

AIRNIMAL JOEY ELITE DROP

🏷️ £2,199

Drop-barred all-rounder for commute, sport or tour



ABOUT THE BIKE

Airnimal aims to offer something a bit different in the world of folding bikes, being aimed at all road cyclists rather than just commuters, with more of a focus on the rider experience yet still folding down small enough to get the bikes on public transport. There are three models in its range, with the Chameleon being the high-performance speed machine, and the rugged Rhino the one for all-terrain riding. In between is the Joey, a versatile all-rounder that comes in a variety of configurations, catering for everything from commuting to touring, or even with a sporty drop-handlebar set-up such as the Elite Drop model you see here.



THE RIDE

First impressions Lifting the Joey out of its box and assembling it for the first time, it quickly became apparent that this was something a bit different to the folding bikes we're used to. We have to admit, we weren't totally sold on its looks – next to our other folding bikes, it has a slightly ungainly appearance. But looks aren't everything, so let's get it out on the road and see if it can win us over...

On the road Once you get rolling, the Joey really comes into its own. Close your eyes and it would be easy to believe you were on a standard road bike – not that we advocate riding with your eyes closed! That comfortable, familiar riding position, and the ability to get your hands in the drops with your head low over the bars, will encourage you to put the hammer down and get up a head of steam. And the bike is well up to responding to these efforts, with none of the twitchiness or spaghetti-like flexiness of some folding bikes. That chunky main tube no doubt helps, giving the frame enough stiffness to compensate for the absence of a top tube. If you're planning to take this bike on the train to work, you'll



soon be looking for excuses to take the long route to the station – it's just too much fun to restrict to short rides. These qualities also mean it could serve you well if you're travelling a long distance to take part in an event – maybe a European sportive – but don't want the hassle of transporting a full-size bike box. And it would be well capable of seeing you round a four-hour ride, or maybe even longer, without causing any comfort issues or excessive fatigue.

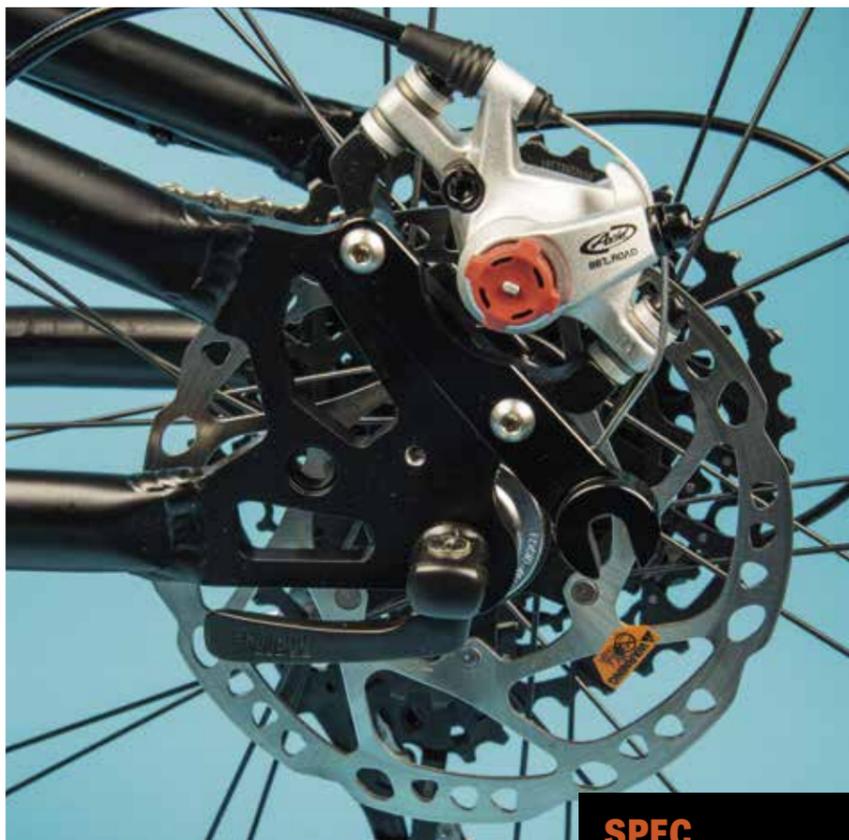
Handling Our test bike measured near enough exactly 10kg on the office scales – a couple of component swaps would easily bring it into single figures. This might give you a psychological boost when riding up hills but to be honest, at our level of ability, wouldn't make any real measurable difference to performance. What does make a genuine difference is the feeling that the whole set-up is extremely well balanced, whether you're rolling along in the saddle on the flat, or stomping on the pedals on a steep gradient, where it feels surprisingly sprightly and responsive for its weight. Compared to all the other bikes on test, the Joey 

is noticeably more stable at speed, both in a straight line and when cornering hard. The larger wheels no doubt play their part in this, but the frame geometry does a cracking job of replicating the ride feel of a good all-round road bike of the kind you'd be happy to ride on a long sportive. Despite the slightly awkward looks, it's clear that a lot of thought has gone into designing a bike that will match your full-size road bike as closely as possible.

