

Tern GSD

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The Tern GSD is, without a doubt, the most useful bike I've ever ridden and there's a hole in my life now I've had to give it back. This is a great bike, for lots of reasons: it's fun, it's supremely practical, it's easy to store and it's built to last.

One of the great things about having a motor on your bike is that it takes the strain for you. And since it does that, it's useful to be able to pile lots of stuff on your bike. There are a range of cargo bikes out there, of which the Tern is one. Tern call the GSD a "compact cargo" bike.

You might be thinking that the GSD doesn't look compact, especially with the huge panniers. But the Tern GSD is no longer than a regular city bike. The GSD uses 20" wheels, which are a good deal smaller than standard wheels, even with the huge custom Schwalbe tyres that Tern have specced. So if you use the same wheelbase as a normal bike, you end up with a bike that's a fair bit smaller.

Tern have lengthened the wheelbase of the GSD so that end to end it's the same as a standard e-bike with big wheels, and that extra space is all at the back, behind the rider. The GSD has a very compact ride position too, and that frees up more space for load carrying. It's pretty upright with a short reach, so it's great for good visibility in traffic and the dropped frame design makes it easy to get on and off.

Fun to ride, lots of capacity

First things first: this bike is fun to ride. It doesn't feel unwieldy, and it fairly buzzes around on its huge tyres which take the sting out of any surface it's likely to encounter. The adjustable stem and the telescopic seatpost mean that you can adjust it to fit pretty much anyone: I'm 1.89m tall and I fitted fine; my kids could ride it too. And everyone you meet will think it's great too, especially if you're giving someone a lift. People tend to think that bikes are impractical, and if we're honest many of them

are, for the kind of stuff that normal people want to do in a day. But you can watch people watching you riding the GSD, and you can see them thinking: I'd love a bike like that.

The bike we tested was set up with Tern's full-length panniers: they're very spacious and you can easily get a week's worth of shopping in them. They're also sturdy and well designed and they have neat restraining straps across the top so they hold their shape well when you fill them right up. They're pretty scuff-resistant too. On top of that (literally) was a single bench seat: the saddle has a grab handle and there are two footrests by the front of the panniers, so you can give a friend a lift. Which I did, on numerous occasions.

That's not the only configuration though. You can get a full-length bench and footrests, to take two kids on the back, or if they're smaller you can fit two Yepp child seats. And a cargo platform is available too for bigger loads, if you don't need to ferry people about. You can configure the bike according to your needs. You can have a porteur rack on the front too, like we did. Whatever your carrying needs, you should be able to spec it to suit.

What you end up with is a very compact bike, but with a big load capacity. And it is really big. I've carried a full video studio setup on the GSD: lights, cameras, stands, the lot. And I also had room for Matt the videographer riding on the bench seat at the back. And I carted all that stuff up the steep hill to our location, with the motor taking the strain.

I've taken the kids to school. I've carried a week's worth of shopping, easily. I've carried a bunch of tools for DIY. I've carried six boxes of cider when I was briefly the local cider delivery boy. I've even carried another bike, with the wheels in one pannier and the frame in the other. That was a bit of a squeeze, but it did work.

The GSD doesn't have the overall capacity of a long-john cargo bike with a bucket at the front, especially a bigger one. But those bikes need some serious space to store them, and the GSD manages a capacity that's perfect for everyday living in a package that's no bigger than the bike you ride now. That's some feat: you're not going to easily get a full-sized cargo bike in your shed, or your hallway.

But the GSD goes even further than that: You can fold the bars down and drop the seatpost, and then you can stand it on its end because the big rear rack has four feet built in. So that means that even if space is really limited you should be able to find some sort of nook or cranny you can shove the GSD in.

Now this is a 30kg+ bike so you're not going to want to lug it up three flights of stairs to a top-floor flat; in fact any kind of steps or stairs are a struggle. Ideally you want level access to wherever you're going to store it, or a few steps at most. The weight and size of it means that you're not going to get anyone trying to walk away with it if it's parked outside the supermarket though; there's a nurse's lock through the front wheel for security if you're popping into a store.

Motor-wise, the bike performed brilliantly. It's hilly where I live in Bath, but the Bosch Performance Line motor never struggled to get me where I want to go. The 20" wheels mean that the standard gearing that Tern use here ends up being quite low, which is perfect. You'll spin out top gear easily enough going downhill, but I'll always trade that for having enough gears to get back up again. It's not a bike that's designed to go fast, anyway; there's very little incentive to make it go faster than the 25km/h assistance limit.

The GSD is designed with Bosch's DualBattery system. It comes with one 400Wh battery but you can add another next to it, and ours had two. That 800Wh capacity means range is never really something you think about. This isn't a bike you'll be doing much long-distance cycling on, it's a city workhorse. And two batteries means a week of running into town and back with no worries about charging. When the time comes it's best charged overnight as it takes a while. Realistically the extra cost of the second battery is only likely to be of interest if you're using the bike for more than just errands, maybe as a delivery vehicle or for work during the day. Most people will find the 400Wh version plenty in terms of range.

Overall, it's nothing but positives really. The GSD is fun, it's practical and it's built to last. It's an e-bike for the long term, for moving your life over to getting about by bike. You should try one. I really can't recommend it highly enough. Okay it's expensive, but it's not bad value because it's so useful:

One of the things people often say is, “you could replace a car and save yourself money”. That’s certainly true, because even running a small car will cost you a couple of grand a year in tax, and fuel, and maintenance, and insurance, and parking, and magic trees and so on. Even an expensive e-bike is going to pay for itself in a couple of years if you can go down from two cars to one, or one to none.

This is an expensive e-bike. Even the basic build will set you back £4,000, and this one we’ve got has a few extras that take it closer to five grand. But in terms of replacing a car, it does a better job than most. And it does that without being a massive bulky unit that you need a double garage to store. It’s great, in short. Go and try one.