



Photos by Patrick Field

● 8FREIGHT

BIKE TEST

# CARGO BIKES

For shorter journeys, they're a practical alternative to a car for kids or cargo. Cycle trainer *Patrick Field* tests an 8Freight and a Bullitt

**BICYCLES ARE** ideal for personal transport but have limited carrying capacity. If you need to move bulky household supplies, building materials, or gardening tools, or want to transport children, there's a point at which a bicycle becomes impractical. Adding a trailer works and is relatively cheap. But for regular load-carrying, you can't beat a cargo cycle.

These two cargo bikes are light and nimble enough to provide enjoyable, local transport, with the option of spontaneously transporting heavy, awkward loads. Drop off the kids on your way to work, pick-up a weekly shop on the way home, and still enjoy your commute. Both bikes have aluminium frames whose carrying capacity isn't bolted on; it's part of their structures. They're not retro but modern: urban utility bikes, if you like, or 'sports cargo' bikes.

**LOADING**

The first choice to make with a freight bike, and the most obvious difference between the 8Freight and the Bullitt, is the location of the load. The 8Freight, designed by Mike

Burrows, has been around for ten years, manufactured initially in small batches by the man himself. The current version, assessed here, is basically the same machine but mass-produced in Taiwan.

Mike has lots of experience of long drivechains from building recumbents. He opts for a standard handlebar-and-fork steering arrangement, puts the load behind the rider, and solves the problem of transmitting power to back wheel with a nylon pulley. This diverts the triple-length chain's pulling run down under the load tray and stops the returning run from flapping.

The Bullitt, also manufactured in Taiwan, for Copenhagen-based Larry vs Harry, dates from 2008. It follows a classic 'Long John' pattern: the cargo deck sits ahead of the rider and a rod beneath links a steerer-tube turned by the handlebar to the fork.

The rider of an 8Freight has a conventional view forwards over the handlebar, which is directly connected by a steep head-tube to a BMX-size front wheel. It's deftly manoeuvrable. The handlebar is the widest point, which helps when judging



● (Above) The 8Freight's hubs are supported on one side only. Puncture repairs are easy, upgrades less so  
(Below) The rear rack makes it easier to secure oversize loads that overhang the main luggage platform





● BULLITT (ALFINE 8)

spaces. You just have to remember to line the bike up when turning into a narrow gap or the back wheel will cut the corner.

In contrast, the Bullitt's pilot looks at the road ahead over a luggage deck. The less conventional relationship with the front wheel may take a little longer to get used to but

is a strictly short-term problem. (As with any new two-wheeler, it's best to get a feel for how it behaves when riding along normally before trying slow speed manoeuvres.) Having the load in sight makes it a bit more secure. It's easy to monitor how cargo is behaving over bumps and round corners. Carrying passengers is more sociable.

It's harder to keep an eye on an 8Freight's load but this potential problem is balanced by a more flexible capacity. A large integral carrier extends from the top of the load cage over the back wheel, enabling over-size items to be tied on, resting above and behind the luggage tray. On the Bullitt, it's less convenient to hang stuff over the front wheel, while anything really big can obstruct the rider's view of the road ahead.

The standard 8Freight has a fabric lining hanging inside the luggage cage. A wicker basket, strong box or courier box are optional extras. The Bullitt's basic setting is a flat-bed deck. There's an extensive range of in-house options, such as folding seats, plastic canopies, and lockable boxes.

#### COMPONENTS

The wheels of the 8Freight are mounted on one side only: the front on a stub axle, the rear on an axle that rotates like a bottom-bracket inside the frame. The hub and wheel are on the left end of this axle, while the freehub and cassette are on the right end, on the opposite side of the frame. Non-rotating elements of the front and rear drum-



● (Above) The Bullitt's front load platform is easy to keep an eye on. Steering is via a rod to the fork  
(Below) The Bullitt's 'easy up' stem gives 100mm of instant handlebar-height adjustment



#### Also available



##### 1) THE LUGGER £835+

Unpretentious steel 'Long John' style cargo bike, with front loading. Made in UK. Maximum load 60kg. Pictured with optional electric assistance.  
[cargobike.co.uk](http://cargobike.co.uk)



##### 2) BAKFIETS CARGO £1700+

Classic Dutch cargo bike available in short and long versions, with a variety of boxes and child-carrying options.  
[bakfiets.nl](http://bakfiets.nl)



● 8FREIGHT

» brake hubs are part of the frame, so there's no need for torque arms to brace them.

The cantilevered wheels, characteristic of Burrows designs, enable punctured tubes to be changed with the wheels in place. This encourages the use of lighter, suppler tyres. The design is simple and elegant but limits the choice of components. Perhaps the 8Freight's most daring feature is the 8-speed derailleurs? A bike that can carry 100kg, missing the safety-net of a hub-gear's stationary change, demands that its rider knows what he or she is doing.

