

if it ain't fixed, don't break it

what is an il pompino, and why should we be interested? well, the one we have as our guest at the post is an all steel, fixed wheel road style bike in a rather fetching shade of blue with a style of handlebar apparently referred to as a midge bar. imagine a shallow drop road bar which has been grasped at each side by a tug o war team and pulled. the steerer is the ubiquitous 1 1/8" aheadset, gratifyingly of the external variety. i'm not sure if this is because it's a hassle to work a steel tube to enable an integrated set (yuk) or because brant at on-one (il pompino's maker) favours the external type.

on the basic pompino, forks are in steel, the same as the frame, while its big brother (pompino pro) sports the carbon variety. both wheels are impressively built on black, on-one large flange hubs, giving it that distinctive retro track appearance. rear wheel is a flip-flop - there's a cog on each side - with a 20 tooth and an 18 tooth. i am assured that the reasoning behind a flip-flop hub is to allow at least one other gear by flipping the wheel as necessary. however, jez and i had the rear wheel set up in the track ends with the substantial chain tensioners, so any notions we may have had of flip flopping, would have to have taken place before pedalling commenced - there's no way either of us

would have appreciated standing out on uiskentuie strand with an adjustable spanner and an allen key trying for a lower gear.

since the chainwheel is a 48 tooth, for those interested in gear inches, that gives the pompino the option of a 65" or a 72" gear, though there are

a myriad of toothed options available throughout the industrialised world. the chainwheel is affixed to a truvativ chainset which in turn meets the steel frame via one of those shimano type bottom bracket things, where the axle (spindle?) is attached to the drive side and the left crank fits on to that. in other words, like the aheadset, the bearings are on the outside - pretty much de rigeur these days, but a surprise on this machine.

the rear fork is a monostay (i'm a vegetarian - i don't do wishbones) and fitted with rack mounts and mudguard eyes for those who need to carry stuff, or even for touring (take a step forward tony morley). i will admit to being surprised that the brakes were of the cantilever variety, since the bike is road styled and i would have expected calipers (particularly on the pompino pro which comes with standard road bars), though cantis are better on a tourer and maybe cyclo cross has had an influence here. however, at least they were cantilevers and not

the 'linear pull' brakes beloved of the big s. they are activated by a pair of tektro aero levers, and the bar tape was wrapped to perfection, making my attempt at fitting colnago tape to the c-40 look decidedly amateurish.

the saddle is very pretty - jez's kids thought it very cool. not what i would fit to the colnago (elitist snob) but it very much looked the part on this bike. the most important part of the whole bike, the frame, is a not too heavy, but very neatly tig welded set of steel tubes. ahhh, steel - not a material seen in the bike world too often these days, but more favoured by the post than aluminium of whatever flavour. paint finish was very good for a bike of any price, let alone something costing under 500 and comparable to that on my colnago superisimo



which cost more for the frame than this complete bike. smart thinking employed on the seat clamp which has the slot at the front, keeping much of the rear wheel crap from welding the post to the tube (eventually). considering the bike turned up in two boxes - one for the wheels and one for the frame assembly, the finished item looked 'well smart' as my son would say. just the sort of machine that invited the unwary to take it for a scoot somewhere close by.

and this is where the 'fun' started.

jez is an old hand at this, having covered more miles on a fixed than most of us have had hot dinners, so this was like meeting an old friend to him. he's also slightly more vertically challenged than i am, so the 51cm frame was just dinky-doo. i, on the other hand, have never ridden a fixed wheel bike in my puff, so instead of the usual situation where we test stuff, this time the stuff tested me.

getting on the pompino was absolutely hilarious unless you were yours truly. despite my brain being well acquainted with the fact that i was going out on a machine that did not freewheel, knowing and acting upon this essential piece of information were two entirely different things. this was not assisted by the fact that jez had fitted his campag clipless pedals and i felt honour bound to do the macho thing and clip myself in. leg one was a piece of cake, except it kept going round as the bike moved forward, meaning that leg two was having a heck of a time trying to meet with the pedal, let alone clip in. quite sure that no-one was watching, i grabbed a nearby wall (honestly) and held myself still, while clipping both feet into the pedals. once underway, pedalling is just like any other bike, as long as you keep pedalling (apologies to any fixed veterans who are creasing themselves with laughter at this point). the first bike and novice journey was a 21 mile round trip to port ellen primary school (to hand my homework in:-) which was not entirely to my liking, and not just because i got caught in a hail shower.

