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Hub-gear roadsters

For short-distance daily transport, it's hard to beat a roadster for get-on-and-go convenience. **Richard Peace** reviews models from Gazelle and Trek

The term roadster is often used interchangeably with city bike, Dutch bike, or even *opafiets* and *omafiets* (grandfather bike and grandmother bike in Dutch). Whichever term you choose, certain design traits are universal: practicality, low maintenance, comfort, and durability.

This tends to make them a few kilograms heavier and a bit slower than bikes that cycling enthusiasts favour. That's not important. What matters is that you can hop on them in whatever clothes you're wearing and know they will be reliable and easy to use for everyday tasks such as shopping and commuting.

The Gazelle Esprit T3 is a genuine Dutch roadster, made in the Netherlands by a company that specialises in such bikes. The vast majority of its non-electric models feature hub dynamos and/or hub gears, two classic roadster features.

Trek is an American company better known for its road and mountain bikes. Despite this, the Loft

7i EQ Step-Over has broadly similar equipment to the Gazelle Esprit T3, with dynamo-powered lights, hub gearing, a chainguard, mudguards, and a rear rack. The main spec difference is Trek's choice of rim brakes over the Gazelle's roller brakes.

Frame and fork

Both bikes have an aluminium frame and a steel fork, although they look quite different. The Gazelle's funky modern look with varied tube profiles contrasts to the traditional round tubing on the Trek, which is in keeping with its retro feel.

As you would expect from high-quality manufacturers, welds are neat and strong and the matt black paintwork on both bikes is silkily smooth. Much of the Gazelle's cabling is

First look

Underneath the modern styling it's a traditional Dutch roadster: heavy, comfortable, and practical



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The Gazelle is super stable – a great attribute in traffic when you have one hand off the handlebar to signal
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Tech Spec GAZELLE ESPRIT T3

- **Price:** £599
 - **Sizes:** Small (49cm), medium (54cm, tested), large (59cm)
 - **Weight:** 18.9kg/41.7lb
 - **Frame & fork:** Aluminium frame with rear facing dropouts and fittings for roller brake, rear rack, mudguard, and front lamp/rack. Steel fork with fittings for roller brake and mudguard.
 - **Wheels:** 42-622 Continental Ride City tyres, Ryde Dutch rims with 36H 2-cross spoking (13g rear, 14g front), Shimano Nexus 3 rear hub, Shimano dynamo hub.
 - **Transmission:** Plastic platform pedals, 38T chainset, square tape bottom bracket, KMC Z410 RB chain, 18T sprocket. Shimano Nexus 3-speed hub with twistgrip shifter. 3 ratios, 43-80in.
 - **Braking:** Shimano roller brakes front and rear (BR-C3000F and BR-1M31)
 - **Steering & seating:** Widek Aerowing grips, Comfort curved aluminium bars, Gazelle Nero quill stem, threaded headset. Selle Royal saddle, 27.2mm aluminium seatpost.
 - **Equipment:** Alloy rear rack (front rack optional extra), enclosed plastic chainguard, plastic mudguards, AXA Solid Plus wheel lock with optional cable extra, front and rear LED lights powered by Shimano 2.4W front hub dynamo.
- gazellebikes.com

internally routed, as is the dynamo wiring within the front fork and main frame. The head tube is specially shaped to accommodate a frame-integrated front LED. It looks stylish and gives the lamp some protection too. The front LED can be relocated to sit on the front of an optional, metal basket-style front rack (load rating 5kg, £54.95), which uses the light housing on the frame for mounting. A front basket is a practical choice for a city bike, as you can just drop your shoulder bag in it and pedal off.

By contrast, the Trek's cables run externally, though on this black frame they are barely visible. While frame integrated cables are neater, some might prefer external cables for easier maintenance. You could fit a low-rider rack to the Trek as the fork has extra eyelets at the dropouts, although there aren't any halfway up the fork legs so you'll need to clamp the rack there.

