

# TREKKING BIKES

Practical hybrids are more popular on the Continent than in the UK, yet they exist – and at different price points. Chris Juden tests three



(Above right) A power modulator softens the Sonoran's front V-brake

Imagine your non-cycling neighbours announce their intention to start cycling to work and the shops. Their Sunday drive for a country walk and pub lunch will also be replaced by a cycle ride that ticks all the same boxes. They might even take the occasional cycling holiday. So what sort of bike should they buy? *You* might choose a touring bike, which we know does all those things very well, but they're after comfort rather than speed and already said they 'don't want those low-down racing handlebars'.

Everyday transport suggests a hub-gear 'city bike'. But maybe the streets of your city – like so many in Britain – show scant regard for contours. And

when it comes to the holidays it's a fact that scenic means hilly. A Rohloff hub would be way over-budget. But derailleurs are very reliable these days.

## Trekking = equipped hybrid

You'll be thinking of a hybrid, but that word can mean so many different things. You should probably steer these new cyclists away from sporty 'flat-bar road' hybrids, since they'll want the lowest bottom gears they can get and tyres that go well not only on roads but also badly surfaced cyclepaths.

Panniers must be carried for shopping and holidays, and comfortable year-round use calls for mudguards and lights. Carriers etc. can of course be added to bare-bones hybrid bikes, and given the much higher profit on parts than bikes, the

shop may be happier to throw in free fitting of such 'accessories' than sell a bike that comes fully equipped. Another reason British shops are full of naked bikes is that's how someone who knows little of cycling apart from cycle sport, thinks a bike ought to look. They also seem lighter and cheaper. Add the missing parts though and on go the pounds – both sorts!

Cycle manufacturers buy in bulk. So whilst everything adds to the price of a bike, it's pennies rather than pounds. Plus the manufacturer will have ensured these parts match, fit and function together, and be responsible under warranty if they don't. The cycling-savvy Dutch, Danes and Germans know that a practical bike is better bought fully equipped. And when it comes with a wide range



of gears, for travel as well as transport, they call it a trekking bike.

Trekking is a useful label. It means 'like touring but different' – just as the bikes resemble British tourers but with different handlebars for a more upright riding position. The other difference is that in the rest of Northern Europe, trekking bikes are the standard bicycle. We assume everyone rides hub-gear roadsters over there. Many do, but trekking bikes are more numerous. There is even a German magazine wholly devoted to the Trekking Bike!

### About the bikes

Visit any large cycle retailer in Germany or neighbouring countries and you'll be presented with a full choice of trekking bikes, from cheap and heavy up to carbon-framed models selling for thousands of euros and weighing at little as 10 kilos, dynamo lighting included! I'd have loved to include one of those in this test, but you can't get them over here.

When you do see a trekking bike in a British shop it's quite likely to be from Dawes, who offer a range of six models. We picked the Sonoran, their second most expensive but the least costly in our test. This British version falls short of the full trekking spec in the lighting department, plus a few other items that continental customers expect to be included. This makes the Dawes appear cheaper and lighter – until you add them yourself.

Next (in price) we went to Cycle

Heaven in York ([cycleheaven.co.uk](http://cycleheaven.co.uk)) for the Gazelle Fuente Pure. It's a Dutch import, available at only a handful of shops in a few enlightened parts of England. But available it is and from Gazelle you get the real deal. The Fuente may be expensive but everything is included, even batteries.

Finally we see how the Americans do trekking with the Cannondale Tesoro. This company's European HQ being in the Netherlands however, we can expect this bike to be also a little bit Dutch. We seem to have a Hispanic theme going on here too: with a Mexican desert, a spring and a treasure, the last one being most expensive! It's also the most sporty.