i did mention that the frame was 51cm, admittedly with a sloping top tube, while my colnago sports a 54cm frame. height was reasonably easily taken care of by a lengthy on-one seatpost, but smaller frames have shorter top tubes, in this case a full centimetre shorter than the colnago. couple this with a six degree rise, 100mm stem and



i was losing a good four cm against the colnago. this equals discomfort, particularly into an islay headwind. the next frame size up is a 54cm which likely has a correspondingly longer top tube, but on-one's website claims that the pompino should be sized 3cm less than a

standard road frame. what's a chap to do?

even jez said he would have preferred a slightly longer stem than the one supplied (on-one do not appear to supply stems any longer than 100mm, though it is possible to specify a zero rise version), but we both agreed that the shorter stem probably makes more sense in an urban setting where bracing yourself against horizontal rain is likely to be less of a preoccupation. try pedalling the colnago at very low speeds and it immediately becomes a bit of a handful (not unexpectedly), but the pompino was just as happy at my often embarrassingly slow meanders as it was at speed (and i use the term in its loosest sense). there's a bit of toe/pedal interface overlap that was a tad worrying when turning, if only because the pedals keep going round oblivious to the potential pratfall almost about to occur. yes the colnago's the same, but you can freewheel yourself out of that. and then there was the bottom bracket

height. this is a centimetre higher than standard road bikes, and logically so, since it is not possible to take either pedal out of the equation when cornering, but this creates a concomitant problem. in order to have the saddle at an ergonomic height and avoid hitting knees off chins, when feet are removed from pedals at stopping time, said feet are nowhere near the safety of solid ground. easy for the jez hastings of this world, but an unexpected surprise for us novices. the midge bars were great, though i admit i had my misgivings. i spend about 90% of my time riding on the lever hoods, and the angle at which the bars placed the tektros did not look at all convincing, but it turned out to be comfort personified, as did riding in the drops. and however cool the saddle looks when your bum isn't on it, sitting on it was enough of a pleasure that i didn't really notice it, which is probably the nicest compliment that a saddle ever gets.

the tyres i didn't really like, if for no other reason than i didn't really like them, but since you can specify a whole when of different continental tyres or even a schwalbe variant, there's probably something there for everyone. (tyres other than nutracks are an added extra on top of the specified bike price). the wheels came with 700x23c continentals but you might just get away with up to 32s at the back,



though the front forks look as if they could accommodate something larger still.

now i don't drink any kind of alcoholic beverages, and many have said over the years that if i only just took the time to get acquainted with whichever drink i was being persuaded to have, i would come to enjoy it. a persuasion which obviously never made it past the initial stages, and i have to admit that the idea of riding fixed has entered the same arena. while the rebel in me is desperate to be cool with this whole fixed scene, and to take it in my stride, the reality is that i suck at it. and since i would rather just get on a bike and go for a ride, i doubt that i have the time, inclination or patience to actually 'get it'. a pompino with a singlespeed freewheel would be a delight for me, and i'd be quite happy to wear out one of those. the on-one single speed hub has wide enough threads to incorporate such decadent luxury and though they don't

stock freewheels, separate purchase could easily be arranged and still hit the magical 'less than £500 figure'.

none of the above is intended to reflect negatively on the il pompino itself which is a very good bike at a very good price. but, if like me, you have long fancied joining the ranks of the 'would be couriers' and track standing at the traffic lights (thankfully something spared the residents of islay, since we don't have any traffic lights), it may be prudent to try before you buy. i was about to spend a not insubstantial amount of plastic on having my old superissimo repainted, fitted with track ends and build a fixed wheelset. only now i'm not.

the more experienced half of thewashingmachinepost assures me that this machine is fixed wheel heaven and is currently trying to borrow a grandmother to sell in order to hang on to the blue pompino housed in thewashingmachinepost bike shed.

the il pompino is priced from £449: the pompino pro from £499. order yours from www.on-one.co.uk. many many thanks to brant richards for the loan of the test bike. very much appreciated, and thanks to morrison's bowmore distillery who provided the backdrop for the photos.

since posting this review, brant has e-mailed to say that they can fit any stem from 90mm to 130mm from the planet-x range, and that the bike reviewed can also be had with standard road bars instead of the midge. however, i'd stick with the latter - much more fun. and if frame sizing greets you the way this greeted me, then moving up a size is apparently just as practicable because of the sloping top tube design.

www.on-one.co.uk
www.planet-x.co.uk

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