



## Cycling Plus Magazine August 2004

*Bike Trailer group test written by Cass Gilbert*

### Bicycle Trailers

#### Why carry when you can pull? Cass Gilbert looks at the best alternatives to panniers...

Last month we looked at racks and panniers as a way of load carrying. But trailers can be a viable alternative too – particularly if your bike isn't built for cargo duties. They're also well suited to tandem and family tours where extra capacity is a real bonus, or if you've an extended flock to feed on the weekly shop.

Trailers designed for touring tend to be lighter and more refined than utility versions built for shuttling awkward loads around town – and generally cost more too. In this month's review we're testing four of the main touring contenders, with Burley's Nomad and Carryfreedom's Y-Frame favouring the two wheel approach, and the BOB Yak and Weber Monoporter opting for the single wheel setup.

#### One- and two-wheel designs

Single-wheel trailers are 'rotationally coupled', which means they lean with the bike so you'll notice their effect on handling the more load you carry. This makes them best suited to bikes with short, stiff chainstays – most MtB hardtails rather than long wheelbase tourers or full sussers. As with panniers, it's important to pack evenly and as low as possible or the trailer can start to steer you rather than follow you – and even jack-knife. Single-wheeled trailers are longer and have a wider turning circle than their two-wheeled brethren. Single-wheelers are good on road but come into their own on rougher surfaces. You can ride faster and with one wheel tracking directly behind your bike, it's easier to avoid rocks and a slimmer profile also makes them better suited to riding narrow tracks.

Two-wheel trailers are 'rotationally decoupled' – which means the trailer moves independently from the frame. This means you can lean into bends and ride out of the saddle without any effect on handling making two-wheelers ideal for just about any

bike – even your lightweight road machine. In fact, you can even use them as a little extra resistance training before race day! Being more stable, they're a doddle to hitch and much easier to manoeuvre off the bike. Turning circles are excellent but width can be an issue. Easily up to hardpack tracks, two-wheelers can bounce from side to side on rocky terrain and make it harder to avoid stones and potholes in the road.

Pros and cons of touring with trailers  
Trailers shift the weight of your baggage away from the frame, causing less wear and tear to wheels – so fewer changes are needed to make your bike ready to tour. Weight is carried lower and off the bike, improving handling too. Trailers also offer the option of dropping kit at the campsite and heading off on your lightweight bike. As a downside, you can't run just a couple of panniers for a light day ride. That said, hiking enthusiasts can bring their specialist rucksacks, they carry more, are easier to pack and are a real icebreaker with the locals in many parts of the world. Kids love them, and if you can't outrun the little grommits they'll even try and leap aboard.

Not everyone gets on with trailers though. The bike becomes less compact and in cities, they're trickier to reverse and park – and if you're riding a tandem, you'll need plenty of wall space to lean up against. For this reason I prefer them when wilderness touring rather than city touring. Once offset against your lighter bike – you can get away with less beefy tyres and wheels – overall weight is only a few kilos heavier than racks and panniers. But that extra hardware needs to be slipped past surly airport check-in staff. While general cycling is easier, climbs on loose, rocky terrain are harder as the bike feels more skittish without front panniers to plant the wheels. They're not as easy to push either.

Trailers create a small increase in rolling resistance, offset in part by a decrease in wind resistance. You'll notice straightaway how they 'pulse' when you accelerate or brake sharply. A loaded trailer tries to keep its own momentum so riding more smoothly soon becomes second nature. Make sure your brakes are powerful enough and be sure to fit any trailer with rear reflector and a BS-approved red light at night. 16in tyres are

found in any shop with children's bikes and there's a wide choice of quality 20in tyres on the market. You may need to decrease tyre pressure on the roughest terrain as small wheels can bounce around – at which point your Yak starts acting more like a kangaroo.

