



Cycle's test promise

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all but impervious to punctures.

The Abington doesn't come with any equipment unless you specify it. I added ARCC's extraordinarily sturdy rear rack (£155) and a set of SKS mudguards (£40). You can also have a kickstand (£40) and a Brooks B17 leather saddle (£135).

By contrast, the District 4 comes with everything. I particularly liked the dynohub lighting and the MIK-compatible rear rack, which accommodates a wide range of bags, crates, dog baskets, child seats and more (see mikclickgo.com for details). The AXA frame lock is a useful addition for when you're just nipping into a shop for a moment but the test bike's had a slight twist to it. I had to press on the locking bar to make it engage.

Ride

Belt-drive bikes aren't as efficient as chain-drive bikes. The bigger losses come not from the belt but the internal gear hub – and all its whirring pinions – that belts are paired with. Yet belts do lose some efficiency as they wrap around the chainring and sprocket because they're not as flexible as chains, plus they're under more tension. These efficiency losses are evident at the more modest power outputs that most people ride at most of the time.

Whether this matters to you is a moot point. Some cyclists won't notice, others won't care because of a belt's advantages. People have ridden around the world on belt drives. Yet I've found riding belt-drive touring and mountain bikes somewhat frustrating, and I'm not surprised that the €100,000 prize from Gates for

Other options



CUBE HYDE PRO £999

No equipment and the 8-speed hub is a Nexus rather than an Alfine, but it's a keenly priced belt-drive bike with urban MTB aesthetics and fat (55-622) Schwalbe Big Apple tyres.

cube.eu



CANNONDALE BAD BOY 1 £2,000

Another belt-drive urban MTB, the Bad Boy 1 has an Alfine 8-speed hub, a distinctive Lefty fork and integrated, rechargeable 'be seen' lights. Tyres are 40-584.

cannondale.com

winning a UCI Mountain Bike Downhill event on a Gates belt-drive bike remains unclaimed. (And don't forget that downhill events have been won with hardly any pedalling at all!)

On the other hand, for a bike that will be ridden for trips of a handful of miles around town, put me firmly in the 'don't care' camp. In fact, I'd really like to try a singlespeed or fixed-wheel belt-drive bike as an urban runaround.

In terms of the two test bikes, the Abington and District 4 have the same kind of 'comfortable roadster' ride. They're both 15kg belt-drive hybrids with upright riding positions, comparable components and similar steering geometry. They were great for short town rides, less so for country lane rambles. ●

Verdict

A clean, low-maintenance town bike is ideal for 'bike users'. No mess, no fuss: jump on and go in whatever you're wearing; park it in the rain; take it to the garage bike shop if it ever needs attention... Belt-drive hybrids like these two are essentially modern incarnations of the traditional roadster.

The ARCC Abington has a more stylish steel frame, a junction-friendly bottom bracket height and much tougher tyres. It also represents a good long-term investment for cyclists who see electric assistance in their future, as it could easily be converted with ARCC's IDS kit.

The Trek District 4 Equipped is better value, however, because it comes with the utility cycling essentials that cost extra with the Abington. Rack, guards, lights, lock and kickstand provide the easy-to-live-with practicality that a belt drive promises. I also preferred the ride feel given by the Trek's higher stack height and larger-diameter wheels.