



Extra pannier room for families, campers, tandemists and more

Photos: Sam Jones

Front pannier racks

When two rear panniers aren't enough, a front rack offers extra capacity and helps balance the load. Sam Jones reviews four

For commuters, tourers and anyone looking to carry a load by bike, whether it's groceries or something for the allotment, the rear rack is a well-established essential. Less common is the front rack, but it's indispensable if you're looking to maximise your bike's carrying capacity.

So long as your bike's fork is compatible, a front rack gives you more space for extra stuff. It's particularly useful for long-distance cycle campers, tandemists (who have double the luggage requirements), and for cyclists whose rear rack space is compromised – such as a parent with child seat on the back that prevents the use of rear panniers.

While you can ride with one pannier on your rear rack without

issue, a front rack's load needs to be balanced. Scales aren't essential; judging by holding a pannier in each hand is fine. A balanced front rack won't compromise your steering (although it will still make the steering feel heavier, as there's more inertia).

Packing discipline is essential for more enjoyable riding. As a rule, you'll want your lightweight, bulky items in your front panniers and your heavy supplies in the bigger rear bags because the rear rack will generally take a heavier load.

“It's particularly useful for long-distance cycle campers”

What to look for

Fork fittings

Make sure your bike's fork has the necessary fittings for your chosen rack. Many front racks fit to two pairs of threaded eyelets – at the dropouts and halfway up the fork legs. Some fit to different eyelets, to the front axle and/or use clamps instead of bolts. Take care with carbon forks as most are not designed to carry a rack.

Pannier positioning

Tarmac: low-rider racks that place your pannier's mass around the front wheel axle are better for stability and steering. **Off road:** look for a higher pannier position to prevent bag collisions with uneven or overgrown terrain.

Adjustability

All racks have some degree of adjustability but you need to check that the rack suits your bike's wheel diameter, tyre width, mudguard placement and brake calliper – as well as ensuring that it will reach the fork's eyelets. A horizontal position is best but a slight backward tilt on a front rack is fine.

Material

Light and strong steel and aluminium are the common materials. Expensive titanium racks also exist.

Loading

Some racks are designed for just panniers, others might have a deck to allow additional loads and styles of packing – for example, a basket. Don't exceed the rack's total weight allowance.