

eZee Torq review

Seven years ago a friend, Claire, let me try out her Giant Lafree Twist Lite on the steep hill where I live in South Shropshire. The way it climbed that hill was inspiring. What had been an obstacle was no more. I had to have one! Back in 2003 buying an electric bicycle was straightforward. The Lafree was the best - and lightest - electric bicycle in the world. It cost me £830.

In May 2010 I entered the Tour de Presteigne ride to the Welsh coast - Herefordshire to Aberystwyth via hills and mountains. I doubted the Lafree was suitable – it would be slow and would need lots of batteries to get there. Still, it was all I had and Claire and Alan kindly lent me five spare batteries, to be shared with Paul from New Zealand with his similar machine. Then, shortly before setting off, Onbike director Phil Key's eZee Torq became available. I jumped at the opportunity and set off towards Aberystwyth.

The Ezee Torq was a revelation. Its hill climbing is far superior to the Lafree's. The 14AH lithium ion battery lasted 46 miles – expiring high up in the Cambrian Mountains. This was at least three times what I expected from the Lafree. I would have needed probably five batteries to get the Lafree to Aberystwyth – that's a lot of batteries to carry in your luggage.

The Torq would be very well suited to touring. It has the power to make 80 miles a day in hilly country easily viable, carrying plenty of luggage. The bike even runs at a good speed unassisted. Keeping the throttle open it is easy to keep going at or above 15mph.

Using a non assisted bike, my typical touring distance with luggage is about 40 miles in a day. Doubling this range opens up a whole new world of possibilities – if I can go 80 miles in a day I won't need to put the bike on a train, instead just cycle to a destination.

The bike is comfortable too – the 28" wheels, front suspension and suspension seat post contribute to this. Furthermore it has the only comfortable saddle I have ever experienced outside the world of recumbents. It's a Velo Plush. The saddle even tips up when parked, helping to keep it dry. Also contributing to comfort is the quietness of the motor.

The ride is reassuringly stable and, against expectation, I didn't notice the front wheel drive – there was no tugging or scrabbling from the driven wheel. The brakes – mechanical disc at the front and Shimano roller at the rear – were also reassuring.

I liked the gearing. The eight speed Shimano derailleur gives a decent range – a very useful top gear, although the lowest gear proved a bit high on the steepest climbs bits but then, standing on the pedals for just a couple of short stretches, I didn't once have to get off and push.

The twist grip means you can modulate the power precisely. The Lafree by contrast has just three positions – on, off and eco.

Are there any niggles? There's not much information about the state of the battery but you can get this as an extra. Unlike the Lafree there's no chain guard or integrated lock.

Another disadvantage is the cost. A new Torq will cost £1500 and a 14 AH battery a further £500. Batteries may only last 3 years, whereas my Lafree is still running on its original, thanks to occasional rather than regular use.

Seventy miles later, we arrived in sunshine at Aberystwyth's sea front. Here I switched from pedelec to moped mode. The bike ran happily at 12 to 13 mph. This was the icing on cake! An advantage of this feature is that you can use it to go up very steep hills walking alongside the bike.

In conclusion the Torq is the best most effective bicycle I've ever ridden. Trying is believing.

Thank you, Phil, for lending me your bike!

Dave Thomlinson