

Fixed asset

The Pearson Touché is one of a small number of *practical* fixed-wheel bikes. Dan Joyce tested it

There's more to fixed-wheel bikes than fashion. Looking *past* the track bikes and the bikes with tiny flat handlebars, fag-paper clearances and candy-coloured rims, you can still find here and there a fixed-wheel bike that will function well as an all-weather commuter, a winter training bike, and a pedal-every-single-yard audax bike. Pearson's Touché, which has frame fitments and bigger clearances than most, is just such a bike.

The Surrey-based shop offers a pick-and-mix approach to its off-the-peg fixed-wheel bikes, which come in steel, aluminium and even carbon fibre. You can swap handlebars and tyres, and add mudguards, a rack or a hub dynamo. Our test bike was specified as a winter commuter.

Frame and fork

The frame angles on the aluminium-tubed Touché are no different from any other fairly quick-handling road bike. The clearances are. There's room under the carbon fork and the chain- and seat-stay braces for 28mm tyres or, as here, for 25mm tyres and mudguards with enough space between for grit to clatter through.

The front centres distance (bottom bracket to front hub) isn't bad for a fixie either. There was no overlap between my size eights and the wheel. They just brushed the mudguard. I'd specify 165mm cranks to fix this. As an added bonus, shorter cranks would give more pedal clearance in corners and they might be marginally easier to spin at high cadences.

Frame eyelets mean that full-length mudguards fit securely and without bodging. There are separate eyelets for a rear rack, and the chain-stays are long enough for you to use one with universal panniers without fear that you'll clip your heels. The dropouts are reinforced with steel, which is no bad thing if you'll be taking the rear wheel in and out a lot to turn it round.



(If that's you, adding chain tugs to the bike would make it easier to align the wheel, tension the chain and keep it taut. DMR chain tugs cost about £15.)

Equipment

The bike's double-sided hub means that you've got a choice of two gears, if you're prepared to stop and get your hands dirty. Here both are the same: 71in. One's fixed, the other free. For flat or gently rolling terrain – like London, for example – that size of gear is fine. You can wind it up to speed from a standing start at the lights without any trouble, yet riding fixed you won't find your legs blurring like rotor blades on every descent. If it's a bit lumpy where you live, then a lower gear – say, 65in – would be better. A 20T fixed or free sprocket would give this with the 48T chainring. If you can't find one, 42×17 or 18 gives a similar gear.

The wheels are good for an off-the-peg fixie. Mavic Open Pro rims are lightweight but they're reinforced at the spoke holes with eyelets, and the machined braking surface doesn't

“Purists might disagree, and the law doesn't require it when riding fixed, but the rear brake on the Touché is a bonus”

(Right, top to bottom) In conjunction with the IQ Fly headlamp, the Shimano hub dynamo is ideal for commuting

The Selle Italia Max Flite saddle is a comfortable perch, even at leg-blurring cadences

Ultra Gatorskins resist punctures well for fast tyres, so long as you don't run them soft or threadbare

have a nasty joint. Continental Ultra Gatorskins are what I use on my own winter bike, as they offer a good balance between rolling efficiency and puncture protection. Having a two-sided hub is a bonus at the back, while at the front you've got one of Shimano's 'sport' hub dynamos. Drag is imperceptible and light output from the B&M IQ Fly headlight (which has a switch) is excellent. The hub could power a rear lamp but doesn't here; you'll need to add a battery lamp or a dynamo one plus wiring.

Purists might disagree, and the law doesn't require it when you're riding fixed, but having a rear brake on the Touché is bonus. You can stop much quicker, and fast descents and corners are less nervy. Back pressure on the pedals is a useful *addition* to a rear

The Rivals

Fixed wheel bikes are everywhere. Those with mudguard clearance and eyelets are much rarer.



On-One II Pompino From £500

Unusual steel road bike with track ends, big clearances, and fittings for mudguards, a rear rack, and cantilever or V-brakes. Various à la carte build options available.

www.on-one-shop.co.uk

Condor Tempo From £700

Good looking carbon-forked, steel-framed 'fraudax' bike from Condor's extensive range of fixies. Comes with rack and mudguard eyelets and clearance for 28mm tyres.

www.condorcycles.com

Ridgeback Solo £599.99

Another carbon-forked, steel-framed fixie with the necessary fittings. New for 2009, it replaces the (identical?) Genesis Skyline. Comes with SKS mudguards fitted.

www.ridgeback.co.uk

brake, particularly at low speeds, but it's not a practical replacement.

The ride

Is there an ineffable oneness between man and machine on a fixie? Well, you are literally chained to the rear wheel so there's a togetherness in that sense, but it's more a matter of staying focused and remembering to keep pedalling. If you don't your legs will get jerked around, possibly kicking

you up off the saddle – and even off the bike if you're very unlucky.

Because you are pedalling all the time, you'll spin or strain depending on the wind and terrain. It makes every ride a workout, and so it's best if your commute ends in the shower.

The courier bars on the test bike put your hands and wrists in a more comfortable position than a flat bar, while the TT levers mean that braking is at your fingertips. I found the last 3 inches of the bars redundant, however, and would saw them off there. Drop bars (an option) would be better still, not so much for town use but for fighting rural headwinds and for the better range of hand positions.

The shorter stem that I asked for meant that the bike fitted well. I liked the anatomic saddle too but switched the pedals for dual-sided SPDs.

Summary

This is just the kind of reliable, simple bike I'd use if I had a flat or rolling commute that was around 6-15 miles long – one that was long enough to warrant changing into cycling gear, but short enough that a strong wind wouldn't exhaust you. I'd spec different cranks and a different handlebar and add chain tugs, but as practical fixies go this one does most things right. Mudguards stop wet rides being miserable and the hub dynamo lighting is fantastic. Short of going custom or building a bike from parts, *fraudax* riders (see last issue for the definition) will struggle to find anything more suitable than this.



TECH SPEC

Bike	Pearson Touché
Price	£745 as tested. From £550
Weight	9.63kg (without pedals)
Size	54cm
Colours	blue or gunmetal grey
Sizes available	48, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60cm
Frame and Fork	Double-buttressed aluminium frame with steel-reinforced 'track ends' and mounts for two bottles, rear carrier rack and mudguard. Carbon fibre fork with aluminium steerer and mudguard eyelets.
Wheels	Continental Ultra Gatorskin 25-622 tyres on 15mm Mavic Open Pro aluminium rims, 32x3 1.8mm spokes on 120mm OLN Ambrosio flip-flop hub (rear) and Shimano DH-3N71 hub dynamo (front)
Transmission	Wellgo M-17 flat/SPD pedals (not shown), FSA Vero 170mm cranks with 48T chainring, square-taper cartridge bottom bracket, KMC Z 1/8-inch chain, 18T fixed sprocket or 18T freewheel. 1-speed (2-speed with different sized sprockets), 71 inches
Braking	Tektro R536 57mm-reach sidepull brakes with ITM TT brake levers
Steering & Seating	Cork tape, 42cm aluminium courier bars, 8cm ITM Racer aluminium stem, FSA semi-integrated threadless headset, Selle Italia Max Flite anatomic saddle, Pearson carbon fibre seatpost
Accessories	SKS chromoplastic mudguards, Busch und Müller IQ Fly headlamp
Contact	www.pearsoncycles.co.uk tel: 020 8642 2095

