

October 2021

NCM Moscow Plus: 3,000 Mile Review

3,000 miles to date

I've now ridden over 3,000 miles on my NCM Moscow Plus (27.5") so thought it was probably time to do a proper review of it, warts and all.

Background

I selected this bike as it seemed to be the best one I could afford and offered a good range. So, did I make a good decision?

My bike is UK/EU spec so 250W with a 25km/h assist limit and no throttle, we are a bit prehistoric over here.

Over the time I have owned it I have added a few bits and pieces to customise and adapt it to my own requirements. It is pictured here in its current form.

Hello Boris



The best additions have been the mudhuggers but the Brooks saddle and the retro bar-ends (had to change the grips to do this) both really help on a long trip.

Review

Obviously, the Moscow Plus is a rear hub motored bike and is hard-tailed so it is not suited to extreme off-roading, jumps, or downhill racing. This is no problem to me but I have still used it on some challenging off-road courses (with a 200ft drop into the sea if I got it wrong on one occasion). To be fair, this does show up the limitations of the entry-level forks. It is worth noting that some forks can cost more than one of these bikes so this is not a criticism.

When I first got the bike, it seemed huge and a bit scary (especially when the power kicked in), these days it just feels like it belongs there and it has become my main form of transport (yes, the car has gone).

*A few parts have
been worn out*

Over the first 3,000 miles, I've replaced the rear tyre (Smart Sams won't last long on the back although I like their grip on the front). I replaced it with a Schwalbe Marathon MTB, which is also nearly worn out now. I've also been through 3 chains, 1 freewheel and numerous sets of brake pads. All of these are consumables and this is to be expected on any bike, especially with me living in a hilly area and being reasonably heavy.

For cosmetic reasons, I changed the front rim stickers as they got a bit tatty.

The only unexpected failure I have had to date is two rear spokes (not at the same time), reading the forums, they do seem to be a weak point. Easily changed so buy some spares, ideally something like Sapim as they are a bit stronger.

I have bent the derailleur hanger a couple of times in crashes and now own an alignment tool. Again, this is not a criticism, the hanger is designed to bend to save the derailleur itself. I also managed to snap a rear mudhugger and my steel saddle rails (it really was quite a good crash).

Great range

From a range perspective, I average about 60 miles per kW/h giving me a usable range of about 50 miles on mixed terrain and using £1 of electricity every 400 miles. I normally ride on assist level 3 which means I'm largely under my own power unless on a hill.

I find the bike stable in most conditions but it is slab-sided and a strong cross-wind can be interesting at speed. On the subject of speed, my record (downhill) is 45mph, this is rather silly and not recommended.

The motor kicks out around 55Nm of torque, this is exceptionally good for a 250W hub motor and it will climb anything I've found with a bit of help from me. Obviously, a hub motor can't climb as well as a mid-drive with the same torque, that is basic mechanical theory and indisputable fact. However, it does manage very well (I live in hilly Cumbria), even with a loaded trailer.

Charging the battery from flat; takes about 4 hours as per the adverts. I have used the bike without the battery a few times while it has been on charge. Obviously, the hub motor makes it a bit heavy, but it works fine with no drag.

On the subject of weight, the bike is rather heavy (over 30kg in its current format with a basic toolkit onboard) and this does make it hard work to exceed the maximum assist speed on the flat. I'm afraid that's life. The batteries weigh a lot whoever you buy your bike from and however much it costs, they all use the same cells.

The gears are a bit agricultural but that is what you get for the price, they do the job and the ratio range is great although an 11-32 cog has a big jump in the middle of the gears, you can get around this by learning your ratios and changing rings on the front at the same time as the back between 3rd and 4th.

The brakes are effective for an entry-level bike. I'd love multi-piston brakes and will upgrade if/when they wear out but the standard Tektro ones are more than fit for purpose (they squeeze hard enough to wear out brake pads within a few hundred miles).

Tyre pressure makes a big difference to the ride and stability, more than I expected. I generally use 55psi on the road in both front and rear and drop it by at least 10psi off-road.

Although I've tried all of the power settings, I stick to 3 all the time. The setting changes the speed at which assistance kicks in and 3 suits my riding style.

I do wish I'd ordered the rear-rack as they are proprietary and impossible to find after the event so think about that at purchase time.

I have ridden in all weather conditions. If you are going to use it in heavy rain, put some tape over the power button on the battery as it is a known weak point, apart from that all has been fine.

Conclusion

I'm in the market for a second bike for a bit of commuting and will probably do a Bafang conversion soon on an old frame I've got lying about to save a few quid. I will still use the Moscow Plus for my leisure rides.

The bike is battered and bruised and looks like it has been used but, in fairness, it has taken all I have thrown at it. Not many bikes in this price range would have survived this level of abuse in my opinion.

So, in conclusion. If you want a budget ebike that is capable of combining everyday use with some light trails I would recommend the Moscow Plus, it takes me where I want to go reliably with no great fuss and still manages to make me smile at the same time. All in all, a really good solid bike and I really do believe you'd struggle to find better for the price.

I look forward to doing a 10,000 mile review and am reasonably confident that it will happen.

So in summary, is this bike any good? Yes, I believe I have made a good purchase, it will be a great town and shopping bike. I can also use it for my occasional commute too (technically about 9 miles each way to my nearest office but in reality I usually work from home or do a longer train trip). If I were buying new, I'd probably pay the extra for the Plus and gain the additional range and better brakes, forks etc but overall I am confident that Alphonzo and I will become good friends for the long haul.