

Town and country

Hybrids seldom offer the versatility you'd expect. Dan Joyce tests one that does: the Scott Sub 20

By definition a hybrid ought to be a jack-of-all-trades bike, a straightforward non-specialised machine that's as suitable for weekend rides as weekday commutes. Most in the UK aren't. They tend to be light, sporty, and stripped down, like flat bar road bikes and the majority of urban mountain bikes, or heavy, practical and cheap, like comfort bikes and trekking bikes. Scott's Sub range ('Speed Utility Bike') bridges the recreation/utility divide better.

Like its stablemates, the mid-range Sub 20 is relatively light – just 11 kilos before you fit any extras – yet it retains the fittings you want for mudguards, a rear rack, and even a kickstand. You can even buy it with those accessories fitted; Scott call it the 'city kit'. With its wide gear range and 32mm tyres, it's much an entry-level, flat bar touring bike as it is a city bike. Unusually, all three Sub bikes are available with 26in or 700C wheels. We tested the former.

Frame and fork

Sculpted tube profiles where the down tube and top tube meet the head tube reflect the fact that this is a hydroformed aluminium frame. Hydroforming uses high-pressure hydraulic fluid to shape the tubes into more flowing shapes with flares, curves and concavities. It looks nice and lets the designers add a bit of strength to a highly stressed area. Reinforcing gussets or thicker tube walls (butting) would add a good deal more strength, but also more weight.

Light bikes, meanwhile, are something of a Scott speciality: their top-end Scale Ltd hardtail mountain bike weighs 8.55kg and their Addict Ltd road bike 5.9kg (13lb). Low weight is one of the ace cards for the Sub 20 too, even though it's 'only' a hybrid. As it starts at 11kg, when you do add mudguards, a rack, and a kickstand you end up with a bike



“The Sub 20 is light and sprightly and yet still takes the rack and mudguards you want for utility or recreational use”

that's still a very reasonable 12.7kg (28lb). That's more than a kilo less than entry-level touring bikes like the Dawes Horizon and Revolution Country Traveller. It's not significant with panniers, but when you're pressing the pedals without it's nice.

The fork is V-brake only, but the frame includes mounts for a rear disc brake. That's more because the same frame is used for the Sub 10, which does come with them, than because you'd upgrade the Sub 20 with disc brakes. You'd need a new wheel as well as the Sub 20 doesn't use disc hubs. What is neat about the disc mounts (if you ever did upgrade) is that they're on the chain stay rather than the seat stay. This means that the brake calliper won't foul the rear rack.

Also available with 700C wheels and either dearer (Sub 10) or cheaper (Sub 30)

Equipment

There's 40mm of easy height adjustability for the Sub 20's handlebars, on top of what you'd get from flipping the 7° stem. The NVO 'Adjustable Threadless System' uses a shim instead of a stack of spacer washers, held in compression by the top cap. You can slide the stem up and down to suit, changing easily from high bars for town riding to lower ones for mile-eating.

Gearing is 27-speed Shimano Deore using touring bike sized chainrings. The range of 20-107 inches is overkill for city cycling, where a single chainring set-up – perhaps with a hub gear – is sufficient. However, it does mean that you've got all the gears you need for extended touring. With the accessories removed and different tyres fitted, it's enough for off-road riding too – though you'd be better off on forest fire-roads than singletrack.

The 32-spoke rear wheel is a weakness if you want to put really heavy loads on the rear rack when

you're travelling. But beneath the weight of a couple of universal sized panniers, it should be fine. The wheels are semi-quick release. You need an allen key to undo them. That's more secure than a cam lever if you leave the bike locked up in town.

The City Kit is okay, although it doesn't include one city essential: lighting. The rear carrier does have mounts for a rear light, at least, and the drilled fork crown means a front lamp could be fitted here. I really liked the chain-stay mounted kickstand. It was great for parking the bike while popping into shops. The mudguards lack mudflaps. However, the front does have break-away safety clips.

The ride

The Sub 20 rides like any other flat-barred light (ish) weight bike with 100psi tyres. It's quite quick, because there isn't a lot of drag from the tyres, and the flat bar makes for easy control around town. The downside of this set up is that the heel of your hand and the base of your thumb can take a pounding after several miles. The aluminium fork doesn't help. Forks can deflect much more than frames over road irregularities, but not if they're super stiff like this one. I'd prefer a budget carbon fork on this bike, which wouldn't bring the weight hit of steel. I'd fit Cane Creek Ergo Control bar ends too; you might prefer a butterfly handlebar.

If you just want the bike for utility use or don't mind downgrading its rolling performance, you could improve shock absorbency by fitting fatter tyres and running them at a lower pressure. For longer or faster rides, however, there's a lot to be said for the efficiency of 32mm high-pressure tyres. I enjoyed being able to pick up the pace on the Sub 20.

Summary

It's refreshing to see a sensible, versatile hybrid like this. If you need one bike that will serve as a commuter and a tourer, then the Sub 20 is a good choice. Town riders might not want the exposed 27-speed drivetrain, while tourers might not want the flat bar or aluminium fork. But as compromises go, this bike doesn't make that many. Its rivals will invariably be heavier, less practical, or both. It's a genuine multi-use hybrid.



1. 40mm of easy bar height adjustment via the NVO stem/steerer.
2. Parcel spring can interfere with pannier hooks.
3. Kickstand comes in handy around town.
4. Rack-friendly disc brake mounts!

TECH SPEC

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| Bike | Scott Sub 20 |
| Price | £469 plus £39.99 for the City Kit |
| Weight | 12.7kg with City Kit, 11kg without |
| Size | M (20in) |
| Colours | black |
| Sizes available | XS, S, M, L, XL in 26in; S, M, L, XL in 700C |
| Frame and Fork | Hydroformed aluminium frame with replacing drive-side dropout and gear hanger, and mounts for two bottles, rear rack, mudguard, disc & V-brakes and kickstand. Aluminium fork with straight legs and mounts for V-brake and mudguard. |
| Wheels | Maxxis Colombiere 32-559 (26x1.25) tyres on 17mm Alex SUB aluminium rims, 32x3 DT 1.8mm spokes on Scott SCO 31 front hub and Shimano FH-RM60 rear |
| Transmission | Wellgo 988 S pedals, Shimano FC-M433 175mm cranks with 48/36/26T chainrings, Shimano BB-UN26 bottom bracket, Shimano CN-HG53 chain, Shimano HG50 9-speed 11-32T cassette, Shimano Deore front derailleur, Deore LX rear. 27 speed, 20-107 inches. |
| Braking | Tektro SCB-3A V-brakes with Scott Comp SCL levers |
| Steering & Seating | Scott Grips, Scott X-Rod OS 58cm handlebar with 5° bend, 4-bolt 11cm Scott stem with 7° rise on 40mm-adjustable NVO steerer, Ritchey OE Logic Zero semi-integrated headset. Scott SUB saddle on Scott Comp 26.8mm aluminium seatpost. |
| Accessories | 'City Kit', comprising aluminium rear rack, chromoplastic mudguards and a kickstand |
| Contact | www.scott-sports.com tel: 01670 712129 |