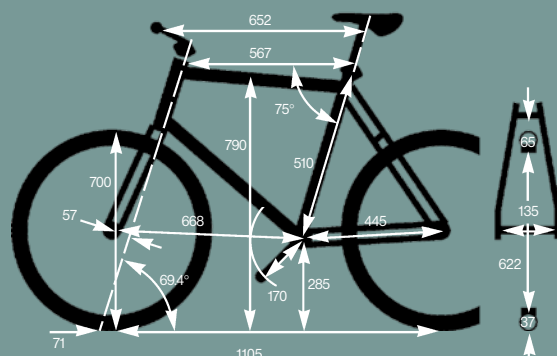
We're not attempting to compare like with like, but to give an idea of what you'll get by spending more or less on a trekking bike and a feel for what different brands may offer. To nevertheless enable fair comparisons, I've added the pounds and kg for Dawes' missing parts and subtracted for Gazelle's extras, putting these standardised prices and weights in brackets after the actual values. Cannondale deliver no more and no less than the full trekking spec.

### Frame & fork

All these bikes have an aluminium alloy frame, welded from plain cylindrical tubes for Dawes, curved and profiled for Gazelle and hydroformed by Cannondale. Gazelle's styling doesn't appear to be much

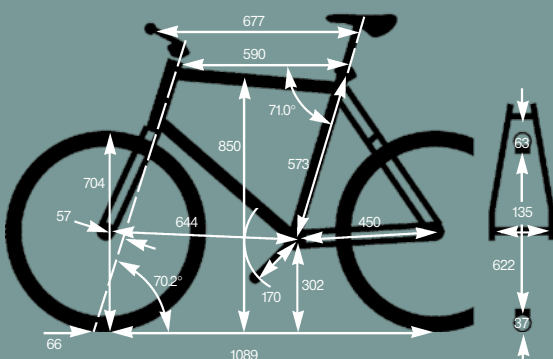
## TECH SPEC

Bike	Dawes Sonoran
Price	£400 (£460)
Weight	15.0 kg (15.9 kg)
Gears	24-speed: 24–120in
Frame	Aluminium alloy
Fork	Cro-Mo Steel
Fittings for...	3 bottles, wheel-lock, centre stand, guards & separate rear carrier, custom front low-load
Tyres	Schwalbe Road Cruiser 37-622
Rims & spokes	Alex ACE-19, 36x3 stainless 2.0mm
Hubs	Shimano Parallax q/r
Pedals	Alloy
Cranks	Shimano alloy 170mm
Chainrings	Fixed steel 48/38/28T
Sprockets	11/13/15/18/21/24/28/32T
Chain	KMC Z-72
Front Mech	Shimano Altus
Rear Mech	Shimano Alivio
Shifters	Shimano Rapidfire
Brakes	Tektro V, modulated front
Levers	Tektro Quartz
Headset	Threaded 1 1/8
Stem	90mm adjustable –10/+50°
Handlebar	Alloy 600mm 45° kraton rubber grips
Seatpost	Shock absorbing
Saddle	Dawes padded
Rear carrier	Alloy with luggage strap
Mudguards	Laminated plastic
Front Light	–
Rear Light	–
Chainguard	–
Stand	–
Accessories	Bell
Manufacturer	Dawes Cycles, 35 Tameside Drive, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, B35 7AG <a href="http://dawescycles.com">dawescycles.com</a>



## TECH SPEC

Bike	Gazelle Fuente Pure
Price	£620 (£575)
Weight	17.1 kg (16.2 kg)
Gears	24-speed: 20–106in
Frame	Aluminium alloy
Fork	Cro-Mo Steel
Fittings for...	2 bottles, wheel-lock, centre stand, guards, rear & front low-load carriers
Tyres	Schwalbe Advancer 37-622
Rims & spokes	Rödi-Gazelle VR19, 32x3 paired stainless 2.0mm
Hubs	Shimano Parallax q/r
Pedals	Alloy
Cranks	Shimano alloy 170mm
Chainrings	Steel 42/32/22T
Sprockets	11/13/15/17/20/23/26/30T
Chain	KMC
Front Mech	Shimano Acera
Rear Mech	Shimano Deore
Shifters	Shimano Rapidfire
Brakes	Shimano V, both modulated
Levers	Shimano
Headset	Gazelle threadless
Stem	Gazelle Shuttle 90mm quick-release adjustable
Handlebar	Alloy butterfly-shape, sponge rubber grips
Seatpost	Gazelle Linea
Saddle	Selle Royal Nuvola
Rear carrier	Gazelle with luggage strap & integral pump
Mudguards	Gazelle with coatguards
Front Light	Spanninga Luceo
Rear Light	Basta Riff
Chainguard	Ventesse
Stand	Powerclick III
Accessories	Bell, Axa Defender wheel-lock, Elite bottle & cage
Manufacturer	Koninklijke Gazelle NV, Postbus 1, 6950 AA Dieren, Nederland gazelle.nl



