

FIRST RIDE
CIRCE
HELIOS AUSTER
£1,599

The Circe of life

The kids, the shopping — even the wife/husband: Circe's Helios tandem takes care of everything that life can throw at it

Words Ellie Baron Photos Roo Fowler

Yes
The perfect, genuine do-it-all workhorse



“Is that a folding tandem?”
It's a question that you'll have to get used to when riding the Circe Helios, thanks to its 20in wheels.

It's not a folding tandem, by the way, but the smaller wheels have a practical application in that they make the Helios's 'stoker' (rear) position perfect for younger riders thanks to the frame's low stepover height. In a happy coincidence, 'stoker fear' appears notably reduced, too, as the rider is much closer to the ground than on standard-sized wheels.

Our test bike was the Helios Auster, the drop-bar version of Circe's six available Helios models, all of which share the same frame, but are specced with different wheels, components and bars dependent on their application.

Out on the road, despite its smaller wheels, the Auster felt incredibly stable, and not at all twitchy, while at the same time being very manoeuvrable — perfect for snaking in and out of struggling riders on the recent London-Brighton.

Which brings us nicely to its climbing abilities. Tandems don't climb, do they? The Circe appears to laugh in the face of gravity, thanks in no small part to its weight of just 14kg (31lb), powered by the will of two riders.

A 52/39/30t triple chainset with Shimano's 9-26t Capreo cassette gives a good range of gears to get you over, and down, everything that the route between the capital and 'London-by-the-Sea' can throw at it, including Ditchling Beacon — given the chance anyway; the crowds had us walking more often than we would have liked.

Descending was great fun, with the



Chain tensioner keeps things neat and tidy

weight of two people seeing us flying past the other charity riders, but always in perfect control thanks to the compact frame and confidence-inspiring front disc brake.

Such a lightweight tandem was also easy to power with just one person: Circe's stroke of genius has been to design the Helios frame to accept a dedicated rack conversion, which replaces the stoker's seatpost and bars to turn the tandem into a one-man HGV (or should that be mini-van?). The rack will carry enough luggage for multiple round-the-world trips, or will accept two child seats for the closer-to-home task of taking a pair of little ones to school.

Other add-on accessories include mudguards and conventional pannier racks, plus crank-shorteners to extend the adjustable advantages of the Helios.

Such a small frame in comparison with more regular-sized tandems ensures that the removal of the Helios's quick-release seatposts

No
Takes a little getting used to when riding it solo



The Circe: perfect for parents, spouses...and builders

Weight: 14kg (31lb)
Frame: Helios 7005 aluminium
Frame sizes: one size
Colours: black
Fork: steel (disc and V mounts)
Groupset: Shimano 105/Tiagra
Wheels: Alexrims DM18 on Shimano Deore XT (front) and Shimano Capreo (rear) hubs
Bars: Pro LT anatomic (captain); 2B City Slicker (stoker)
Saddles: 2B Sport
Tyres: Schwalbe Kojak
Price: £1,599
www.circecycles.com

and a twist of the bars will easily fit it into most cars with the back seats down, with the removal of the 20in wheels reducing overall length slightly if a few more inches are needed. But it's not a folding tandem, OK?



Infinite adjustability: the Circe is littered with QR options



V-brake behind and disc up front give loads of stopping power

ALTERNATIVE

TWO-FOLD TANDEM

Bike Friday Two'sDay 105 Performance £3,360

Small-wheeled tandems are few and far between, but US bike manufacturer Bike Friday's Two'sDay 105 Performance is, like the Circe, ideal for smaller stokers with its 20in wheels, with a small step-over height and nigh-on infinite adjustability, making this another tandem that is perfectly suited for the whole family, two at a time.

But unlike the Helios, Bike Friday's 20in wheeler really is foldable, making world travel, or the two-man train/bike commute, a breeze.

