has a low and high setting and comes with the best mounting system

PROS AND CONS

- ✓ Simple to use
- ✓ Robust Controller
- ✗ Poor instructions
- ✗ Plain grips
- ✗ No ring connector on live feed

on test. It's very simple to bolt to the handlebars and there's no need to mess about with a mounting kit as it's all built into the controller.

I like the fact all the wires are attached to each other within the packaging as there's no need to guess what connects where.

In a line: Robust, simple to mount controller.

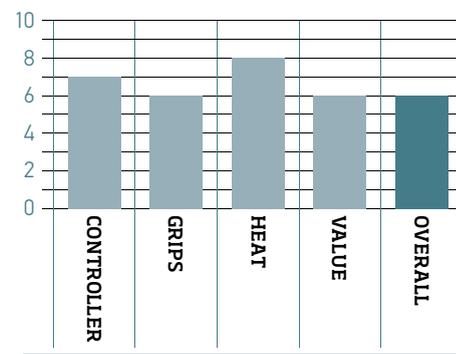
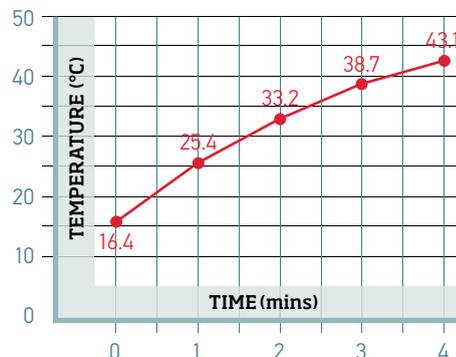


DataTool Therma Grips

£56

www.datatool.co.uk

ABR Rating: **6/10**



The DataTool Therma Grips are unique in the fact that the controller is built into the left hand grip. This saves the need to have to locate somewhere convenient to mount the controller. These grips, along with the Oxford Adventure grips, turn off when the ignition is switched off (if you wire any of the others directly to the battery they will always remain on, assuming the controller is on, regardless of whether the ignition is on or off). This is a great benefit to stop flat batteries and it is far easier to connect direct to a battery than to wire into the ignition.

The grips are obviously branded and I would have preferred to see more effort gone into the design of the grip rather than just writing the firm's name on them. They'll require manual cutting of the ends to ensure a perfect fit. As there is no separate controller

the wires are easily attached using good quality connectors and the process is made simpler due to the fact that there are only two wires. Unfortunately I was unable to fit the grips to my bars as the throttle grip was extremely tight and only just squeezed on after a lot of twisting. The left hand one was even tighter and I was unable to fit it. Inside the grips there are four grooves and while I expect they will be OK to fit to a smooth bar, mine (as have all my previous bikes) are patterned on the end to help the metal grip the rubber. It would take a lot of force, and potentially damaging the grips to get them on.

The most positive thing about these grips is the comprehensive colour instruction book. I urge all other manufacturers to take note of this as they are fantastic and really explain how to fit the grips in easy steps.

PROS AND CONS

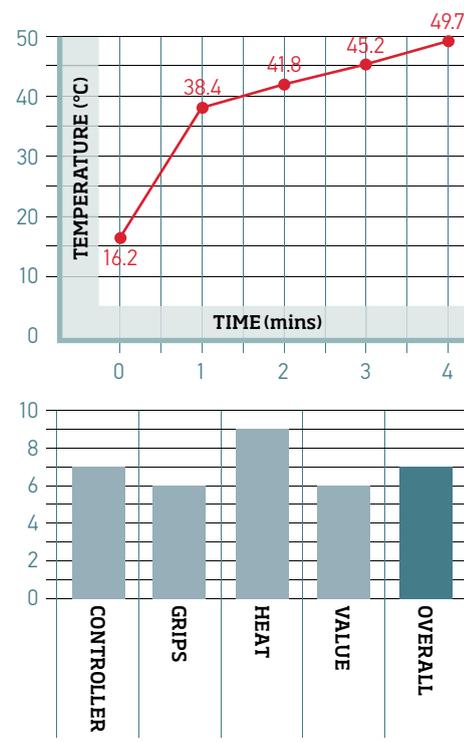
- ✓ Integrated controller
- ✓ Simple design
- ✓ Great instructions
- ✗ Controller clunky
- ✗ Doesn't fit to my left bar
- ✗ Branded grips

The controller attached to the grip is a bit too clunky for my liking though there are four settings which are achieved by sliding the switch. A small LED on the throttle grip indicates whether the grips are working, but this is a bit on the small side and hard to see.