#### BURLEY NOMAD £290

*Weight: 6.8kg, Payload: 45kg, Capacity: 100 litres  
Length: 1.31m, Width: 69cm, Load bay: 42x77cm*

Burley's Nomad uses a more conventional 2-wheel setup. It rolls surprisingly well and feels far lighter than it is. Handling is good around town though a wide width does mean it gets caught on many cycle path gates, which can be a pain. Wheels remove quickly thanks to quick releases and the whole trailer neatly flat packs for transportation or storage in seconds. Features include a mesh divider and two pockets with a hood that pulls taught over the trailer – but unfortunately this doesn't mean it's waterproof. Great at low speeds, the Nomad has the advantage that it's easy to lean up if your bike has a propstand. Although the trailer is clearly well made, it doesn't feel half as rugged as the Yak or Y-Frame, and its alloy tubing and nylon fabric isn't suited to hucking utility loads. The Nomad uses 16in wheels and a solid hitch that connects to the seat and chainstay but it's still not as straightforward as system as that used on the Chariot.

**SCORE: 7 – Well made and roomy but the Burley is tricky in traffic and expensive.**

#### BOB YAK £250

*Weight: 6.25kg, Payload: 32kg, Capacity: 94 ltr Bag  
Length: 1.5m, Width: 43cm, Loading bay: 40x70cm*

The BOB Yak has been a popular alternative to racks and panniers for years, ideal for upping your load capacity without punishing your bike. At just under 1.5m long, the single wheel tracks superbly both on and off road. There are a few niggles – it's hard to hitch to the bike when heavily loaded without bending the trailer drops, and it's also awkward to set down. Finish could be better, including wheels, tyres and paint quality. But with its 4130 chromo tubeset, simplicity is its virtue and the Yak is a tough beast, with a cage that's perfect to lean up against rocks and boulders and loads of bungee points.

PTO.



BOB trailers are designed to be parked by turning the bike on itself but we've found this can bend the rear skewer over time when hauling heavy loads. The BOB Yak comes with its own bag, but you might want to upgrade it to something stronger and more versatile, like Ortlieb's 90 litre Rack Pack or TNF's 90 litre Base Camp Duffel with its rucksack straps. The dedicated QR skewer is available to suit a range of hub widths – from road bike to tandems – while the BOB Nutz can be used with hub gears and solid axles, and there's a wide range of spares. The two main improvements we'd like to see are less exposed drops when the wheel is removed for transport and better stability when the unhitched loaded trailer is on the ground. BOB may have started the commercial trailer scene but against today's new innovations, it's beginning to feel outmoded and a bit pricey.

**SCORE: 7 – Great for expedition touring, tough and dependable, but not so user-friendly.**

### **CARRYFREEDOM Y-FRAME £180 (£230 WITH ORTLIEB BAG)**

*Weight: 5.6kg, Payload: 45kg, Capacity: 50 litres Rack Pack or 80 litre box  
Length: 1.09m, Width: 64.5cm, Load bay: 38x58cm*

Brand new to the market, the Y-Frame's the offspring of a Scottish and Canadian collaboration. There's not much to it – a simple subframe made from thick-walled 6064T6 aluminium and a beautifully cut wooden base. This simplicity allows for indulgent finishing touches, such as the quality wheelset, Schwalbe tyres, a sturdy Chariot hitch and stainless steel fittings. This pared down minimalism also means the Y-Frame is light, robust and easy to repair and crucially, very customisable. It doesn't take a woodsmith to fine tune the base to your needs, whether it's adding bungee points or bolting on a tool kit. If you're short of ideas, the Y-Frame comes in a range of guises, such as a lockable aluminium box and a bog hauling cage – the aptly named bArk.

The Y-Frame hitches close to your bike's rear axle stub so handling is supremely nimble with a tight turning circle, while the length is minimal – making it a great trailer for tandems too. When it comes to transport, wheels are speedily removed, as is the trailer elbow to create a compact package – though there is some play in the sleeve, which causes a low rumble when riding on tarmac. The wooden base is covered in a non-slip material and requires the use of a supplied mat to stop abrasion when used with Ortlieb's 50 litre rack bag. The Y-Frame is best suited to the road though it's more than up to bridleways too. If the platform is too small, a larger size is available for £200.