The Bullitt's frame takes generic components. The drop-outs bolt on and can be specified for hub gear, derailleurs or single-speed options. The standard front fork means that – unlike the 8Freight – a generator hub is an option. The Bullitt frame can also be fitted with an electric assist.

**AROUND TOWN**

Neither bike is wider than a two-wheel solo. In moving traffic, there's no extra delay caused by their shape. Filtering through static, queuing motor-traffic can be slightly more troublesome, due to the extra length. On the 8Freight you need to be aware that drivers may read your presence as a solo-bike rider, not noticing the elongated back end. Position yourself accordingly. On the Bullitt, you have to deal with the problem of extra length ahead, particularly when emerging from entrances and side roads. In practice, both machines capture the attention of other road users due to their novelty. Their larger presence makes sharing space with motor-traffic even safer than when riding a normal bicycle.

A bicycle obviously can't match the capacity or maximum speed of a van but access and parking are always easier. Both machines will go through a standard



● BULLITT (ALFINE 8)

doorway and can often be wheeled to the exact spot their load is required.

Both bikes have double-leg prop-stands the width of the tray. The Bullitt's is deployed simply with a foot, locks by gravity, and is released by running the bike forwards; it retracts with a steel spring. The hydraulic disc brakes don't allow for a parking brake so it's wise to carry a toe-strap in hilly areas.

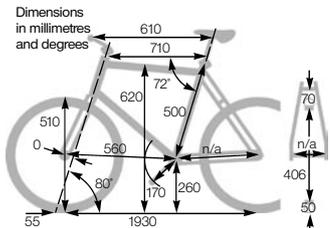
The 8Freight's stand goes down automatically, powered by a gas-strut, once released by a lever on the handlebars. Its cable-operated drums incorporate a lockable brake lever, which functions as a parking brake.

**CONCLUSION**

The 8Freight is cheaper, lighter and handles better than the Bullitt. Its radical design is elegant but limits your options for upgrades and alterations. The Bullitt is less particular but its frame is more versatile, with the potential to satisfy a wider range of functions not just now but into your unknown future. If you have the capital and storage, however, you're unlikely to regret buying either. ● *Patrick Field runs the London School of Cycling. He bought his first cargo bike, an SCO Long John, in 1991.*

● (Above) The 8Freight's stand is powered by a handlebar-actuated gas-strut. There's a parking brake too  
 (Below) The Bullitt's Alfine hub means that gears can be changed while stationary. Very useful

**Tech Spec**



**8FREIGHT**

**PRICE:** £1895

**WEIGHT:** 22kg

**FRAME & FORK:** 7000-series aluminium, single-stay design for custom hubs.

**LOAD CAPACITY:** Primary luggage platform 680x530mm. Rear rack. Bracket for front basket. Max load: 100kg (plus rider).

**WHEELS:** 50-406 Schwalbe Big Apple tyres, aluminium rims, 36x2 spokes, custom hubs

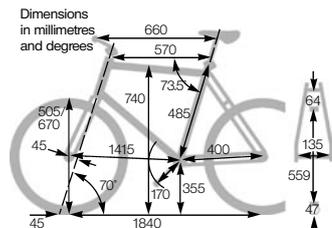
**TRANSMISSION:** flat pedals, 42T Sturmey Archer chainset, 12-28T 8-speed cassette. Shimano Altus rear derailleurs, twist-grip shifter.

**BRAKING:** Sturmey Archer 90mm drums.

**STEERING & SEATING:** backswept handlebar, with 20mm stem height adjustment (spacers). Unbranded saddle.

**EXTRAS:** chainguard front mudguard

[8freight.com](http://8freight.com)



**BULLITT (ALFINE 8)**

**PRICE:** £2430 (frameset £1577)

**WEIGHT:** 25kg

**FRAME & FORK:** 7005/T6 heat treated aluminium frame, chromoly fork.

**LOAD CAPACITY:** Luggage platform 710x466mm. Max load 180kg (inc rider)

**WHEELS:** Schwalbe Marathon tyres, aluminium rims: (front) 47-406, 36x3, Shimano centrelock disc hub; (rear) 47-559, 36x2,

Shimano Alfine hub

**TRANSMISSION:** flat pedals, Alfine 40T ch/set, 20T sprocket. Alfine shifter. 8-speed, 27-83in.

**BRAKING:** Alfine hydraulic discs

**STEERING & SEATING:** riser bar, 'easy up' stem, FSA Orbit XL II headsets, chromoly steering rod. 31.6 seatpost, Bullitt saddle

**EXTRAS:** mudguards

[larryvsharry.co.uk](http://larryvsharry.co.uk)