more than that, whereas Cannondale's shapes have a clear structural purpose. See how the down-tube flares to join the head-tube and also note the beautifully smoothed welds. Clear lacquer reveals that no body putty is used to get this finish!

Gazelle and Cannondale both manipulate the down-tube so as to feed cables inside it. That looks neat, but calls for a lot more outer casing and sends it round a couple of extra corners, which means more friction. See gears and brakes for my observations and remember it'll only get worse with use.

I didn't strip the frames to weigh them, but the Cannondale is odds-on favourite in the lightweight stakes, with the Dawes coming home a nose in front of Gazelle. All have plenty of integral fittings for the necessary trekking accessories, and generous clearances. The geometries vary, but with one exception not in any remarkable way.

I can't say as I noticed any extra comfort from the two steel forks compared to Cannondale's oversized aluminium. Comfort comes mainly from tyres and these all have enough air between rim and road. Many trekking bikes come with a suspension fork, but I'm glad these don't, since that so-called upgrade adds a lot of weight.

### Wheels

I attribute much of the difference in performance between these three bikes to their tyres, which all come from Schwalbe, but with properties that differ as much as their prices. Despite its greater weight the Fuente felt slightly easier to propel than the



Gazelle's Shuttle QR stem makes it easy to adjust the angle and height of the Fuente's butterfly bar

Sonoran, whilst the Tesoro was by far the most rewarding to pedal.

All the wheels are round for now, but in the long run I'd like a few more spokes at the rear.

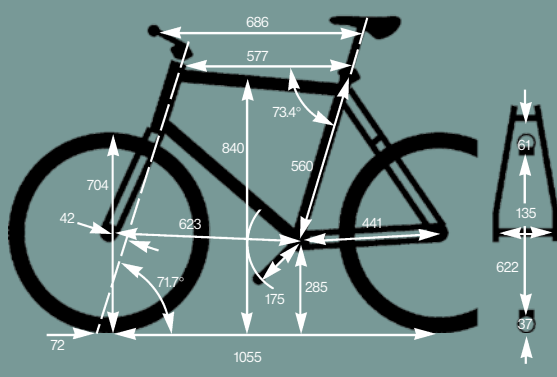
### Gears

Triple chainsets ensure a good range of gears, but there's good and then there's better. I've never thought that trekking bikes needed bigger chainrings than a mountain bike, as well as bigger wheels, which make the gearing high enough already. So I applaud Gazelle and Cannondale for their mountain bike chainsets. Dawes predictably fit the 'trekking' variant with four more teeth all round, giving the Sonoran some superfluously high gears. I never needed its outer ring, but found a use for all three on the Fuente and Tesoro.

