

BIKE TEST



Photos by Chris Juden

£250-£330 UTILITY BIKES

A tale of two city bikes

Practical utility bikes are slowly percolating back into the UK market. Technical Editor **Chris Juden** reviews inexpensive models from home and abroad

▶ **B'TWIN IS** the bicycle brand of French sports supermarket chain Decathlon, whilst Pinnacle belongs to Evans Cycles, UK. Purists may remark that Decathlon's HQ is in Lille rather than Paris, but Evans Cycles is as firmly London as Dombey & Son. And the designs of these two bicycles do reflect certain differences between the Northern European and Anglo-American approaches to city cycling.

It can't be easy to find a short word that doesn't cause offence in any EC language nowadays. 'Elops' is apparently a genus of fish (common name ladyfish). Do not be confused by the '5': this fish has only three gears. As I suggested, it's a totally European city bike, the like of which you'll find in

For true get-on-and-go convenience, even bargain-priced city bikes need a full complement of 'accessories'

cities that retain their everyday cycling culture, where people regard bikes as vehicles and, just like car drivers, expect lights, somewhere to put luggage, comfy seats, central locking, easy parking... So the Elops 5 has all of that – and still costs only £250. I don't know how Decathlon do it!

Californium, on the other hand, is (as any physicist knows) the heaviest naturally occurring element, but I guess Evans were thinking of sunshine and film stars. The isotope we tested, called Californium Two, has a 3-speed Shimano hub like the Elops 5, but not much else in common. This is a bike for English-speaking citizens, who put a premium on low weight rather than practicality. (Even city bikes must be

light in a city where sport rules cycling, and when folk heft a bike they don't count what's missing.) Evans give their Californium an eye-catching colour scheme and enough city cycling attributes to look the part.

Gears, brakes and budgeting

A few of us rode these bikes to work and I won't invent stories to go with the obvious differences in frame materials, dimensions and angles. The fact is: either does the job okay. Whilst riders were initially attracted to strawberry red, they came back for second helpings of chocolate and cream.

Neither bike has the range of gears for hilly places, but the Californium



B'TWIN ELOPS 5



copies better by setting the range a bit lower. None of us had much use for top gear on the Elops, and I recommend swapping the rear sprocket for one with 21 teeth. But you can stand on the pedals and strain away without worry, for the Elops is equipped with chain tugs, which the other bike lacks.

The one place where Decathlon's cost savings show is the quality of the brakes. Safety is not compromised: they stop the bike all right, but are difficult to adjust so they don't rub when off. I nevertheless prefer them to the long-reach dual pivots specified by Evans – presumably for their more traditional appearance. V-brakes are just fundamentally more efficient.

I would have preferred to review the B'twin Elops 7, as it doubtless weighs a bit less, with an alloy frame and better components all round for £300, which makes a fairer comparison with the £330 alloy-framed Pinnacle Californium Two. The latter would still be more expensive and less well-equipped, although it does come with a voucher worth £50 at Evans Cycles. Would that make up the difference? Not really. Take the lights, for example. The B'twin bikes come with built-in dynamo lights powered by the front hub. To retro-fit

a system like that would cost more than £100. The closest you'll get from Evans is a pair of rechargeable lamps that'll have to be removed to avoid theft whenever you park. They will still cost the whole £50, leaving you short of a lock, skirtguards...

Essential accessories

So-called accessories are much cheaper when they're an original part of a bike, adding less than half as much to its price as they cost separately. There are two reasons for this: 1) bike manufacturers buy parts cheaper, in bulk, without packaging; and 2) the retail margin on 'accessories' is three times that on bikes. The second reason explains why shops are so much happier to sell bare bikes!

The Pinnacle Californium Two isn't bare, however. Its plastic mudguards and partial chainguard save weight on the Elops's steel mudguards and complete chaincase, and are nicely colour coordinated with the frame paint. But I have safety doubts. A continuous wrap-around mudguard stay needs the stiffness of a metal mudguard to stop it being carried upwards by a stick-in-the-wheel etc. This thin plastic guard can easily

1 & 3 Integral lighting, powered by a hub dynamo, is a rarity on a £250 bike

2 Wheel-lock and skirt-guards included

Also consider



1) Pashley Princess Classic £545

Classic UK-built roadster with Brooks saddle, drum brakes, chaincase, and a basket. Sovereign version (£645) has lights and rack. pashley.co.uk

