



Sustaining Dunbar

Travel Advice Factsheet 18 - Carrying Things on a Bike



Many people we talk to would like to cycle more, but often have stuff to carry and so drive instead. This factsheet looks at the traditional options and some more innovative and cheaper practical alternatives which you could have a go at making yourself.

Sustaining Dunbar has a selection of trailers which are available to try out free of charge. Contact dan@sustainingdunbar.org for details.

Hanging carrier bags off your handlebars is not a safe option; it destabilises your bike and there are plenty of safer, low cost options:-

Rucksacks/Backpacks/Courier Bags



The cheapest option; most of us will have a backpack or bag that will do the job. Realistically, bags are ideal if you're carrying light loads of around 5-10kg short distances. The disadvantages are that bags can make your back a bit sweaty, and if you're carrying heavy stuff it can get uncomfortable and affect stability. However, many backpacks these days have features such as mesh panels to reduce sweaty backs, so look out for those. If you're carrying laptops etc. then ideally carry these in a bag on your back as your body will protect it from too much road vibration. Many people find courier bags more comfortable and stable than a rucksack, especially if the bags have a stabiliser strap around the waist.

Front Baskets



Baskets can be made of plastic, wicker or metal. Metal is much stronger and can take more weight, but is also more expensive. Baskets cost around £10-£40. Baskets are not ideal for heavy things as this would affect your bike's steering, but are convenient to use as you can just drop your stuff in and go. You can also get basket covers to keep your stuff dry and in the basket.

Front Racks



These racks are fixed to the front fork and can be used to fix baskets to or just to bungee luggage to. They cost around £30. Front racks aren't suitable for bikes with suspension forks.

Rear Racks



A rear rack is a good versatile option; you can attach stuff to it with bungee cords or use it as a base to attach a rear basket or panniers to. Make sure that your load can't get stuck in the spokes and is well attached as you might not notice it if it works loose. Rear racks start at around £20-£30.

Rear Baskets



These are quite popular for grocery shopping. Many people take the handles off so they are less attractive to steal. They are relatively cheap, starting at around £10-£20.

Panniers



These are bags which fix to the rear rack of your bike. They are stable and enable you to carry quite a bit, around 15kg max. Well designed panniers will include quick release fasteners and some convert into rucksacks or briefcases for maximum versatility. There are many different types of panniers, from the traditional touring to designer shoppers and briefcase types. Prices range hugely, but the cheaper ones start at around £10, cheaper on e-Bay. Plastic bin type panniers are becoming more popular, but are quite expensive, at around £40. There are a number of websites and forums dedicated to making your own, see the section below.

Saddlebags



These are bags which fit under the back of your saddle. They range from toolkit size to small rucksack. Prices start at around £20. Advantages of saddlebags are that they don't need a rear rack and they stay relatively clean and out of the way. Disadvantages are that they can't carry much, but are probably ok for commuting.

Trailers

Trailers are expensive, but if you regularly carry big loads, will be ideal. Before you use a trailer on the road, you should practice to get used to the extra length, especially when cornering. Fit lights and reflectors, and wear bright clothing to increase visibility. Braking and accelerating will also be affected. There are two basic types of trailer; the single wheel and the two wheel:-



The single wheel trailer - is lightweight, but probably best for off-roading rather than day-to-day utility cycling. They tend to affect steering quite a lot, and put stress on the frame. Lightweight and hybrid bikes are not really strong enough for towing single wheel trailers and you may need to reinforce your bike if it is a tourer.



The two wheeled trailer is better if you are going to carry more than 15kg, and many have a capacity up to 90kg. They are the most efficient way to carry lots of stuff and have the least effect on handling. Cheap fold up 2 wheel bike trailers start at around £80, but the more solid flat bed ones are generally £200.

The bikehod has been recommended for carrying musical instruments.

Child Trailers



Generally a two wheeled canvas covered trailer towed behind the adult bike. There is usually enough room for 2 kids, but you could also use a child seat on the back of the bike too to increase capacity. Can use for babies, but will need extra fittings. Although trailers are expensive (£200), you will be able to use them for longer, and for things other than children! (shopping, luggage). Some trailers also convert into buggies. Safety - Make sure your trailer can be seen, it's carrying a precious load. Put on lights, reflectors and a tall flag. Practice cornering with the trailer, and remember you

will be a wider and longer load. Finally, a little note about safety; please only carry children in trailers that are specifically designed to carry children. They are expensive, but are also much safer.

Sustaining Dunbar has a selection of trailers which are available to try out free of charge for up to two weeks. We can also give advice about buying and cycling with trailers. Contact morag@sustainingdunbar.org for details.

IDEAS FOR DIY ALTERNATIVES

I've trawled through many weird and wonderful websites so you don't have to, but if you have a free rainy afternoon, there is a lot of information on the internet about DIY alternatives. I can recommend the following as a starting point:-

Crate Rear Basket



These are either loved or loathed. The cheapest rear basket can be made by attaching a modified crate or plastic veg. Box to your rear rack with bungees/long cable ties. Check that you can still sit comfortably though.

Bike Panniers



<http://www.cyclechat.net/topic/53731-bike-buckets-other-diy-panniers/>

An introduction to the wonderful world of DIY bucket panniers. Most of the websites are USA based, where it is much easier to get the square tubs for making your own cheap bucket panniers:-

<http://www.bicycletouring101.com/BikeDIYPanniers.htm>

<http://www.ibiketo.ca/guide/how-tos/how-make-panniers-out-buckets>

http://bit-of-green.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/bitofgreen_panniers.pdf

Pattern for making fabric roll-up panniers. Easy to do, but won't take you round the world!

Bike Trailers



These require more tools and a bit more DIY knowledge, but could save you lots of money:-

<http://www.instructables.com/id/Single-Wheeled-Bike-Trailer/>

<http://www.instructables.com/id/Bicycle-cargo-trailer--200-lb-capacity%2c-%2430-for-pa/>

<http://www.indoor.flyer.co.uk/trailer.htm>

Other Bike Projects

<http://www.londoncyclist.co.uk/features/diy-bike-projects-anyone-can-do/> - This is a good site with lots of fun and useful bike projects, including panniers.

www.ehow.com/how-6143483-make-bicycle-board-rack.html - A bit specialised this one, but will be just the job for someone in Dunbar - how to make a surf board rack for your bike.