Dawes leave all the cables on the outside of the frame and the gears shift

## TECH SPEC

<b>Bike</b>	<b>Cannondale Tesoro Light</b>
<b>Price</b>	£900
<b>Weight</b>	13.0 kg
<b>Gears</b>	27-speed: 19–111in
<b>Frame</b>	Aluminium alloy
<b>Fork</b>	Aluminium alloy
<b>Fittings for...</b>	2 bottles, wheel-lock, rear stand, guards/carriers inc. custom front low-load, internal cables
<b>Tyres</b>	Schwalbe Marathon Supreme 37-622
<b>Rims &amp; spokes</b>	TC5.0 19mm, 32x3 DT stainless 1.8mm
<b>Hubs</b>	Shimano Deore q/r
<b>Pedals</b>	Wellgo C32 alloy/rubber
<b>Cranks</b>	Shimano Hollowtech 175mm
<b>Chainrings</b>	Alloy 44, steel 32/22T
<b>Sprockets</b>	11/12/14/16/18/21/24/28/32T
<b>Chain</b>	Shimano HG53
<b>Front Mech</b>	Shimano SLX Top-swing
<b>Rear Mech</b>	Shimano SLX Shadow
<b>Shifters</b>	Shimano SLX Rapidfire
<b>Brakes</b>	Avid Single-Digit V
<b>Levers</b>	Avid FR5
<b>Headset</b>	Cane Creek ZS threadless
<b>Stem</b>	110mm adjustable 0/+90°
<b>Handlebar</b>	Cannondale Metro 600mm alloy 40° soft rubber grips
<b>Seatpost</b>	Alloy, 2cm layback
<b>Saddle</b>	Selle Royal Freccia
<b>Rear carrier</b>	Racktime Lightit
<b>Mudguards</b>	Cannondale Curana-lite alloy
<b>Front Light</b>	Spanninga Luceo
<b>Rear Light</b>	Herrmans Goggle Auto
<b>Chainguard</b>	Hessling Essencia
<b>Stand</b>	Atran Stylo SI
<b>Accessories</b>	Bell
<b>Manufacturer</b>	Cannondale Europe, Postbus 5100, 7570 GC, Oldenzaal, Nederland cannondale.com



just as they should on a brand new bike. Gazelle and Cannondale route them inside the down-tube, which looks neat, but I'm not impressed. By offsetting this tube at the bottom-bracket, Gazelle provide a reasonably straight path for the continuous casings, so the Fuente's gears work well enough when new.

Cannondale, however, put in a couple of extra bends to get around that corner and with 9-speed also being a little more sensitive to friction, rear upshifts were sometimes sluggish on the Tesoro. Unfortunately I can't see any easy way to externalise the cables on this otherwise excellent bike.

### Brakes

Inexperienced riders can find V-brakes a bit *too* effective, and may send themselves flying over the handlebars if they grab the levers in a panic. So Dawes and Gazelle both fit a power modulator on the front brake. This puts a bit of springiness into the cable, so the lever has to be pulled further, maybe giving time to realize that the bike is stopping quick enough already!

Gazelle also modulate the rear brake, which isn't such a good idea given the Fuente's long and tortuous cable route. This follows the gear cables inside the down-tube and under the bottom-bracket, then goes up the seat-tube before bending back on itself to reach the brake. Friction around those corners combines with the modulator spring to make the rear brake feel vague and soggy.

Cannondale don't even fit a modulator on the front brake (perhaps assuming customers for a £900 bike expect it to stop sharpish) and wisely



Cannondale make their welds so smooth. Internal cables are neat too, but add friction

leave the rear brake cable out of their internal routing. And if you want even better brakes the Tesoro frame has disc mounts already.

### Steering & Seating

It was good to have butterfly bars on one of the bikes (Gazelle call them multi-grip) as I've never tried them myself before. I quite liked them and can appreciate why others prefer this shape. The other two bikes have a shape we used to call North Road, with handgrips at about 45° to straight. It's okay, but I'd prefer a greater angle and a choice of other positions.

Being accustomed to drops, I adjusted the handlebars on these three bikes as low and far forward as they would go, but realise that most people will be glad to have their handgrips high and close. It's a different cycling attitude – in both senses of the word. I found I could get a little more

stretched on the Tesoro, but all three bikes come with a stem that can be angled upwards, raising the bars by at least 8cm and bringing them very much closer to the saddle than the position in which I measured and photographed them. The inclination of Gazelle's Shuttle stem, and the handlebar, can be adjusted without tools. It's even possible to do this whilst riding, but not recommended!

I could tell there was something weird about the Sonoran's geometry the moment I sat on it. Sliding the saddle as far back as it would go improved comfort, but I still felt too much on top of the pedals for the upright posture dictated by a fairly short reach to the handgrips. Later I measured the seat angle: 75°! I also found this saddle too thick and sweaty.