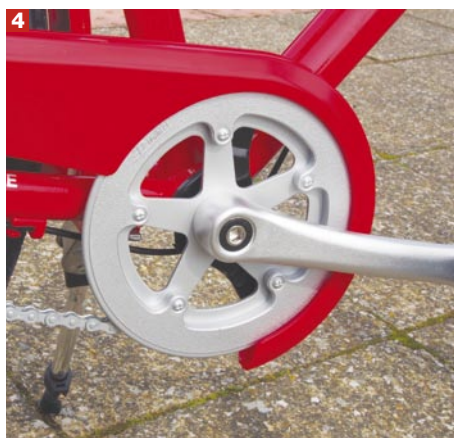


2) Ridgeback Avenida 1 £269.99

An aluminium singlespeed (38/18) with nice Continental tyres, a kickstand, and 'guards. You'll need lights and a rack. ridgeback.co.uk



PINNACLE CALIFORNIUM TWO



4 buckle and tear away from the stay, which will only grab more tightly onto the wheel as it passes the fork and wraps around the axle, hauling the rim towards the hub as it goes! Having seen the results of stays like this doing just that, it's a risk I'd rather not take. Safety-release fittings please, Mr Evans!

As well as providing more complete protection for clothing, the total chaincase on the Elops will help the chain last a lot longer than the Californium's partial covering. Some chaincases have a quick-release rear section to facilitate wheel removal. Unfortunately you don't get such refinements at this price, so punctures will be a pain to deal with.

Our Californium came without a basket, so I checked the website to make sure it's supposed to. It is, but the basket is often forgotten, judging

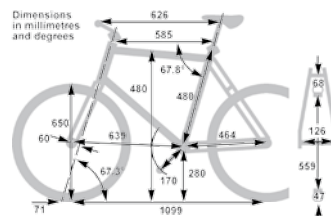
4 The chainguard is colour-coordinated and will keep oil off your clothes, but won't prolong chain life like a full chaincase will

5 Angle-adjustable stem and plastic basket

by customers' Qs and As! And although it looks wicker it's actually plastic. The only way to carry a reasonable amount of shopping is in panniers, via a rear carrier as provided on the B'twin Elops, but a basket is more handy to drop stuff into. And whilst high-up forward weight makes the steering heavy, it's reassuring to keep an eye on your handbag – says Julie.

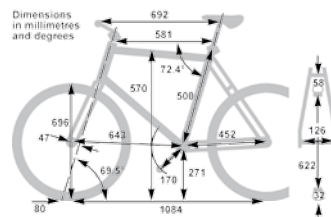
Admittedly, the Elops 5 is a somewhat heavy and over-gearred bike. But it rolls okay if you live somewhere flat, and it's tremendous value for money. Although its colour scheme is not as eye-catching as the Californium, it also has nicely coordinated components (even brown tyres) and attracted comments such as 'really smart'. The Californium will nevertheless win friends on looks alone.

Tech specs



B'TWIN ELOPS 5

- Price:** £249.99
- Weight:** 18.5kg
- Sizes:** M/L (tested), L/XL
- Frame & fork:** Steel frame & fork with fittings for: wheel-lock, guards & rear carrier.
- Wheels:** Impac puncture-shielded, brown, 47-559 'streetpac' tyres, alloy 19mm rims, 36×3 2.0mm spokes.
- Transmission:** 3 gears 46–85in via Shimano Nexus 18T×44T on 170mm
- steel cranks.**
- Braking:** Alhonga V-brakes & levers.
- Steering & seating:** Threaded 1in headset, 4cm stem, steel handlebar, brown rubber grips. Broad and thickly padded saddle, steel clip and post.
- Equipment:** Hub generator, lamps, AXA wheel-lock, steel guards, full plastic chaincase, steel carrier with parcel clip, propstand, bell.
- Contact:** B'twin.com



PINNACLE CALIFORNIUM TWO

- Price:** £330.00
- Weight:** 14.1kg
- Sizes:** Small, Medium, Tall (tested)
- Frame & fork:** 6061 butted aluminium frame with fittings for: bottle, guards & carrier. Steel fork.
- Wheels:** Kenda 32-622 tyres, Alex DC19 rims, 36×3 2.0mm spokes.
- Transmission:** 3 gears 38–71in via Shimano Nexus 20T×38T on 170mm alloy cranks.
- Braking:** Tektro
- dual-pivot brakes & levers.**
- Steering & seating:** Threaded 1 1/8 in headset, 11cm adjustable (–10/+50°) stem, alloy handlebar, brown rubber grips. Velo anatomic ladies saddle, alloy micro-adjustable post.
- Equipment:** Plastic basket, chainguard, & mudguards, propstand, bell, £50 Evans voucher.
- Contact:** pinnacle-bikes.co.uk