**SCORE: 8 – Tough, versatile, elegant and easy to hitch, the Y-Frame packs a big punch for its size.**

### **WEBER MONOPORTER £225 (£275 WITH WATERPROOF BAG)**

*Weight: 5.75kg, Payload: 25kg, Capacity: 80L Bag  
Length: 1.5m, Width: 44.5cm, Load bay: 40x59cm*

With its sophisticated design, the Monoporter makes the Yak look distinctly homemade. Some 10cm longer, it uses a superior 20in Alesa wheel with a fast rolling Vredestein tyre. Suspension takes the form of an elastomer, sufficient to tame off-road bounces (thanks in part to a larger wheel), without sagging too much under acceleration on Tarmac – an issue with BOB's suspended Ibox.

Aluminium tubing and a hard plastic base trim half a kilo off the Yak but the real Brompton-esque advantage of the Monoporter is its superb fold, allowing it to be easily stowed. Attention to detail is typically Germanic – a simple, lockable mounting system, a smooth sealed bearing hub, an Allen key that slots neatly away for a full fold and its own removable feet for stability on the ground, making it easier to park. With its platform base, it's also very adaptable. Clip in the accompanying Ortlieb-made roll down bag (£50), strap on a cardboard box of groceries or attach your own rucksack, though with a lack of bungee points, and extra strap would have been good. Overall, the Monoporter's more practical than the Yak for most uses – even if it ultimately doesn't have the same tough build for expedition touring.

**SCORE: 8 – A great all-round single-wheel trailer with a superbly engineered fold.**

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### **CYCLING PLUS VERDICT**

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A trailer is a fantastic tool that makes your bike more versatile than ever – both on tour and once back at home. Before you know it, you'll be clamouring to help friends move and itching to find loads to pull. In fact, hauling a trailer is a strangely satisfying experience, akin to the deep-rooted feeling of self-sufficiency that draws us to cycling in the first place.

In terms of touring, we think they're best suited to loads above 10kg – below this panniers are more practical. We prefer single-wheel trailers off-road and with loads up to around 15-20 kg – after that, cornering can be a little dicey. Two-wheeled trailers are much easier to hitch and lap up any load you can throw at them – we ran out of space at 38kg (my dog), with the bike feeling as lively as ever. Trailers are easy to pack, but can be less accessible on the road, so a bar bag is useful too.

All four trailers have their advantages and disadvantages. The width of Burley's Nomad can be awkward in traffic but it features a plethora of travel pockets and can be flat packed in seconds. Despite its

shortcomings, BOB's Yak continues to be a very appealing expedition trailer. It tracks particularly well on road and gravel, and its solid chromo frame should be up to years of service – mine's survived numerous trips around the world. For the price, we really would have liked a better finish, and more user-friendliness in both loading it up and transporting it off the bike.

Our favourite trailers were the Monoporter and the Y-Frame. The Monoporter hold the trumps with its easy fold and superb attention to detail. While time will tell whether it challenges the Yak for out and out durability, it's a more apt all-rounder for the majority of riders' need, particularly if you're mixing and matching your transport – we'd just have liked a couple more straps. But it's perhaps the Y-Frame that's our overall winner, certainly when it comes to road use. It handles extremely well and is easy as pie to hitch. Best of all, it's adaptable to a multitude of chores, being light and rugged enough to be at home as much as a utility workhorse as it is shouldering your life belongings across the far corners of the world.

Deceptively simple and elegantly effective, the Y-Frame is the perfect introduction into the world of load hauling.



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Visit [www.carryfreedom.com](http://www.carryfreedom.com) or phone  
845 456 0928 (international +44 (0)1560 600 369)  
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