



Photographs: Robert Sparring

Biketest

Ride high

Roadsters are comfortable and practical urban transport. **Victoria Hazael** tests a Pashley Princess Sovereign and Gazelle Chamonix C7



VICTORIA HAZAEL

Website Editor

Victoria has a bad back so needs to cycle sitting upright at the moment

Roadster, sit-up-and-beg, or Dutch bike? There are various names for a bike designed for slower cycling in an upright position with a swept back handlebar, often a step-through frame, a chainguard, a coat- or skirt-guard, and a basket or rack to carry a small load. You don't spot many in the UK, but roadsters are a common sight on the streets of the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, all places where there is a culture of everyday cycling.

The Pashley Princess Sovereign and the Gazelle Chamonix C7 enable you to glide through the streets rather than race along in Lycra with your head down. That's important to me at the moment as I've injured my lower back and pelvis. Sitting up prevents strains, aches, and pains.

The Pashley Sovereign was designed in the 1930s and hasn't changed all that much since. It is still handmade in the UK, in Stratford upon Avon. Pashley

bikes are often used in period films and TV dramas; keep your eyes peeled and you'll see some in the latest Mary Poppins film.

If you don't like attention, this is not the bike for you. People stop you in the street to talk to you about it and tell you their mother/aunty/granny used to ride one like yours. A woman even waved me down in the street shouting: "What's your bike's name?". (Hers is Demelza, after her favourite character in Poldark.) And I was invited to a Pashley picnic by a man on a Pashley Guv'nor at the traffic lights.

The Gazelle Chamonix C7 is a more modern looking bike, although it is designed by Royal Dutch Gazelle, a company that started in 1892. A few people I met thought it was an e-bike and that I had a motor inside the boxy frame. I have no idea why, since I was cycling very slowly.

Frame and fork

The Pashley Princess Sovereign's lugged steel frame is brazed by hand and painted at the Pashley factory. There's a steel fork too, and fittings on the frame for a rear rack and a pretty but not very easy-to-use pump. The geometry is classically roadster-ish, with relaxed frame angles and a long wheelbase. It

First look

Retro style combined with everyday function, but remarkably heavy even for a roadster



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Tech Spec

PASHLEY PRINCESS SOVEREIGN 8-SPEED

Price: £875

Sizes: 17.5, 20, or 22in (17.5in tested)

Weight: 22.4kg/49.3lb

Frame & fork:

Lugged & brazed hiten steel frame with fittings for rear rack and pump. Chromemoly steel fork.

Wheels: 37-590

Schwalbe Marathon Plus tyres, 590x18

alloy rims, 36x3

spokes, Shimano

Nexus dynamo front hub, Shimano Nexus 8-speed rear hub.

Transmission:

rubber-treaded flat pedals, chromed steel cranks, 44t chainring, square taper bottom bracket, 20t sprocket. Shimano Nexus 8-speed

shifter and hub.

Eight ratios, 31-94in.

Braking: Shimano

Nexus roller brakes.

Steering & seating:

Rubber grips,

560x25.4mm

steel backswept

handlebar, alloy &

steel quill stem, 1in

threaded headset.

Brooks B66s saddle,

25.6mm steel plain

seatpost.

Equipment: steel

mudguards,

Pletscher alloy

rear rack, plastic

chaincase, wicker

basket, kickstand,

skirt-guard, Axa

Solid frame lock,

pump, bell, B&M

Lumotec front

dynamo lamp,

Herrmans rear

battery lamp.

pashley.co.uk

suits cruising around at an easy pace rather than travelling in a hurry.

The Gazelle Chamoni C7 frame is TIG-welded, hydroformed aluminium, with a sportier geometry and slightly lower step through. Though nearly 4kg lighter than the Pashley, it's still a heavy bike. The aluminium fork has head/steerer tube suspension reminiscent of Cannondale's Headshok system, except that here it's a simple steel spring offering only around 25mm of travel. I didn't feel it was necessary as the upright riding position means your weight isn't on your hands.

