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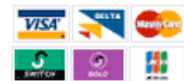
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1. [F-series electric bikes](#)
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The fastest electric bike yet

extracts from [A to B's](#) recent review of our eZee Torq

Readers may have noticed a small news item hidden in *A to B 50*, that a prototype Ezee Torq electric bike had carried an injured charity rider from London to Paris, and completed the ride in a very acceptable time. When the bike had been repatriated, we had a call - would we like to try it?



Torq electric hybrid

From a distance, the Torq is a fairly conventional-looking, broadly MTB-style machine. True, the wheelbase is longer, it has 28-inch wheels and a few nobby bits your average commuter would be unfamiliar with, but the broad feeling is of familiar territory. But beneath this veneer of ordinariness, you'll find one of the most exciting machines around.

The battery is Ezee's new Li-ion unit tested in *A to B 49* and the motor is the same efficient, compact device fitted to the 20-inch Quando folder. Obviously, with a 28-inch wheel, it's going to go a bit faster...

Thanks to the lightweight power technology and a light alloy diamond frame, the Torq conspires to be pretty light without making any real effort. At 23.7kg, it wouldn't be outrageously heavy for a *non-assisted* MTB of the cheaper variety, and it's certainly one of the lightest electric bikes

yet produced. Take the battery out, and the Torq weighs 19.3 kg, so if you decide to pedal unassisted, you are effectively riding a conventional machine.

Gearing would be high for a conventional bike. On an everyday MTB, there are few opportunities to use a top gear like that, but riding the Torq you generally get into that overdrive gear and stay there. Incidentally, production bikes are expected to be fitted with the 8-speed Shimano Sora, but the ratios will be similar.

Speed & More Speed

Open the throttle and the power wafts in getting properly into its stride from about 12mph, by which time you will be rattling through the gears almost as fast as you can gun the shifter.

Keep the throttle open and the motor's gentle hum fades away but the insistent push in the back continues until you're pedalling at a nice comfortable rate in that 133" overdrive. That's around 19 or 20mph. Under favourable conditions, speed can creep up to 22mph, which is as fast as we've ever been on an electric bike.

As the hill begins to bite and speed slows, the motor really begins to do its stuff. At 18mph there's more than 370 watts available, and as the gradient sharpens, power continues to climb, reaching a 570 watt peak at 12mph. That might sound a lot, but it's actually quite a modest amount, and broadly compatible with the legal continuous rating of 250 watts. The Torq obviously has an efficient motor because despite the limited consumption, it went on to demolish our *hill-climbing* records too.

With reasonable pedal effort, we found it quite easy to climb a 12% (1:8) gradient at 12mph, which is around 50% faster than a typical electric bike. On an 18% (1:6) gradient, a bit of work in first gear gives an unprecedented climbing speed of 10mph. If speed falls any lower, the motor begins to wilt, but assuming your progress is not balked by vehicles, bends, wildlife and other hazards, the Torq will despatch much steeper gradients, provided they're short.

The Torq's abilities result in some start to stop times that will sound outlandish. Pedalling with reasonable enthusiasm, we rode our flattish nine-mile 'commuter' route in 27 minutes 30 seconds, or no less than six and a half minutes quicker than the electric bike norm. That's an *average* of 19.6mph - by far the fastest time we've seen.

Riding at these sorts of speeds is an odd experience. Luddites need not fear, because it's nothing like riding a noisy, smelly, legislation-entangled moped. In the cruise zone, any tiny motor noises are completely overwhelmed by the joyous sounds of the wind whistling past your lug 'oles and the tyres sizzling on the black-top. For most people, the sheer exhilaration of this silent, and apparently effortless, speed will be a new experience. The rider pedals as normal, but gets rewarded with greater velocity than they ever dared hope for.

Range & Charging

Ah well, there's no such thing as a free lunch. When we tried the new Li-ion battery on the more conventional Ezee Sprint in A to B 48 we were pleasantly surprised to see a range of 29.3 miles at an average of 16mph, and nearly 35 miles by holding speed down to the legal limit. In contrast, the Torq broke yet another record, smashing the hour barrier by completing our 17.8-mile test course in an unprecedented 56 minutes, or 18.9mph. If you consider that the course includes a few long drags of 10-12% and a couple of short sharp ones of 18%, that really is remarkable. Speed rarely fell below 17mph, and never below 10mph.

We think the Torq provides one of the most enjoyable transport experiences available.

It eats cross-country miles like a small motorcycle, but keeps in touch with most of the positive attributes of the bicycle - healthy exercise, wind in the hair, the great outdoors and so forth. In the daily battle for road space with massed ranks of four-wheel-drives, the extra speed is a very reassuring safety feature in its own right, getting you out of danger as quickly as possible. Climb a steep hill on a normal bike these days and you can expect to be passed by three or four badly driven four-wheel-drives. Riding the Torq, you may only be passed by one. Quite simply, you're safer climbing a hill at 12mph than at 4mph.

Conclusion

If your idea of cycling is a gentle potter, stopping to tickle kitties under the chin, and discussing the price of scrag-end with Mr Jones the butcher, you will not be a natural Torq customer. But if you're faced with a hilly commute and you don't want to drive or ride a motorcycle, it's very effective.

Price remains a bit vague, but is likely to be around £1,200. It's hard to put that figure in any sort of context, because the bike is quite unique. Certainly, if you want this sort of performance, you will have to pay that sort of money. Chinese mopeds are actually cheaper to buy, but a moped brings a helmet, insurance, MOT and a mountain of other red tape.

We've tested powerful electric bikes before, but the souped-up jobs generally manage only to grunt a handful of miles before exhausting their batteries. The Torq is completely different - gentle, refined, deliciously fast, and well up to maintaining the pace for 20 miles.

This is very nearly the lightest electric bike we've seen, yet it has comprehensively beaten the flat-road speed record, the mountain course record and the hill-climbing record. Could we really not recommend it?

Surely it's illegal? The bike itself is well within the legal weight limit, and the motor is continuously rated at 250 watts, so it *would* be legal, but as the Torq can maintain a speed well in excess of 15mph, it clearly isn't. Ezee get round the problem by the tried and tested 'Italian method' - restricting the motor in such a way that the user can easily adapt it for 'off-road use', if you get our drift. But with technology now pushing the boundaries, we think it's time for the legislators to consider introducing a 'sports' electric bike category, as successfully applied in Switzerland for some years.

We must be joking! Our utterly useless Department for Transport (in-house magazine 'a2b' incidentally) can't even clarify the standard electric bike spec, but it's nice to dream. A new category would legalise a higher top speed, with tighter controls over such things as insurance and safety equipment. They really should get their fingers out in Marsham Street. If we're going to deal with the looming energy/pollution crisis, we'll need new means of getting about. This is one of them.

Specification (prototype, as tested)

Ezee Torq £1,200 (estimate) • Weight Bicycle 19.3kg Battery 4.4kg Total 23.7kg (52lb) . Gears Shimano Deore 9-spd derailleur. Ratios 46" - 133" . Battery Li-ion . Nominal Capacity 360Wh Max range 32 miles. Full charge 5 hours. Consumption (not exceeding 15mph) 11.6Wh/mile Running costs 8.2p/mile

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Torq electric bike £1295

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