The Dutch know how to build a comfortable bike and whilst I don't think the Fuente's suspension seatpost moved much, the saddle was good to sit on. The Tesoro, however, was my favourite bike to ride. It's a good deal lighter of course, but as comfortable on the flat as it was quick up the hills.

## Lighting

You're going to need lights sometime on any practical bike, so they're an important part of the trekking specification. But British shops don't

like to sell bikes with lights on, so Dawes omit them. Usually these lights will be dynamo powered, to satisfy the huge German market for this type of bike, but the Dutch aren't that restrictive. The Fuente's battery lamps worked well enough, but the Tesoro confirmed those German prejudices. Though it has the same headlamp, I couldn't get this one to work at all, and the rearlamp on this bike was also on the blink – not in an eye-catching way! The Tesoro arrived at CTC with its propstand snapped off and missing, so it's likely the bike had some harsh treatment from a previous reviewer.

The good thing about a bike that comes fitted with unreliable lights is you can demand replacements under warranty. This makes hassle for the manufacturer, so usually they do fit something decent.

The Luceo headlamp looks neat, and the one that worked gave a useful beam from its unusually front-mounted LED. The Fuente's rearlamp was also a bright one.

## Other equipment

I was surprised to see only a single pair of stays and no apparent safety-release facility on any of the front mudguards. Maybe they're all stiff enough to resist a potential jam? The new bike safety standard includes a test for it, and they all claim to conform, so I put such worries behind me. When riding the Tesoro on a stick-strewn woodland path however, I found that its stay did release – and a good thing too! But I'd rather see more positive safety devices on these bikes.

Gazelle provide additional side guards on the rear. These are as useful to keep a long coat out of the spokes as a lady's skirt – or the feet of a child in a seat!

All three have a good, strong luggage carrier: perhaps overly heavy on the Fuente (it could have something to do with the Dutch practice of taking passengers!), narrower and very light on the Tesoro.

Dawes skip the chainguard, which not only calls for caution from those who wear the trousers but also lets the chain get dirtier. My commute includes one mile of towpath and after a few trips I could see the amount of grit kicked up by the tyres onto the outsides of the other bikes' chainguards – and feel it in the

Sonoran's chain!

Dawes also omit the stand, though there's a plate between the chainstays to accept one. The Fuente has a very good side-stand thus fitted, but I prefer the rear stand on the Tesoro. In this position you get better support for heavy rear panniers.

I'm glad all bikes must be sold with a bell, since I need one for the towpath's blind corners – to avoid being toppled into the river by a less careful oncoming rider! Dawes' bell is weak, Gazelle's hardly better, but Cannondale's made a good ping.

Gazelle include a host of other accessories, the most important of which is the integral wheel lock. Whilst this merely stops someone riding off on the bike, that's enough for low-risk areas and if you want to increase its security you can buy accessory chains and cables that plug into the side of this lock. It's worth noting that all the bikes have threaded fittings on their seatstays for the secure attachment of the same sort of lock. But it won't match the bike and have a folding key with the Gazelle logo on the fob.

The Tesoro's style is more Spartan. It's all there with no fuss or excess. I like the red contrasts with all that brushed aluminium. Maybe just a bit too beautiful to leave parked outside?

## Conclusion

If you're on a limited budget, a Dawes trekking bike will do the job just fine, but you'll need to budget extra for lights at least. If you can afford to spend appreciably more you might get something lighter, but not from Gazelle.

The Fuente excels in comfort, the completeness of its specification and the sheer style with which Gazelle make all these parts match and work together. It's one very refined bicycle, which sets its rider apart from the mass of bike commuters and is also perfect for pootling country lanes.

As we approach one thousand pounds some really nice trekking bikes become available, albeit not many in Britain. But Cannondale's Tesoro Light is such a fine machine that I doubt you'll need to look further (unless it's for something just as good with its cables on the outside). I would as happily go touring on the Tesoro Light as ride it to work – until someone steals it, that is!

The Tesoro's extended rear dropout provides unobtrusive mountings for a stand and possible disc brake