Components

At first glance the Pashley Princess Sovereign looks like a bike from the 1930s and 1940s. On closer inspection, it has a mix of classic and contemporary components. The sprung leather saddle might be a traditional Brooks but the chaincase, for example, is plastic.

The beautiful, hub-dynamo-powered

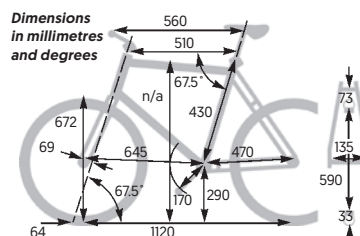


Top: Underneath the handy wicker basket is a lovely dynamo lamp. Oddly, the rear lamp is battery powered
Bottom: 8-speed gearing helps with the bike's heft, but a bigger sprocket to lower all the gears would be helpful

front light is (un)matched with a battery-powered LED rear light. The Gazelle also has a battery rear light, and it's an odd choice in both cases. While it's true that you can have a brighter front lamp if you don't divert some of the power to the rear, the real reason may simply be production efficiencies as there's no (internal?) rear wiring required.

The wheels on the Pashley are a traditional size: 26x1 3/8in, otherwise known as 650A. The rims are 590mm in diameter, 6mm bigger than 650B/27.5in. It's an uncommon size, mid-

way between 700C and 26in MTB size. Limited tyre choices aside, it's actually a decent option for a smaller size bike. The largest size Princess, meanwhile, has ISO 635 wheels (also uncommon!), just like the men's Roadster Sovereign. Puncture repairs don't normally faze me but the rear wheel on the Pashley made me worried I'd have to faff about with my whole toolkit on the roadside to



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Read Cycling UK's top ten tips for cycling in traffic:

cyclinguk.org/top-ten-tips-for-cycling-in-traffic

**First look**

A Dutch roadster with modern styling. The Switch stem is great, the suspension post and fork less so

Tech Spec

GAZELLE CHAMONIX C7

Price: £799

Sizes: 49, 53, 57, 61cm (53 tested)

Weight: 18.7kg/41.4lb

Frame & fork:

Aluminium frame with fittings for mudguard, rear rack, frame lock.

Aluminium fork with ~25mm steel spring suspension.

Wheels: 37-622

Schwalbe City Lite

tyres, 622x19 Mach

1 ER10 rims, 36x3

spokes, Shimano

Nexus dynamo front hub & Nexus 7 rear.

Transmission:

170mm Gazelle

alloy chainset, 38t

chaining, square

taper bb, chain

tensioner, 18t

sprocket. Shimano

Nexus 7-speed

shifter & hub. Seven

ratios, 36-89in.

Braking: Shimano Nexus Inter M roller brakes, Sturmey Archer levers.

Steering & seating: 620x25.4mm alloy handlebar, 110mm Gazelle Switch adjustable stem, 1 1/8in threadless headset. Selle Royal Ruvola saddle, 27.2mm Post Moderne seatpost (~20mm travel).

Equipment: chromoplastic mudguards, alloy rear rack, skirt-guard, kickstand, Axa Defender frame lock, plastic chaincase, Axa Blueline 300 dynamo front lamp, Gazelle battery LED rear.

gazellebikes.com

► mend one. Thankfully, I didn't have to take the wheel off: the Schwalbe Marathon Plus tyres are almost impregnable. The price to pay for the lack of punctures is that they're not exactly easy rolling.

The Gazelle has 'normal' size (700C) wheels with easier rolling but less tough tyres. If you do get a puncture, vertical rear dropouts make rear wheel removal and refitting more straightforward. There's a chain tensioner hidden in the chaincase to stop the chain going slack.

Both bikes have modern hub gears and roller brakes. Pashley switched over from rod brakes in the late 1990s, as roller brakes are much more effective at stopping the bike in the rain. They don't offer the instant bite of disc or V-brakes, however, so you need to think ahead and leave more time to brake, especially going downhill.

Both bikes are fully equipped. With a chaincase and skirt-guard, you can rider either bike in whatever you want; I



Top: Another battery-powered rear lamp!

