

BIKE TEST



A hybrid's head-up position and flat handlebar provide good visibility and easy control on town and city streets.

SUB-£1000 COMMUTERS

Urban hybrids

With a bigger budget, even city bikes can be light, sporty, and stylish.

Dan Joyce tests two for a little under £1,000

» **HYBRIDS SELL** best at the lower price points because the kind of person who wants a non-specialised bike typically doesn't want to spend very much on it. In recent years, however, the Cycle to Work (C2W) scheme has raised the bar. Participants can get a bike worth up to £1,000 tax-free through salary sacrifice, making more expensive bikes more tempting. At that price, you can get a very nice hybrid indeed.

The Koga SuperMetro, which sneaks under the C2W threshold at £999, and £100 cheaper Giant Seek 0 are both urban hybrids rather than do-it-all hybrids. They look like they're

The Dutch Koga SuperMetro looks like a hybrid with the UK market in mind: no accessories, and just under the £1,000 Cycle to Work threshold

designed for the UK market, eschewing accessories such as mudguards in favour of a more Spartan style. That style won the SuperMetro an iF Product Design Award, essentially for 'trendy design and functionality'.

Frame & fork

For an average height rider, the 57cm SuperMetro is a big looking bike, with a long seat tube and top tube. But then any flat bar bike wants a bit more length in the top tube, since you're not reaching past the end of stem clamp like you are on a drop-bar bike. Here, you're not even reaching that far: there's a pronounced backsweep to the

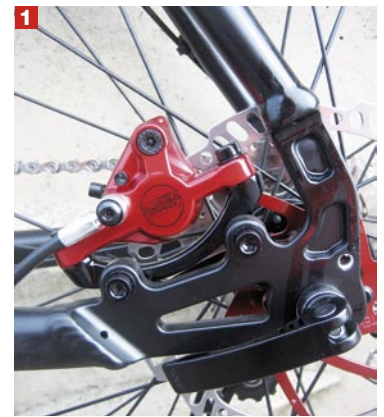
SuperMetro's bar that puts the grips in easy reach. It fitted me fine.

The matt black aluminium frame has fittings for mudguards and a rear rack, with single eyelets at the dropouts. There are also fittings for the sort of seat-stay fitting wheel lock that's common in Koga's Dutch homeland, and even for a behind-the-bottom-bracket kickstand. The rear brake hose runs internally through the down tube.

What's most unusual about the SuperMetro is its 'Feathershock' aluminium fork. There's a suspension unit underneath the head tube – rather than in it, like Cannondale's Headshok – just above the fork crown. It purports



KOGA SUPERMETRO



to give 35mm of suspension. You cannot adjust this, although you or your Koga dealer can change the spring. There are three weights, of which this Medium was too stiff for me.

The Seek O's medium-sized frame is a compact with a steeply sloping top tube. There's more standover, but distance from saddle to grips is much the same as the Koga. Aluminium frame and fork are smoothly hydroformed, and the frame eyelets that the fashion police dislike are quite subtle, particularly at the rear dropouts. At first I thought Giant had omitted them. But no: they have threaded the inside of the big upper bolts that hold the bolt-on dropouts to the frame.

Those dropouts are vertical. To tension this hub-gear'd bike's chain, there's an eccentric bottom bracket. Full mudguards would prevent you spraying water over this and making it stiff, as well as keeping the rider clean.

The Seek O's top tube has a stainless steel plate on each side, presumably to stop you scratching the paint off the frame when you park it.

Equipment

Since they're designed for city use, both bikes have fewer gears than the trekking triple setup you'd expect on

a jack-of-all-trades hybrid. The Seek O has an 8-speed Alfine hub, while the SuperMetro uses 1×9 derailleur gearing. Range is similar.

The SuperMetro's 9-speed Deore shifter moves an SLX Shadow rear derailleur up and down an 11-32 cassette. It works fine, but I'd prefer a bigger cassette and a different derailleur. The shorter cage version of this SLX derailleur – GS as opposed to SGS – would look neater and possibly shift more crisply, while still wrapping enough chain. It would cope with a cassette up to 34 teeth, making hills a little easier. Other Shadow derailleurs would cope with up to 36 teeth.

Up front there's a bashguard on the single chainring, which will stop the SuperMetro's chain derailing on the outside. It never derailed on the inside either, although I'd add a chain catcher of some kind for peace of mind.

The Seek O has a constant chainline, since it uses a single sprocket – albeit with a derailleur-width, 3/32in chain rather than a chunkier 1/8in chain. The 8-speed Alfine hub offers a 307% range, which is wider than the Koga's cassette. Steps between gears are well spaced; with the 20T sprocket fitted, it's like having 12, 14, 16, 20, 24, 27, 31 and 38-tooth sprockets. The

1 The chainstay disc brake calliper position means that a rear pannier rack will fit fine

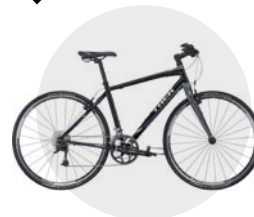
2 Feathershock suspension. The non-adjustable spring in here provides up to 35mm travel

Alfine trigger shifter works the opposite way from a high normal (i.e. normal) derailleur shifter, so the big thumb paddle shifts against the cable tension to a *higher* gear. You get used to this.

Both bikes use hydraulic disc brakes, with the rear calliper mounted to the chainstay to prevent it fouling a pannier rack. They're entry-level brakes, in hydraulic terms, but compared to cable operated brakes the power and modulation is outstanding. And you won't wear the wheel rims out.

