

First ride: Volt London

by Richard Peace Jan 2 2022

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"It really does feel like you have bionic legs"

I've been lucky enough to get my hands on a demo version of the [Volt London](#), a striking looking single speed with a rear hub motor and torque sensing. Volt have been around a good few years now, and grew from a small family firm into one with their own assembly plant in Milton Keynes, a London showroom and a UK wide network of dealers. Their London model is due to go on sale in Feb/March 2022 and can be ordered in advance now.

Why a single speed? Traditionally non-electric single speeds were beloved of city riders who valued virtually zero daily maintenance tasks on a cheap to buy and run bike. They also found a following from the ranks of road riders who felt pushing quite a high gear from a standstill was a good method of power training. Both groups appreciated light bikes, which single speeds often are.



But e-bikes have given single-speeds a new practicality as they are much easier to ride with that added power and so they have gained a much wider appeal. It's important to get a motor with enough low speed torque and with a suitably-sized chainwheel and rear sprocket. If the manufacturer gets it right - as Volt has in the is case - you get an e-bike where the motor power helps you easily get up to a speed after which it's much easier to push that single gear along. Most riders would probably choose to tackle moderately hilly country with an electric single speed, rather than anything ultra hilly - though my test ride proved Pennine foothills were no obstacle....

Torque sensing key

You might think a system using a comparatively budget hub motor like the Spintech branded Bafang would not be sophisticated but you'd be wrong. As these bikes need to react quickly to quite a lot of downward pedal pressure to get them going, a high quality torque sensing and control system makes for a relatively easy start and smooth power application.



I've jumped straight into the performance here rather than mull over spec as the riding experience is just so good it's worth cutting straight to the chase for. The last time I tried a 'full size' single speed e-bike was quite a few years ago, and whilst I loved the idea and the bike's light weight, the hill climbing ability and the timing of the power delivery left something to be desired.



Not so with the Volt London. Almost as soon as you step on the pedals, the motor springs into life and the harder you step on the pedals, the more power it delivers. It's one of the best e-bikes I've tried in terms of the power system responding to your input. Perhaps that's partly because the gearing never lets you spin fast enough just to get power from the movement of the cranks only. Whatever the technical reason, it really does feel like you have bionic legs.



'Battery bounce' on the battery capacity meter was quite noticeable and not at all helpful; you might know the tendency of some systems for the horizontal bars on the battery pictogram to come and go depending on the load on the motor. This made it very difficult for me to get any real idea of what capacity was left in the frame-integrated 504Wh battery. Just as useful is the button on the battery itself which turns the system on and off and indicates approximate remaining capacity with an appropriately coloured light.



Economy and range look pretty impressive. On my hilly test ride that included over 950ft of climbing with plenty of 10% plus gradients, battery depletion suggested more than 30 miles of range. Of course, being a single speed meant you had to put more effort in up the hills and really stand on the pedals on steep gradients and you certainly got a decent amount of exercise, but the torque sensing made it a moderately exhilarating workout rather than a lungbusting one...

Classic looks and city speed plus hill-climbing ability

There's no denying the London's classic looks, blending a brushed aluminium frame and a retro style porteur design front rack once beloved of continental newspaper delivery boys. It's brought right up date though, not just with the sophisticated motor assist but also with speedy Schwalbe G-One 27.5" x 2" tyres, high quality Alex rims and very effective Tektro hydraulic discs.



The Panasonic cells used in the decent sized 504Wh battery, solidly integrated into the frame, should give you faith in its longevity and the electronic key is a nice high tech touch and an added extra bit of theft deterrent (apparently this can be disabled if you don't want to risk losing your key and in the worst case scenario can be overridden by a Volt dealer).



There's further quality in the Spanninga front and rear hardwired LEDs, full SKS mudguards, suspension seatpost (suited to heavier riders than my 68kg frame though) and sturdy kickstand.



My only real quibbles were that inaccurate battery capacity meter, the 22.15kg weight that popped up on our scales and the lack of a belt drive. OK, it's fully equipped bar a rear rack (though Volt sell a bespoke one as an optional extra that fits onto the inside of the seat stays) and it sports a heavy rear wheel lock and a bigger battery than most single speeds. But even if you allowed for these it still seems a tad on the heavy side.

The launch price of £2,199 makes it look pricey when put up against existing belt-driven electric single speeds such as the [Pure Flux One](#) at £999 (though this has a much smaller battery and no torque sensing) and the successfully crowdfunded [Tenways](#) currently at £1,366 (again a smaller battery, though it does have torque sensing and a bijou yet powerful rear hub motor). Having said all that the London is the best equipped of the bunch and probably the highest quality and it also has a [two year warranty](#) on most parts, including the battery. It's certainly great fun to ride and a very persuasive argument for single speed e-bikes.



Richard Peace

Richard Peace took to full-time outdoor writing/photojournalism after stints in an office and as an English teacher abroad. His cycling route guide books include the best-selling *Ultimate C2C Guide* and the *Ultimate UK Cycle Route Planner* plus *Electric Bicycles*. He has written for various media about many aspects of cycling