

EVERYDAY CYCLING

Our Friend Electric



Bike Test: Powacycle Salisbury:

£499

25kg

6 speed Shimano gearing

200w motor

24v NiMh Battery Pack

<http://www.powacycle.co.uk>

A few weeks ago, me – a dyed-in-the-wool cyclist and my wife – a complete beginner, got the opportunity of spending a week with one of Powacycle's latest electric bikes. Find out how Mr and Mrs got on with Powacycle's Salisbury.

His

I must admit it before it becomes glaringly obvious. I'm a bike snob. I'm spoilt. I've got a stable of three bikes, a hardtail MTB, a 20lb road bike and a cyclo-cross-bike-cum-tourer that does just about everything. So I arrived at the Powacycle Salisbury with a smug, 'I'm gonna hate this' attitude. For a start, the bike weighed in at 25kgs, compared to a mere 10kg for my road bike and a few more for my MTB. How could I possibly ride this thing that weighs more than twice the weight of my beloved road bike? I unpacked the bike from its box, put the pedals and handlebars on and charged the battery and eyed it suspiciously.



Coming back a few hours later, the battery was fully charged and it was time to swallow my pride and my cycle-snobbery, at least for the duration of the test. I turned the ignition key (yes, it's got an ignition key), switched the selector switch to pedal-assist and pushed away on the pedals. The sensation that I got next was nothing short of a revelation – after about half a pedal stroke, it was as if an invisible hand was gently pushing me in the back, as the 200 watt brushless motor in the rear hub kicked in. Before I knew it I was breezing along at 15mph, with absolutely no effort whatsoever.

The Powacycle Salisbury, to the untrained eye, looks like a fairly standard trekking bike or urbanised MTB – 26 inch wheels, aluminium frame, suspension fork and full commuter kit – rack, stand and mudguards, making it an eminently capable commuter straight out of the box. Look closer and you'll see that the bike has a longer rear triangle than most bikes, accommodating the Ni-Mh battery pack between the rear wheel and the seat tube. Look further back and you'll also notice the fat rear hub, containing the motor that provides that silent, smooth,

'eternal tailwind feeling'. Up on the handlebars a motorcycle-style twistgrip falls naturally to the right hand, while the left grip features a rocker switch, enabling you to switch modes from pedal assist to throttle power, whilst on the move.

On the move, I found as an experienced rider, I had to alter my riding style to get the best out of the pedal assist system. In the UK, all electric bikes are restricted to 15mph to comply with taxation laws. My commute regularly sees me pushing 20-25mph between traffic lights. While the Salisbury was more than willing to lend its invisible hand up to the magic 15mph, it bluntly refused to help out beyond that, and I was very quickly reminded that I was pushing along a 25kg bike. After a few frustrating commutes I suddenly realised that I was missing the point. My commuting style was incompatible with the Powacycle. So instead of grunting away from the lights, I decided to take it easy, sit back and enjoy the view. Ride like this and the Salisbury will take you across town sweat-free. Approaching hills, a similar technique paid dividends. No use trying to push the bike up at high speed or in a big gear. Just sit up, drop down a gear or two and spin up the hill, with the bike supplying its 200 watts of gravity busting power.



The week with the Salisbury quickly came to an end and I found that I'd moved from being electro-sceptic to becoming rather enamoured with the bike's charms. There were a few things that would turn the Salisbury from being a very good package into a really great one. For riders over around 5'9" or so, a longer seatpost is essential to allow a proper riding position, as I, at 6'1" was riding bent-kneed for the duration of the test. Also the suspension fork wasn't up to the standard of the rest of the bike, with a harsh top out clunk and a lot of play between the uppers and lowers. A quality rigid fork or a better quality Suntour suspension fork would have made a big improvement – however the latter would no doubt impact on the bike's keen price of £499.

These however are very minor quibbles in what is a well specced, complete and highly effective commuter package. Casting an eye over the bike's components all the elements were there – square to round section aluminium frame, smart double wall aluminium rims with wear indicator, V brakes, alloy rack, suspension seatpost and even a kickstand – really handy when you're loading up the bike with work gear or shopping. The Salisbury might not suit die-hard 'cyclists' – it was never meant to, but as a way of getting around town, sweat-free, for £499 – it takes some beating. A quick look at its nearest rivals (the cheapest of which is over £900) and it seems an even better deal. I have to hold my hands up – I'm a convert!

Hers

My wife Sue commutes around 2 miles to work 5 days a week and desperate to find something to replace the bus, taxi or monotonous walk to work and back. Sue suffers from exercise induced asthma and has found on the few occasions she's tried to cycle to work, the persistent gradient on the way there was left her literally gasping for breath and in no fit state to do a full day's work. Yet she desperately wants to find a way of combining moderate exercise with her busy life. The prospect of a bike that would lend a little helping hand was an attractive one. But how would the electric bike measure up to her needs?

Coming from a completely different end of the cyclist spectrum to me, Sue very quickly made friends with the Salisbury. It's ready to roll commuter friendliness scored points straight away, together with a low stepover height making skirts a possibility, without it looking like an overly girly bike.

Like me, Sue was seduced from the first turn of the pedals. Her commute is 2 miles, all on a steady uphill gradient with short, nasty, much steeper climb a third of the way in. Taking my advice of not try to go too fast or too hard at anything, she found that the bike ironed all the lumps and bumps out of the outward leg, but allowed her to switch off the power assistance on the way back and make the most of gravity.

When the bike came home at night, it was simplicity itself to plug in the smart charger with the battery in-situ. It can be removed altogether for when you want to lighten up the ride and go 'power-free' and when in place, is locked securely with the ignition key – a good idea when the battery itself costs £99 to replace. The battery is

said to last for around 13 to 17 miles of flat pedal assisted riding and this was borne out in testing. Even after a full day of commuting, we never saw the battery below 2/3 full.

At 5'6" the bike fitted Sue perfectly and would work equally well for riders 3 to 4 inches taller and a few inches shorter.

The bike's weight only made itself felt when hauling it up the three steps into the house and moving it around in tight spaces. Once on the road, the power assist miraculously shedded the pounds.

Summary

When I asked a very reluctant wife to relinquish the bike at the end of the test period, I asked for her to sum up her week with the Salisbury. Her answer was telling. She said that for her, it was the difference between cycling to work and not cycling at all. No doubt there are plenty of people who are in Sue's position – eager to give cycling to work a try but who don't want to arrive out of breath and in a lather of sweat. Bikes like the Salisbury bridge an important gap and cater for a potentially huge number of people who might otherwise not give cycling a second thought. And at substantially less than practically every other electric bike on the market, and without the tax, insurance and licence headaches of scooters, motorbikes and cars – it's a wonder that we don't see more of these refreshing machines on the road.

For more information on the Powacycle range go to <http://www.powacycle.co.uk>