

testridden



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Gazelle Fuente Plus

It's a bike, but not as we know it.

How am I going to explain this? When Paul from Gazelle dropped off the Fuente Plus (\$1759) commuter bike he'd been using as his personal transport for several months for us to try I just didn't know where to start.

The sudden rise in the oil price means Australians are really just at the beginning of the whole commuter bike, ride it every day, everywhere concept, but the Fuente is the result of 115 years of the evolution of the species. Talk about a context problem.

Almost every bike sold to adults in Australia is based on a bike built for racing: be it on road or off. Bikes are promoted on their lightweight, high-performance aspects, and when someone wants an everyday workhorse they are pointed towards something cheaper and heavier but along the same design lines.

Gazelles are neither cheap nor heavy and every part has been designed not with outright

performance in mind but with comfort, safety, reliability and ease of use.

Just staring at the Fuente was a series of surprises at the quality and practicality of the bike. From the ground up, the tyres have thicker sidewalls to reduce punctures. The sidestand looks like it's been stolen from a Harley Davidson but it can actually keep the bike upright even when the panniers are fully loaded. There's a Perspex chain guard to keep the grease on the chain and off your pants. A similarly clear rear wheel guard keeps little feet and skirts out of the rear spokes.

All Gazelles come with rear racks with 25kg capacity and their own elastic straps in case you need to carry something and forgot to attach your panniers. Mudguards are standard, as are front and rear integrated LED lights. You do, however, get a choice of dyno or rechargeable battery-powered lights, but both have an auto-on function when it

gets dark. How cool is that?

Look closely at the back wheel and you'll also find an integrated wheel lock that carries its own key until you engage the lock. It's not the sort of lock that will let you leave the Gazelle on the street at night but it's perfect for a quick dash into the shop. Then there's the cushy seat before you get to our favorite: the wide handlebars mounted in a lever-operated headstem that, instantly and without tools, allows you raise, rotate and adjust the reach of the bars. Need a little speed this morning? Just lower the bars and power into work. Cruising with the kids? Sit tall and relaxed.

The frames use trapezoidal tubing for more rigidity and most of the cables are internally routed for a clean and low-maintenance finish. Gearing is a choice of internal and external, with the Fuente using a typically fuss-free 24-speed Shimano system.

On the road it's quite a strange sensation: the seating position

is pure comfort but the bike rolls like a road bike and handles and brakes smoothly and precisely. It's what you'd expect of a bike that costs this much but it's just in a different style of package than we'd ever experienced. Which is probably the only place the Gazelle will struggle: how many Australians are willing to spend more than \$1750 on a bike that is perfect for daily commuting and is built to last for years when the same amount will buy a mid-range racer that will need lots of maintenance and perform only half as well? Go figure.

— Matt Johnson