In a line: Perfect for those that do not want flat batteries, though make sure they fit your bars.



Oxford Hot Hands

£69.99
www.oxprod.com
ABR Rating: 7/10


Oxford Hot Hands are different from the other heated grips on test in that you can easily remove these from the bike when needed. This is because they are wrap-around warmers that simply attach on top of your existing grips. They do however still have an on/off controller and plug into the bike's battery feed. I can't say I'm a fan of these type of grips but they definitely do have a market for those that do not want (or like) them to be permanent fitments on their bikes.

The instructions are very clear and concise which helps the fitting process. They are attached by wrapping them around your existing grips and are held in place by Velcro. My only concern with this is if they ever came loose they would effectively spin in the hand, thus causing a loss of throttle control, so it's important to make sure you fit them both

correctly and tightly to prevent this happening.

A basic controller features a simple on/off switch with a green LED light to indicate if they are on or not, but they have no temperature control which is rather disappointing. Sometimes they can simply be too warm which is just as distracting as having cold hands.

I am also not a fan of the way the controller attaches to the bike. It is curved to enable it to go around the bars, but it is actually fitted with a sticky pad and this pad can only be placed on a flat surface which restricts where it can actually go. The instructions do state that the metal mounting bracket has been superseded by a much easier sticky pad, but this defeats the purpose of over grips as when the time comes to remove the grips, you will have to leave the controller stuck to the bike.

As these grips are wrapped around the existing ones on your bike, they do tend to

PROS AND CONS

- ✓ Easy to fit
- ✓ No need to remove your existing grips
- ✓ Compact controller
- ✗ Potentially could slip if loose
- ✗ Price
- ✗ Inadequate mounting solution

feel a lot bulkier than a normal set of grips which may put some people off. Having said that, they heat up the quickest and have the greatest heat transfer rate after a minute by a long shot. But as I've mentioned above, there is no heat control and this may prove to be too warm for some.

In a line: If you want quickly removable grips these are ideal.



Oxford Adventure Grips

£79.99
www.oxprod.com
ABR Rating: 10/10

These are the most expensive grips on test but as with most things in life, you really do get what you pay for. This is a fantastic product that ticks all the boxes I look for when purchasing heated grips and although the price is high compared to other grips on test, it is possible to shave £20 or so off if you shop around.

The packaging is fantastic while the box and contents look very professional. The instruction booklet has some images in colour and features the most in-depth guide to fitting grips that I have seen which is of great benefit to those who have never fitted heated grips before.

They have been ergonomically designed and feature five different patterns depending on which part of your hand is in contact with them. There are locations for comfort, feel, grip and control.

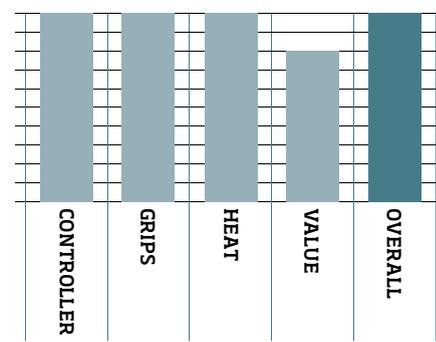
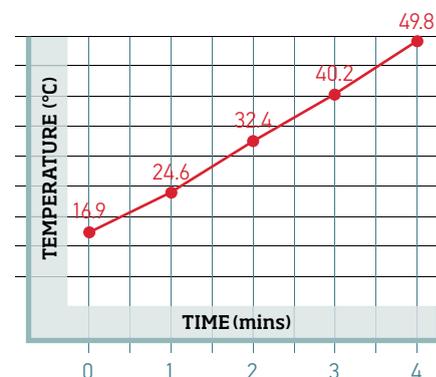
The controller is the best looking on test with five various heat zones (30%, 40%, 50%, 75% and 100%) and the different settings are achieved with two buttons, one to go up the range and one to go down the range.

