Bristol Bicycles Touring Step-through

A great value tourer with a good choice of à la carte options. Liz Colebrook is impressed

Any colour you like, as long as it’s black. Bristol Bicycles avoid colour trends with the belief that bright and shiny attracts unwanted attention. Every model is matt black with black components.

You’re invited to configure your own bicycle online, starting from a selection of seven styles (City, Dutch, Touring, Expedition, etc). Next, you fine-tune details from size through to the various accessories. It’s fairly easy if you’re familiar with the relative merits of different components, and especially good if you want or need a step-through frame and prefer a road (dropped) handlebar – a combination that’s rare these days. Your bike is then assembled (in Bristol).

Components

Bristol Bicycles frames are imported from Asia, where they’re well made from 6061 aluminium. This is fairly light but can feel harsh unless paired with a compliant fork and wheels. The Touring model uses raked steel fork, giving the front end some ‘springiness’. But in making the wheels comfortable, reliable and durable (all good points), the bike gains a fair amount of rotating mass.

Low gears are a necessity in hilly areas, especially so with luggage. I hardly used the Touring model’s outer chainring, while the lowest gear was just low enough. The trigger shifter requires a powerful thumb push. If you have arthritis in your thumb joint, the Expedition model could be a better bet as it comes with a dropped bar. Oh, and don’t skimp on the saddle; the standard one is only okay for short journeys.

The test bike has two excellent upgrades from the Bristol Bicycles menu: a hub dynamo and hydraulic disc brakes. On a step-through bike, tight bends add friction to a cable rear brake, whereas hydraulic fluid is unaffected.

Verdict

A practical, value-for-money cycling solution for cycling newbies and anyone on a budget. I’d like to see more options, like a lighter wheelset and a kickstand. But this is an excellent concept.