Bottom: There's a steel spring in there offering around 25mm of suspension travel. Given the upright riding position, it's largely superfluous



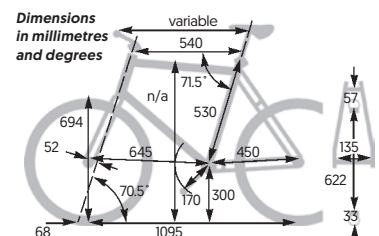
tried a long skirt and wide culotte style trousers to confirm they were effective. It's quite liberating to be able to ride in anything you fancy. Plus your chain should last longer as it's more protected.

The mudguards on the Pashley are steel so won't fold up behind the fork if a stick gets caught. Both bikes have frame locks; the one on the Gazelle is more secure as it's bolted to the frame. But don't rely on either for anything more than just-popping-into-a-shop security.

With a rear rack and, in the case of the Pashley, a sturdy front basket, both

bikes are suitable for commuting or shopping. Either would accommodate a childseat, although adding a 10-15kg toddler to an already heavy bike would require quite a lot of strength to ride.

The bikes' kickstands came in handy, and the Gazelle's is particularly sturdy. I missed bottle cage mounts, which neither bike has, as I tested the bikes in a heatwave.





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Above: The Pashley's strap-on frame lock
Near right: A front lamp that's ever ready!
Top right: The Gazelle's hub is 7-speed not 8
Bottom right: Both bikes keep your clothes clean



The ride

I rode the bikes on my commute, on 10-mile rides, and when cycling with my children. Aside from the riding position, the most obvious feature – common to many roadsters – is weight. They are both *really* heavy. The Pashley is 22.4kg, which is more than many e-bikes! You can't help but notice this if you're used to lighter bikes.

Even with the help of the Shimano Nexus 8-speed gears that Pashley introduced in 2017, hills are hard, especially if like me you're not the lightest rider. I began to notice slight inclines on roads I cycle daily and that I had always thought of as quite flat. Lower gears would help. I'd like a bigger sprocket for both bikes.

The Gazelle is easier to ride uphill despite its higher bottom gear, and it feels a bit nippier when turning. Its twist-shift gears should be more intuitive for returnee cyclists. Gear shifting, which can be done while stationary, is smooth on both bikes, and the steps between ratios feel nice and even.

The Gazelle's bottom bracket is unusually high for a town bike, making it harder to put a foot down at the lights. At 5ft 6in, I'm not particularly short but the Dutch are generally taller than us, which might explain this design choice – and the fact that this bike comes in a huge 61cm size. In the Netherlands, bikes with step-through frames

Other options



GENESIS COLUMBIA RD
£899.99

A steel roadster that weighs less: this is under 15kg. It has 700C wheels, 8-speed hub gearing, and mechanical discs. genesishikes.co.uk



BOBBIN BIRDIE 7
£385

A pretty steel bike in a range of colours, it's 16kg and has 7-speed derailleurs gearing and sidepull calliper brakes. Budget components reflect the budget price. bobbimbikes.com

aren't considered 'women's bikes'.

The high bottom bracket of the Gazelle is not helped by its suspension seatpost, which moves up or down when you change your position on the saddle and not just over bumps. I found it hard to get the saddle height correct and would have preferred a normal post, or even a dropper seatpost.

However, I loved the adjustable Gazelle Switch stem. The Switch makes it easy to fine tune the riding position, and would make it easy to swap between different riders. It's perfect for anyone with back or neck pain issues. To see the Gazelle switch in action, watch the video: cyclinguk.org/Gazelle.

The bottom bracket on the Pashley is also quite high but that's mitigated by the bike's slack seat angle; the saddle isn't as high off the ground. ●

Verdict

Both these bikes offer a comfortable riding position for shorter journeys, combined with a great view of the road. The Gazelle Chamonix C7 is a modern take on the classic roadster, with an amazing stem that lets you find the most appropriate riding position quickly. The Pashley Princess Sovereign is a beautiful classic that's made in Britain. Yet there's no escaping its weight, so even in this 8-speed version it's better suited to flatter parts of the UK.