A great feature of the Oxford Adventure grips is the intelligent heat control which automatically switches the product off once the ignition is killed – stopping flat batteries. Thankfully, the controller is also very easy to operate.

Although the product comes with a mount,



it's worth noting that it doesn't clamp to the bars as with other mounts on test. I can't say I'm that keen on this kind of mount so it's worth checking where it can be attached first. I managed to find a suitable location on my bike by replacing my hand guard clamp for the controller mount. The controller can then be attached to the mount using a sticky pad, and backed up with additional screws.



PROS AND CONS

- ✓ Simple to use
- ✓ Fantastic controller
- ✓ Ergonomic grips
- ✗ Controller mount may be an issue for some

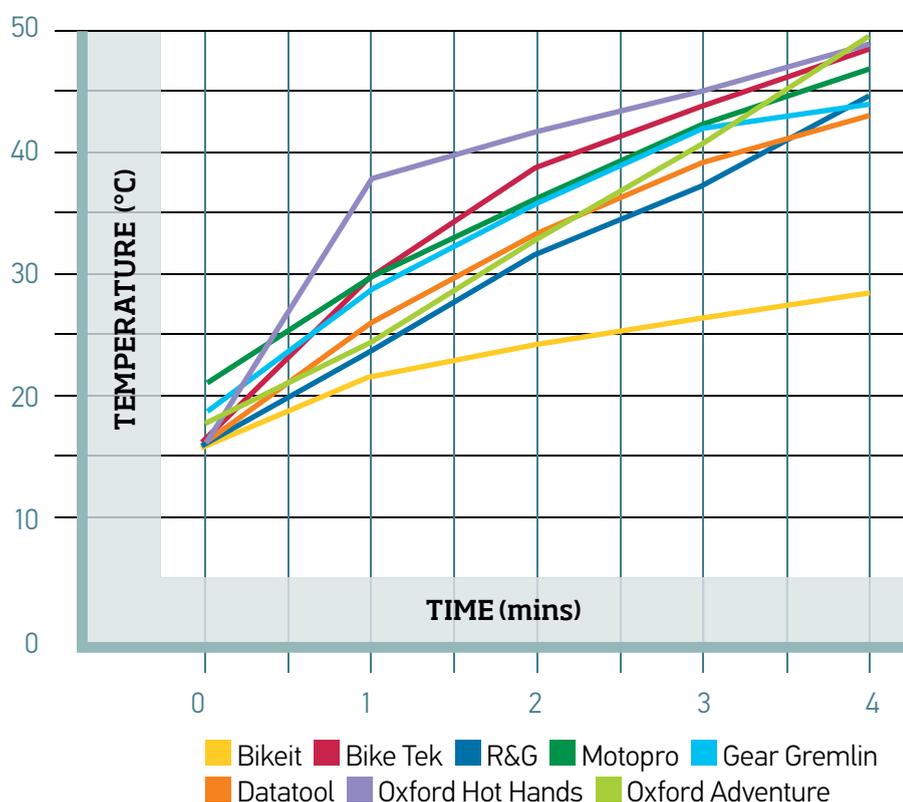
The sticky pads can also be used to attach the controller to any flat surface on the bike.

On top of that, the product comes with a small tube of glue for securing the grips to the bars, and both battery wires have ring connectors attached. The grips are 35mm thick meaning they aren't that big or bulky and are a possibility for those that prefer thinner style grips.

In a line: A very well designed product and best in test.



Conclusion



After testing eight of the most popular heated grips on the market, it was interesting to see the quality of products across the price range. While it's true that you get what you pay for, as evidenced by the ABR Best in Test award going to the Oxford Adventure Grips, there are some great grips to be had at affordable prices. Only the Bikeit grips dissatisfied in their heat output, struggling to reach a tepid 30C in our four minute temperature test, the results of which can be seen on the graph to the left. In terms of warmth for money, the Bike Tek heated grips, at just £36 (second lowest in price), impressed by coming in third place after four minutes. Most of the grips, Datatool aside, were easy to fit and would be a simple, 30 minute job for most riders, even those who consider themselves mechanically illiterate. **ABR**