

GROUPTEST

CYCLING JOURNALIST **SIMON WITHERS** REVIEWS REAR PANNIERS

Rear panniers

Sturdy, rainproof panniers will give you a sunnier outlook when the weather does the opposite. Cycling journalist **Simon Withers** reviews four high-end rear panniers

THERE ARE LOTS of good panniers out there that cost a good deal less than the four that we're testing here, of course. But if you're riding year-round in Britain, there will be times when you'll suffer something more than the occasional shower. This is even truer if you're travelling in the tropics. And one thing you don't want after a long day's cycling is arriving at your destination only to find your clean clothes are as soaked as you are...

1 Durability

Panniers can take a battering, and parts and material can wear out over time. Spare hooks are usually available. Rixen and Kaul supply replaceable attachment systems for a lot of brands; others supply their own. Cotton duck material can be repaired and reproofed, while Ortlieb offers a repair kit for its bags.

2 Pockets & access

Internal pockets help organise your stuff. External pockets are ideal for things you need easy access to: phone, change, multitool, innertube etc. For the main compartment, roll-tops or buckle-down flaps offer more versatility than zips: they'll cope with over packing or odd-sized loads – even ones that poke out of the pannier.

3 Capacity & weight

Pannier weight isn't a huge issue, given the loads you'll be carrying in them. Capacity is a two-edged sword: what you have, you'll fill. Always pack heaviest items at the bottom of the bags. Compression straps tie-down partially fully panniers; roll-tops can achieve something similar if you keep rolling the top down.

4 Off the bike

Panniers are at their best on the bike. They're not really designed to be carried easily, but there will be times when you need to. None of these is a rucksack pannier, but all have handles and some have additional straps that allow you to carry them over your shoulder or, in the case of the Carradice panniers, can be strapped together to be carried as one.

5 Attachment

Two hooks fasten to the pannier rack's top rail, and all good ones have a retention system to stop them jumping off over bumps. The hooks are adjustable both horizontally, so you can set the bags where you want to on the rack, and for different diameter racks. Some hooks won't fit to rails 14mm or thicker. Lower down, the wheel-tangling hooks-on-elastics of yore have disappeared in favour of a plastic cleat on a horizontal or curved rail, which clips behind one of the rack's vertical struts for stability.

6 Material

As with cycle clothing, there are numerous different materials used to manufacture waterproof panniers. These range from natural materials like cotton duck, a proofed heavyweight canvas that can be easily reproofed, to more modern synthetic materials like nylon, polyester, PVC and the tougher, heavier weight cordura. Many bags – but not those here – allow heavy rain to get in via zips and seams.



You won't fit big rear panniers on a road bike, but small bags are possible on a beam rack



WILL THEY FIT ON MY BIKE?

A rear pannier rack fits to threaded eyelets in the frame near to the rear dropouts and high up on the seat-stays. If your bike lacks the upper set, it's possible to use little band-on brackets called P-clips instead.

(Tortec P-clips cost £3.99/pair and are available from Zyro dealers.) If it lacks the lower set, which bears the greater part of the load, you can't securely fit a rear rack; P-clips aren't strong enough there.

If the lower eyelets are used to attach a mudguard too, put the rack legs closest to the frame. Note that some bikes have chain-stays that are too short to accommodate big rear panniers – you'll clip your heels on them.



ALTURA ORKNEY 56 £119.99

These monster-size 56-litre panniers feature Altura's 'Dryline' system, an unusual – but extremely effective – two-layer construction. There's a very tough Cordura outer and a nylon inner bag, with a secure drawstring top. In spite of its size, even when fully packed it's stable on the ground thanks to its tough rubber feet. There's a spacious front pocket underneath the top flap, with separate sections for keeping your gear organised, and there's a reassuring air of ruggedness. The Rixen and Kaul clip system allows you to remove the pannier single-handedly, and I liked the comfortable rubberised carrying handle. The lower hook can only be adjusted horizontally, and though there's reflective piping and front and rear reflective logos, I'd have appreciated more. It's available in red or grey, and if 56 litres is too much, smaller 34-litre Orkneys are available. Hooks fit 8-12mm racks, but oversize hooks (up to 16mm) are available for £7.99/set. Weight: 1330g each. **Expedition-tough, waterproof and voluminous enough for a supermarket trip** zyro.co.uk



ORTLIEB BIKEPACKER CLASSIC £120

The 'Classic' name is no misnomer when it comes to the German company's panniers. Made from waterproof polyester, the 40-litre capacity Bikepacker is designed to withstand water getting into it in any circumstances – and it worked too, successfully shrugging off everything we could throw at it. There's an inner pocket, an inner mesh pocket, and an internal flap with drawstring as a further layer of protection from dust and snow. The Classics are not side-specific, have reflectors each end, and a couple of hard plastic feet to protect the bag's bottom from wear. Their easily adjustable QL1 release system makes removing them from the rack a doddle – lift the handle and the hooks release. These panniers will fit much thicker railed racks than most and come with clips for narrower gauges. A separate shoulder strap enables you to carry them off the bike. Optional external pockets can be fitted, one per bag. Hooks fit 8-16mm racks. Weight: 950g each. **Highly adjustable, superbly built, tough and waterproof** ortlieb.co.uk



CARRADICE SUPER C £110

There's something satisfyingly solid and traditional about Carradice's super-sized Super C panniers. The 54-litre side-specific bags are still proudly made in Lancashire from cotton duck, a strong and durable material that can easily be reproofed and repaired. While it's not 100% waterproof, in practice it repels water admirably, a deep top ensuring your bag's contents stay dry even in driving rain. At the top there's a hefty aluminium rail offering a high degree of horizontal adjustability, while the fastenings themselves fit securely. The clips were initially quite stiff, but should move more easily over time, and it's good to see that the lower hook can be adjusted in any direction. There is a smallish reflector on the spacious back pocket, with an LED loop beneath, though more reflectives would have been good. Our only other criticism is that the lower hook requires a 3mm Allen key while the top fitting requires a Phillips screwdriver. Hooks fit 8-13mm racks. Weight: 1200g each. **High quality, Blighty-built, tough as old boots and easily repairable** carradice.co.uk



PACIFIC OUTDOOR £129.99

Thanks to their roll-top closure, Pacific Outdoors' 44-litre panniers are absolutely waterproof – in fact, they're so airtight that closing them can take a bit of effort. The waterproofing is down to the thermally-welded double-coated nylon. They're well made, have a massive reflective area and a rear reflective patch with slots for a rear light. The external pocket's zip allows you easy access to your essentials and this pocket has vents for drainage. Since they're side-specific, heel clearance is better. There isn't as much horizontal adjustment on the top mounts compared with some, though the excellent quality Rixen and Kaul fastenings are firm, and wider and easier to secure than the similar Carradice fastenings. The lower hook is identical to the Altura's, and again can only be adjusted horizontally. Available in chrome/red, chrome/blue and chrome/black. Hooks fit 8-13mm diameter racks. Weight 860g each. **Lightweight, superbly waterproof with acres of reflective material** madison.co.uk