THE SPEC

The frame The chunky main frame tube gives the bike a stiff, stable core, with a secondary tube to the bottom bracket adding extra rigidity. The rear triangle looks almost conventional, albeit with dropped seatstays to allow for a more compact fold. The rigid carbon fork on our test bike is due to be replaced with a disc brake model for the full production version of this bike.

The fold The general rule with folding bikes is that the better the fold, the worse the ride, and vice versa. So, perhaps it's no surprise that the Joey, with its superb ride quality, takes a bit longer to collapse down. For one thing, you have to remove the front wheel before you can flip the rear triangle under, and then remove the handlebars/steerer column as a single piece. On the plus side, the telescopic seatpost is well designed, with lockable buttons to keep the saddle pointing straight. That bracket on the main tube is part of the optional commuter kit – once you have removed the handlebars, you can clip the stem into the bracket to keep it neatly stored rather than dangling loose. There's also a handy clip on the rear dropout that



SPEC

FRAME:
Airnimal Joey aluminium frame, rigid carbon fork

GROUPSET:
SRAM Rival 1

BRAKES:
Shimano 105 front, Avid BB7 disc rear

CHAINSET:
SRAM Rival X-Sync, 50t

CASSETTE:
SRAM Rival XG-1150, 10-42

BAR:
Pro LT drop

SADDLE:
Madison Flux

SEATPOST:
Telescopic alloy

WHEELS:
Alexrims DA22 rims, Shimano XT hubs, 24 spokes

TYRES:
Schwalbe Durano, 23c

WEIGHT:
10.04kg

CONTACT:
airnimal.eu



RATING

FRAME
Offers a sturdy and stiff pedalling platform

COMPONENTS
A curious mix of makes but, hey, they worked!

WHEELS
At 24 inches they lack the agility of smaller wheels

THE RIDE
It's just like being on a regular road bike!

OVERALL



The frame geometry does a cracking job of replicating the ride feel of a good all-round road bike

you can slot the front wheel axle in. Although it can't compete with the Brompton's neatness, credit to Airnimal for having tackled the matter intelligently as the folded package is less unwieldy than the Tern. **Groupset** Airnimal have previously offered the Joey Elite Drop with a Shimano 105 double groupset, but our test bike came with a SRAM Rival 1 setup – Airnimal told us this will become a standard option soon. We're big fans of the single chainring, which is ideal for a folding bike where there's a strong argument for fewer external parts to get damaged on busy trains or in car boots. SRAM's DoubleTap shifting operates with a single paddle behind the brake lever – a short push shifts up, a long push shifts down. Even if you're used to

Shimano, it doesn't take too long to get accustomed to the difference. The combination of a single 50-tooth chainring and a wide-ranging 10-42 cassette provides plenty of gears for everything from sprints to steep climbs. The full production model of the bike will come with disc brakes front and rear, but our test bike came with a 105 calliper on the front and an Avid BB7 cable disc brake on the rear. It's an odd-looking combination but we had no complaints about performance during testing. **Finishing kit** The Madison Flux is a comfortable enough saddle for rides of four hours and the PRO LT handlebars are a similarly comfortable shape. Although handlebar height isn't adjustable, the bars are fitted with a standard road bike stem, so

you could fit an extender to raise the bars, or cut the steerer down to lower them. You can also fit a longer or shorter stem to adjust reach. Unlike our other test bikes, the Joey doesn't come with its own pedals – another nod to its road bike credentials. **Wheels** While three of our folding bikes use 20-inch wheels, the Airnimal bucks the trend by opting for larger 24-inch wheels. These provide a closer ride feel to a standard 700C road bike wheel (around 27 inches in diameter) but lack the nimbleness around town of smaller wheels. The black anodised rims are laced to good-quality Shimano hubs and feel like they're built to last. The Schwalbe Durano tyres are solid, offering a good balance of decent speed and above average puncture protection. 