

First Ride: Fixie inc Betty Leeds

By  tony_farrelly - Posted on  30 November 2008



Steel road bikes are few and far between these days, so Fixie Inc's Betty Leeds was always going to cause a stir in the road.cc office. And it did.

To find out how much of a stir, read on...

First impressions

As you'd expect from Fixie inc the Betty Leeds is a looker: a striking black and white paint job matched by an equally striking attention to frame detail. Nice touches include the info on the seat stay giving you the low-down on the frame material (heat treated 4130 chromoly, for the record), the simple and functional rear dropouts, the custom painted design on the inner legs of the Ouzo Pro forks, the neatly brazed-on cable guides, and the really satisfying way the Truvativ seat post slots in to the seat tube. I'm not a big fan of retro-chic, but by Fixie's standards this is a very understated bike, (well, it's mostly black for a start), it looks a bit like a Lemond . The look grows on you especially once you've ridden it..



More Betty Leeds pics

Because their bikes are such striking machines and because they're steel, and most of them are fixeds, it would be easy to pigeonhole Fixie as making bikes for urban posers. That would be unfair on two counts: first they're no reason why posers, urban or rural, shouldn't be able to ride good bikes too, but more importantly it would be failing to spot what Fixie are really all about. Yes they do steel, they do fixed, and they like a retro look, but they also like to push things a bit. This is not a pastiche old-school steel racer.

Check out those rear stays if you don't believe us - very different to the Charge Skewer with its ultra straight stays we've also got in on test (be

interesting to compare it to the steel version of the Skewer when that hits the streets). As ever the Germans and the Brits are trying to achieve similar things in very different ways. The Betty Leeds is a performance machine, but it's more aimed at the fast sportive rider than the racer - Fixie have the Reynolds 953 Chip Race for that.

Over here it will be available as a frameset or as a complete bike with a similar build to the one here: SRAM Force groupset, Truvativ 'bars, stem and seat post, and Selle

San Marco Aspide saddle. The only things likely to be different are the wheels the DT Swiss Mon Chasseral on our test model are seriously light but they are not without their problems.

What's it like to ride?

I read somewhere that the Betty Leeds was a bike for rich fixed fans who wanted to get around town fast... well, yes, but having ridden it in the country I'd say it's got a lot more to offer than that.

The Betty Leeds frame isn't heavy, but stick those DT wheels on it and the Betty Leeds builds into a very light bike indeed – particularly for steel. It's twice the price of the Orbea Onix (and then some, more on that later this week) but in this guise it is also three pounds lighter.

From the off though this is one eager beaver. Get it on the flat and you'll never drop out of the big ring, the acceleration is fantastic and not just from a standing start, kick it when you are already on the move and it really does spring forward. Steering is responsive and direct. That lightness doesn't tip over into twitchiness though, this is a well balanced machine. Jump out of the saddle to put the power down and there is no hint of "diving". As you'd expect of a bike this light, it climbs like a dream.

Just as well, cos this was my first experience of SRAM Rival and it wasn't nearly as impressive as the SRAM Red I rode a couple of weeks back. That was crisp and the Double Tap shifters really did just require one tap or two taps to go up or down. That was on a bike straight from the box, our Betty Leeds had done the rounds before us which may account for the squidginess of the Rival downshifts which required more of a push rather than two taps.

Near the top of our usual test hill which I'd spun up while giving myself a crash course in Double Tap technology I noticed that two worryingly fit looking types had jumped on behind, my gear shenanigans meant that unusually I had something left in the tank so I thought I'd see what would happen if I booted it ... when I looked back a couple of miles later they'd gone.* Now that doesn't happen often.

And going down the other side, Betty railed it until a slight touch on the front brake resulted in a nasty rubbing sound from the back end. Hmm...

"Those chainstays look pretty beefy, and they've got a reinforcing bridge like the Van Nicholas Astreaus, the back end can't be flexing, it didn't do that when I put the mighty power of Frailly through them on the flat... it just went, maybe I'll try the front brake again... yikes".

Okay, it wasn't yikes in a scary way, but then I'm not a balls out descender... back at the office and a closer look at that rear wheel revealed why the man from Fixie threw himself bodily in front of Big Dave when he went near the bike shouting "YOU are not to go anywhere near this bike!" Those DT Mon Chasserals may be light, but they are also seriously flexy too. How flexy? Grip lightly between thumb and forefinger and then push. Observe how the wheel touches the brake blocks! Note to DT Swiss: We're for rubber tyres, but making a whole wheel out of the stuff is an innovation too far. Oh, and I'm well under the 90kg weight limit – despite appearances to the contrary.

We've already swapped out the Mon Chasserals for the **Shimano RS80s** we tested last week for the rest of the test period so look out for the full review on road.cc coming soon.

*No they hadn't turned off. Probably.