I tested medium-sized versions of both bikes. The Gazelle sits you in a more upright position, although the



Top: The front lamp housing on the head tube can also be used to mount a basket-style front rack



Bottom: Despite the chaincase, hub gear, and roller brake, rear wheel removal is relatively straightforward

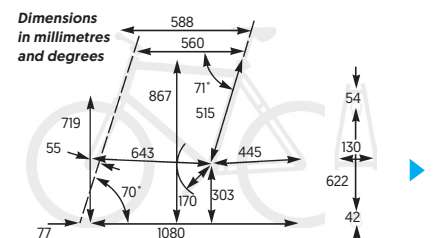
step-over height of the frame is also higher. If you're much shorter than male average, you might struggle to get either of these diamond frame bikes to fit you. The Trek only comes in medium (50.4cm) and large (55.4cm) sizes. The Gazelle comes in small (49cm), medium (54cm) and large (59cm) sizes.

There are step-through versions of both bikes, which do have smaller frame options. Additionally, all Loft models feature what Trek calls 'Flat Foot Technology': the seat tube is behind the bottom bracket, so its effective

angle is significantly shallower than the geometry figures suggest. In effect, it brings the saddle a bit closer to the ground whilst maintaining the same distance to the pedals.

Components

Disc brakes are relatively common at this price point, so it's perhaps surprising that neither bike has them. The Gazelle has roller brakes, in keeping with its low-maintenance-



First look

A lighter weight roadster with rim brakes and a cruiser-style handlebar, it still ticks the boxes for practicality



“
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Tech Spec

TREK LOFT 7i EQ STEP-OVER

- **Price** £875
- **Sizes:** Medium (tested) and Large
- **Weight:** 15.7kg/34.6lb
- **Frame and fork:** 6061-T6 aluminium frame with forward-facing dropouts and fittings for rack, mudguard, two bottles. Steel fork with mudguard fittings.
- **Wheels:** 35-622 Innova tyres, double-wall alloy 32 hole rims with 14g spokes, Shimano Nexus 7 rear hub, Shimano front dyno hub.
- **Transmission:** Alloy platform pedals, 44t chainset, sealed cartridge square taper bottom bracket, KMC Z7 chain, 20t rear sprocket. Shimano Nexus 7-speed hub and twistgrip shifter. 7 ratios, 38-93in.
- **Braking:** Lee Chi RC-483 long-reach dual-pivot callipers with alloy levers
- **Steering & seating:** Electra faux leather grips, 580x25.4mm Electra custom bend alloy bar, quill stem, threaded headset. Sprung saddle, 27.2mm alloy seatpost.
- **Equipment:** Aluminium rear rack, steel chainguard (partial), front Spanninga Brio LED dynamo lamp, rear battery-powered Spanninga Pixeo LED lamp. electra.trekbikes.com

above-all-else approach. Roller brakes are heavier and have a little less bite than discs, but they are long-lasting and need only the occasional greasing by way of attention.

The Trek has long-reach dual-pivot sidepull brakes, presumably a weight-saving choice. They're simple and work okay but both the pads and (eventually) wheel rims will wear out so they're not a low-maintenance choice. Given its higher price point, I feel that hydraulic discs would have suited the Trek more.

The Gazelle has a 3-speed Shimano Nexus hub, the Trek a 7-speed one. If you can live with the reduced hill climbing ability of the Nexus 3-speed, it's a great low maintenance system. Its bell crank mechanism means that indexing is uncomplicated, and it detaches easily if you need to change a rear flat. (The roller brake is a little more fiddly but still fairly straightforward once you have the knack.) It shifts crisply and with minimal effort.

