

COMPACT FOLDERS

If you always want the option of cycling, you need a bike that's small enough to take anywhere. Chris Juden tests a Mezzo D10 and Brompton S2L



Folding bikes make trains and buses useful. They go the extra mile: from the station, tram or bus stop, to where you actually live or need to be. And as town centres become increasingly charged with congestion, folding bikes are saving drivers time and money too. Any folder will do, but small packed size, speed of folding and ease of carrying make things much easier.

CTC now has staff all over the country, engaged in diverse local projects to promote cycling. Where this involves a lot of travel around their locality, a company folding bike comes with the job. Generally this is a Brompton: the dependably made-in-Britain, compact commuting folder par excellence. But a few picked the Mezzo: also British designed, also compact, same size wheels and with a very similar fold, but also with several major differences, including an alloy frame that's made abroad.

We decided to illustrate this

review with models of Brompton and Mezzo that minimise weight and maximise performance. A lighter bike is not only easier to carry, but also quicker to accelerate and less effort uphill.

Brompton

'Nothing is standard' begins the model choosing page of Brompton's website, since each bike is made according to the customer's choices from a long menu of frame, handlebar, gearing and other equipment options. For those unaccustomed to à la carte bicycle purchase, Brompton's chef has some 'key model' menu suggestions. We chose key model S2L, described as 'the lightest Brompton... a nimble two-speed bike that can handle most journeys'.

Though this iconic bike is often mentioned in Cycle, it's a long time since we reviewed a Brompton and much has changed. They used to come with a single or three-speed hub, the option of a carrier plus dynamo

and in any colour you liked – as long as it was red and black! They came out of one small and tightly run factory, now grown much bigger and enabled by modern manufacturing systems to offer more choice without sacrificing efficiency. See Cycle F/M 09 (on the web) for more info.

At 12.9 kilos my 20 year-old 'T3' Brommie is hefty hand-baggage. This S2L saves 2kg (almost 5lb) and it makes a palpable difference. This difference will be most appreciated by smaller, less strong cyclists. My colleague Cherry Allan, who also has an older Brompton which she finds a challenge to cart up and down railway steps, found the S2L not nearly so heavy.

The lightening comes mostly from swapping a heavy hub-gear for a simple 2-speed derailleur: a modification of the tensioner every Brompton already has to reel in the chain when it folds. No carrier or lights and a bit less handlebar also make savings. If we'd chosen key model S2L-X, with titanium fork and rear triangle, we could have saved another kilo but would have increased the price by £450. A neat thing about either two-speed is the bell built into the shifter.

Mezzo

We reviewed a Mezzo D9 in D/J 06, asking the same question: can it compete with a Brompton? We thought yes: being lighter but more bulky to carry and not so simple to fold but possibly better to ride – if you simply wanted more gears and weren't bothered about the range. Five years later and Mezzo's top model has one more gear and thankfully more range, far more than the S2L, but not as much as a 6-speed Brompton, which would actually make a better comparison.

We've only parked the Brompton like this for illustration purposes. It actually sits neatly on its tucked under rear wheel



All the things we liked about the Mezzo first time around (and thought Brompton would do well to copy) are still there, with several small improvements: including a much more elegant monocoque-style frame (initially on this model only) and a re-designed front wheel fold that's quicker and no longer imperils the brake adjuster. The rear carrier now has a pair of skate wheels at the back so you can drag the folded bike, and accepts a purpose-made bag, which Amy Hickman, our Bike Club Officer around Edinburgh, finds handy.

Amy agrees that the Mezzo is a puzzle to fold, but thanks to a video on YouTube (X_pmJ78wDf8) she now has the knack and thinks it's worth it for the gears, as she scales the volcanic hills of Auld Reekie! I wasn't so impressed by the gears on our review bike, which could not be adjusted so they indexed consistently in spite of being brand new. I reckon there are just too many bends in the cable adding too much friction – for 10-speed anyway. Maybe a D9 is the more reliable choice?

Folding

One word describes the Brompton's folding and that's 'neat'. In the moments when a few deft moves transform that compact bundle of parts into a

fully functional bicycle, every Brompton owner becomes a magician. Expect admiring glances and enquiring questions, as my colleague Sara Basterfield observes: 'It's a real conversation starter. People come up and start chatting to you.' Her favourite was the young bride-to-be who confided that she and hubby were to get a pair of Bromptons as a wedding present.

So: the Brompton folds all neat and tidy, with the chain on the inside of the package so you don't really need to put it in a bag (although some jobsworths will nevertheless insist on that, and Brompton do supply a suitable bag) and it folds really quickly. The record is something like 10 seconds, but anyone can do it in half a minute, so no worries about missing your train. Cherry Allan says: 'I've collapsed it on

No hinge in the main frame, a roomier reach, and more gears – some CTC staffers preferred the ride of the Mezzo

a platform and boarded the carriage, all in the space of an impatient guard's whistle!

Modern Bromptons have a catch to stop the rear triangle folding under at other times. It makes the erected bike easier to manhandle up steps or lift and park against a wall. Most people appreciate that and don't mind the extra second to release the catch when folding. But I'm so fond of how you don't need to find a wall to park a Brompton, how you can park it anywhere simply by flipping the rear triangle under so it stands on the trundling wheels, that I'd probably remove the catch.

