



Bike test

CIRCE CYCLES HELIOS STEPS

Richard Hallett reviews an electrically-assisted tandem with more to it than meets the eye

THE CIRCE CYCLES Helios is an extraordinary machine that can be configured as a cargo bike, a child carrier, and a tandem. This STEPS version employs Shimano's beautifully-integrated e-bike motor to create an even more versatile cycle.

For starters, it addresses that most pressing of issues: fast and fun downhill and on the flat though they may be, tandems are hard work on hills. Even shared between two people, the 250W offered by the STEPS unit makes surprisingly light work of fairly steep hills. The same would be true if used as a cargo bike.

The basic Helios design employs small wheels, a one-size frame, very long seatposts, and plenty of handlebar position adjustment, so



Above: Charge remaining is displayed on the highly informative STEPS console on the handlebar

it fits riders of a range of heights. Reach to the bars is fairly short: the front is okay for a rider up to 6', assuming a fairly upright position; the rear is about right for a stoker of up to 5'4".

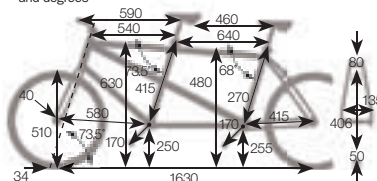
The 20" wheels wear fat tyres that roll well and offer reasonable comfort on rough tarmac. Their small diameter means the hydraulic disc brakes generate considerable torque; deceleration is powerful and controlled. The wheel size inevitably means that steering is quick, but the bike is stable at 25mph or more.

Shimano's proven Alfine 8-speed hub takes care of gearing. The Di2 version fitted can be set to shift automatically, which is unpredictable and irksome for tandem use. In manual mode, shifting is fast and smooth. On the road, the STEPS motor provides a meaty boost when setting off and from low speed, but on the flat the tandem's inherent speed makes it almost redundant when cruising. This helps battery life, which otherwise takes a hammering since most of the 250W is used when climbing any hill. As such, it should do around 60km in hilly terrain. The lockable battery is easily removed for charging and can be charged on the bike.

The machine's only quirk is a consequence of the way STEPS works: the cranks rotate independently of the chainwheel, so front and rear riders tend to pedal 'out of sync'. **C**

Tech Specs

Dimensions in millimetres and degrees



CIRCE CYCLES HELIOS STEPS

PRICE: £3,499.99 **SIZES:** One size

WEIGHT: 24.5 kg (no pedals)

FRAME & FORK: TIG-welded aluminium alloy frame, cro-moly steel fork. Fittings for two bottle cages, mudguards, rear rack, cantilever/V or disc brakes

WHEELS: 50-406 Schwalbe Big Apple tyres, Circe 20"/406 rims, Shimano Deore disc front hub, Shimano Alfine 8 rear hub

TRANSMISSION: Shimano STEPS e-bike drive (250W motor, 36V 11.6Ah battery), 170mm crank arms; Shimano Sora rear chainset, external bottom bracket bearings; 38t timing chainrings, 50t drive chainring; KMC chains; Shimano Alfine 8 Di2 hub gear with electronic shifting, 8 ratios 30-90in.

BRAKING: Shimano Deore hydraulic disc, 160mm rotors

STEERING & SEATING: Flat aluminium captain's handlebar with height extender, black aluminium alloy seat post 30.9mm, Sportif saddles; Circe alloy stoker

handlebar, 2-stage telescopic stoker stem

EQUIPMENT: Circe rack, plastic mudguards

WEBSITE: circecycles.com

OTHER OPTIONS



1 Heinzmann front wheel conversion kit

£1,500

Disc brake-compatible 60Nm front or rear wheel drive kit to convert an existing bike or tandem into an e-bike. circecycles.com



2 Gepida Thoris tandem pedelec £3,599

700C-wheeled tandem equipped with disc brakes, 10-speed SLX derailleur gearing, and a Bosch e-bike drive. e-bikeshop.co.uk