The SuperMetro's wheels are a little nicer than the Seek O's: eyeleted rims are shod with faster-feeling tyres. The Giant's unfortunately named

Also consider



1) Trek 7.6 FX £900

Trek call this a fitness bike but its frame fittings provide all-weather commuter potential. The cassette is an 11-36, giving a good range with the 50-34 double. trekbikes.co.uk



2) Scott Venture 30 £999.99

'Only' a Nexus 8-speed hub rather than the Alfine, and V-brakes, but has hub-driven Busch und Müller lighting and Scott's own 'urban concept rack and fenders'. scott-sports.com



GIANT SEEK 0

Maxxis Detonators are a pretty good balance of comfort and efficiency around town, but the fatter Schwalbe Kojaks on the Koga are better yet. Both have some puncture protection. The wheels have quick releases, apart from the Alfine hub; I'd want security skewers for town parking.

The ride

The Seek 0 is a little heavier than the SuperMetro and feels it, perhaps because of the small efficiency losses in the Alfine's extreme gears. I only noticed this on hills, where the Seek 0's lower bottom gear felt harder work than the bottom sprocket of the SuperMetro's cassette. I'd fit a bigger Alfine sprocket; up to 23T is possible.

Shifting performance isn't as snappy with the Alfine hub, either. Even if you back off the pedalling pressure, there's often a slight delay between the shift at the lever and in the hub – most noticeably between fourth and fifth. Set against this, there's the significant advantage of being able to shift through all the gears when you're waiting at the traffic lights.

I wasn't greatly impressed with the SuperMetro's Feathershock suspension, as it gave me only a grudging 5-10mm of movement. Heavier riders (I'm 66kg) might find it fine. At least there was no fore-aft or lateral movement from the fork.

The SuperMetro nevertheless felt more comfortable through the handlebar. It's possible that the



3 The Seek 0's frame eyelets are subtle, even more so at the rear where the inside of the drop-out bolts are threaded instead of the frame

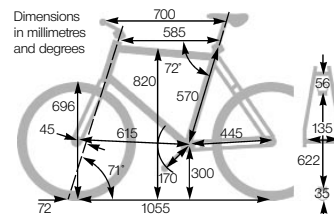
4 Chain tension is via an eccentric bottom bracket, which makes wheel refitting easier

suspension was helping more than it seemed, but I think it's just as likely to be the slightly fatter tyres and the backsweep of the handlebar, which puts your wrists at a more comfortable angle and eases the pressure on the heels of your hands. I'd fit Ergon grips to the Giant. Both bikes have a fairly high bottom bracket, given that you'll be stopping and starting a lot on either of them.

Summary

Add mudguards, lights, and a pannier rack, and either of these bikes would make a thoroughbred urban commuter. Living in a hilly town, I preferred the sportier ride of the Koga SuperMetro. The Giant Seek 0 is by no means a heavyweight workhorse, however, and the £100 price difference would buy the ergonomic grips and faster rolling tyres that I missed. So: do you want a derailleur or an Alfine hub?

Tech specs



KOGA SUPERMETRO

Price: £999

Weight: 11.55kg

Sizes: 47, 50, 54, 57 (tested), 60, 63cm

Frame & fork:

Butted 6069 alu' frame with fittings for rack, m/g, wheel lock, kick-stand, 2×bottle. Koga Feathershock fork with m/g eyes.

Wheels: 35-622

Schwalbe Kojak tyres; Mach 1 250 Disc rims; 32×3 2.0mm spokes; Koga disc hubs.

Transmission:

flat pedals; Truvativ E400 chainset, 170mm,

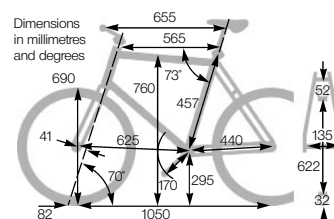
38T; Truvativ Powerspline b/b; KMC X9 chain; Deore 11-32T cassette; Deore 9-speed shifter; SLX Shadow rear derailleur. 9-speed, 33-95 inches.

Braking: Tektro Auriga Pro discs

Steering & seating:

Koga lock-on grips; 600×25.4mm alu' bar; 110mm 0-50° adjustable stem; Tange Seiki integrated headset. SR Viper saddle; 27.2mm seatpost.

Contact: koga.com & cyclesense.co.uk, tel: 01937 530303



GIANT SEEK 0

Price: £899

Weight: 12.3kg

Sizes: S, M (tested), L, XL

Frame & fork: AluX

aluminium frame with eccentric b/b, bolt-on dropouts, fittings for m/g, rack, 1×bottle. AluX aluminium fork, m/g eyes.

Wheels: 32-622

Maxxis Detonator tyres; 622×19 Giant CR70 alu' rims; 32×3 2.0mm spokes; Shimano Alfine 8-speed disc rear hub; Shimano FH-RM65 front hub.

Transmission: studded pedals;

Shimano Alfine S500 Hollowtech II chainset, 170mm, 45T; Shimano external b/b; KMC Z 51 chain; 20T sprocket. Alfine 8-speed shifter & hub. 8-speed, 32-99 inches.

Braking: Avid Elixir hydraulic discs.

Steering & seating:

Giant lock-on grips; 40×31.8mm alu' low-rise handlebar; 100mm×7' alu' stem; FSA threadless headset. Giant Urban Trail saddle; 30.9mm alu' seatpost.

Contact: giant-bicycles.com