

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Having avoided bicycles for a few years, **Simon Stabler** finds there's no reason not to get back in the saddle

It's been some years since I last rode a bicycle and even back then I struggled to get up hills; so you can understand my reluctance to get back in the saddle. But then the offer to try an electric bike manufactured by British firm Volt gave me the chance to not only to rethink cycling but the idea of electric bikes in general.

Over the years, there have been several electric bikes on the market but they've often come up short. The battery is normally the let down, meaning that to get a decent range out of it, manufacturers would cut down on the size of the bike itself.

However battery technology has moved on sufficiently and now, in the case of Volt's Pulse hybrid e-bike, you can get around 60 miles out of 3kg lithium battery neatly fitted to a full-sized frame.

A high quality bicycle, that can be maintained at any cycle shop, the Pulse, is fitted with a 250w hub motor on the back wheel. It's classified as an Electrically Powered Assisted Cycle (Epac), which means that the drive unit is only engaged while you are pedalling. However there is a throttle facility to allow the bike to get you out of tight spots with its pedal free acceleration.

The assist system is switched on and controlled through a small digital display attached to the handlebar. Of course, you don't need to have the assist system switched on and can continue to use the Pulse as a normal push bike but, in addition to an automatic torque monitoring mode, there are four settings giving you a speeds of up to 6, 9, 12 and 15.5mph.

I decided to try the bike out one evening, cycling to a pub around seven miles away. The bike is fitted with independently powered front and rear LED lights, which offer a good range



of illumination. I started off with the display on but power assist off before working my way through the speeds.

I hardly noticed anything on the 6 and 9mph settings and would like to think that the motor only had to provide 1 or 2mph to take me up to the latter speed. Turning it up to 12mph was an all together different kettle of fish though and I decided to put it back down to 9mph until I got my pedalling speed up and felt a little more comfortable with the bike.

It didn't take too long and with the setting back up to 12mph, I decided to take it up to 15.5mph. I went over a small humpback bridge effortlessly and as the bike exceeded the speed of the setting, the motor automatically disengaged with no drag, ready to subtly kick in again when needed.

The next bridge, a very steep foot/cycle bridge across the bypass, came into view. I remember from my cycling days what a nightmare this would be, either having to lean over the handle bars in order to put some extra effort in or simply getting off the bike and wheeling it up. But with the Pulse, you just have to drop the manual Shimano gear down, pedal normally and let the motor help you with the rest.


As I reached the apex of the bridge, I noticed someone wheeling their bike up from the other side and wished them a cheery, yet slightly smug, "evening".

I arrived at my destination, dry and breathing normally. Checking the



The battery is fitted just behind the seat tube, while the hub motor can be seen in the centre of the back wheel.

onboard display, which told me the average speed of my trip, distance and duration, I felt a sense of achievement. Locking the bike, using the cable chain (an optional extra) which attaches to the Pulse's inbuilt frame lock, I popped into the pub for a pint – telling anyone who'd listen how enjoyable the ride was.

Fully refreshed, I made my way back home, attempting to beat my outward journey time. I thoroughly enjoyed my time with the Pulse and I can see how with repeated trips it would help me get my fitness levels back to the near mythical time of my youth when I could cycle close to 15.5mph unaided. 

The Pulse hybrid e-bike is available, priced £1,499 with a standard 36V battery (capable of 60+ miles) or £1699 for the larger battery (capable of 80+ miles) from www.voltbikes.co.uk or by calling 020 7378 4728.