Folding and erecting a Brompton would be even quicker if you could release and close the clamps with one movement, like on the Mezzo, and if the seatpost had measurements on it, like on the Mezzo. Are you listening, Brompton? And about those screw-in clamps: why don't they at least put something on the end of the screw to stop it shaking out? Be warned that it's all too easy to lose a clamp in the boot of a bus, and it's therefore advisable to retighten them after folding – unless the bike remains by your side.

The Mezzo's folding is just as clever, if only we hadn't seen a Brompton already. It's such a hard act to follow and Mezzo's magic is just a tad less amazing, but does include a few extra tricks. Those quick clamps I already mentioned; and once you've found your number on the graduated seatpost, the saddle goes immediately to the

RIVALS



Dahon Mu SL £999

This 20in wheel folder packs to 40×78×66cm but weighs just 8.3kg – or a little more once you add the optional mudguards. zyro.co.uk



Birdy City £1189

With full suspension, arguably a better ride, but it's a bigger folded package, like the Mu SL. This 8-speed version is 11.9kg. r-m.de



Kansi 9twenty £875

Stylish newcomer, the 3-speed version of which we tested in F/M 11. Good ride, needs mudguards. 46×83×67.5cm, 11.3kg. kansi.co.uk

optimum height for pedalling. These features even the score and some people reckon the Mezzo allows an even quicker getaway – once you have the knack.

I don't think there are many places a folded Brompton can be put that a Mezzo can't, but the Mezzo is about 25% bigger in all directions, which doubles the volume. If space is very tight, the answer is obvious.

Riding

You can't expect a bike that folds this compactly to be as good to ride as one that doesn't, and they aren't. The convulsions they have to go through entail compromises in the riding position and limit the gearing options. If you happen to fit the one size offered and don't need many gears or much range, you'll still work a bit harder or go slightly slower, since wheels this small don't roll quite as easily. But love is blind, and the Brompton is such a delightful object that some owners do become besotted! And it is fun to ride, not scary-fast fun, but nip in-and-out fun, which is an appropriate kind of fun for the conditions you're likely to find at both ends of a train journey.

Cardiff Bike Club Officer Melanie Davies loves her Brompton. I'm not saying she's besotted, but apparently she never leaves home without it! She uses it not only for work around Cardiff and further afield by train, but also family rides on the Taff Trail, when she attaches a tag-along for her 5-year-old son, which he loves too! Her one problem is its weight. She wants a shoulder strap.

I said these are not speed machines, but racer and Essex Bike Club Officer Alex Wise can't help himself. He says the Brompton corners beautifully, so beautifully he ground the toes off his posh shoes chasing down London commuters regardless of what they were on! He thinks the brakes need tuning and reports a speed wobble at 43mph!

Alex might have gone even better on a Mezzo, since it offers a slightly longer reach and the

SPECIFICATIONS

Model	Brompton S2L	Mezzo D10
Price	From £760 (bespoke colours +£60)	£975
Weight	10.78	11.70
Folded LxHxW	60x58x29cm	81x68x38
Folded volume	101 litres	209 litres
Gears	2-speed: 58 & 78in	10-speed: 33-85in
Frame & fork	Chromo steel	Aluminium alloy
Tyres	Brompton 37-349 (16in)	Mezzo 37-349 (16in)
Brakes	Brompton dual-pivot	Front dual-pivot, rear V-brake
Manufacturer	brompton.co.uk	mezzobikes.com



(Above) The Mezzo's self-closing catches would be nice on the Brompton too. (Above right) Folded bikes side by side. The Brompton looks only a bit smaller but is in fact half the volume



handlebar can be adjusted up and down (handgrip height on the Brompton can be altered only by choosing a different shape of handlebar). Mezzo handgrips are about 3cm further from the saddle, which is not a big difference, but possibly enough to sway the decision of a tall person or one who just likes to be more stretched than a Brompton allows.

Racers like close gearing too, and that the Mezzo also offers. But I prefer gears further apart that shift predictably. However, the Mezzo rides well enough, and the change to a V-brake at the rear (note that the levers are different if swapping them over) has reduced the effect of all those bends in the cable.

Conclusion

Surprisingly, given an aluminium frame, the Mezzo D10 is beaten on the scales by the Brompton

S2L. But it would make more sense to compare the 10-speed Mezzo with a Brompton S6L, which combines the S2L's derailleur with a 3-speed hub that likely cancels Brompton's weight advantage, as well as narrowing the price gap. Although that results in only 6 speeds, against the Mezzo's 10, they cover a wider range, which with the optional smaller chainwheel may span from 29 to 88 inches. This actually makes a Brompton the better choice for hilly areas – and still £140 cheaper. But if all your journeys end in flat places, two-speeds may well be enough.

If Bromptons didn't exist already, the same people would be falling in love with Mezzos. As it is though, I think Mezzos will be chosen more by those who are too cramped on a Brompton, or simply must have close-ratio derailleur gears.