By contrast, removing the cable from



Top: While the Nexus 7 hub has a decent range, a bigger rear sprocket would give a more useful set of ratios
Bottom: Sidepull brakes save weight and money but discs would be nicer

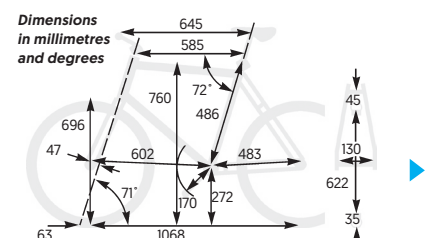


the Nexus 7 rear hub is one of those jobs that always seems to cry out for an extra pair of hands. I found that the Nexus 7 gear required the indexing to be spot on for clean lower gear changes. If you do have to refit the rear wheel, it's also a little more awkward to centre it in the frame and to get the chain tension just right because the Trek doesn't have chain tugs like the Gazelle does.

The Gazelle's rack is rated at 27kg, underscoring its heavy-duty, workmanlike credentials, while the Trek's will carry 18kg. Note that the

Gazelle's rack uses larger gauge tubing (14.3mm) which may not take older style pannier fixings with narrow hooks. The Trek's rack has 10mm tubing, which should accommodate any pannier.

Both of the Gazelle's lights are dynamo powered, and the rear is nicely protected from damage by the rack. The Trek's dynamo powers only the front light; the rear is battery powered and rather exposed on the rear mudguard. However, the Trek's front lamp is





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Above: The Gazelle's dynamo rear lamp
Near right: The Trek's rear is battery powered
Top right: Its [better] hub feeds just the front
Bottom right: This rear roller brake lacks bite



brighter and better illuminates unlit roads. It's powered by a 3W dynamo (the Gazelle's is rated at 2.4W), and all that power goes to the front lamp. Both dynamo setups are inexpensive but entirely practical systems.

The Gazelle is a heavier and more heavy-duty bike than the Trek, and that applies to most of the equipment on the bike too. Even the kickstand is sturdier – it will easily handle fully-loaded parking. The Gazelle's mudguards and chainguard are an exception: they're plastic, whereas the Trek's are steel.

The ride

Both bikes provide a comfortable, easygoing ride in city traffic – easygoing, that is, as long as there aren't too many steep hills.

The gearing of both bikes suits flatter terrain, especially the 3-speed Gazelle. (A 7-speed version is available.) I didn't use either bike's top gear much but often wanted a lower one. The simplest way to get that would be to fit a larger rear sprocket (and some extra chain links).

The Gazelle is super stable – a great attribute in busy city traffic when you have one hand off the handlebar to signal. The Trek is still a nice stable-handling town bike but has less trail and reacts more to smaller movements of the handlebar.

Other options



PASHLEY PRINCESS SOVEREIGN £845-£945

Classic vintage look with high quality, low-maintenance features and either 5-speed or 8-speed hub gears.
pashley.co.uk



THE LIGHT BLUE PARKSIDE 5-SPEED £649.99

Aluminium framed, steel forked roadster with 5-speed Sturmey Archer hub and V-brakes. Review next issue.
ison-distribution.com

Neither bike has powerful brakes. The Shimano IM31 rear roller brake on the Gazelle feels weak. The beefier-looking front roller brake (BR-C3000F) is much better, and it's modulated to stop it locking up so you can haul hard on the lever when you need to.

I'd still like a better rear roller brake (something Gazelle say is an option) but once you get used them they're about as effective as the dual-pivot rim brakes of the Trek, with the added benefit of ultra-low maintenance.

In terms of ride comfort, it's a draw. The Trek has a large sprung saddle that soaks up vibration well but the Gazelle has a more comfortable handlebar position and wider tyres. ●

Verdict

While both bikes share the same remit of easy city riding, they are actually quite distinct. If you value low maintenance above low weight, then the Gazelle Esprit T3 is very good value and should give many years of service.

The Trek Loft 7i EQ will need a little more attention as time passes (especially those brakes) but it's still low-maintenance compared to most bikes. It's not as keenly priced as the Gazelle but is around 3kg lighter. That alone may make it worth splashing the extra cash on for some riders.