



Don't over-inflate trailer tyres. Softer isolates the load better from bumps

Cargo trailers

Trailers enable any bike to carry cargo-bike-sized loads for a fraction of the cost. Editor Dan Joyce, who has been using cycle trailers for 35 years, tests six

Cargo trailers turn any bike into a load hauler. They're indispensable for cycling with items that are too big or too heavy for panniers. And they provide car-boot-style convenience for large collections of smaller things, such as bags of groceries.

Whatever bike you use for towing, its brakes must be good enough to stop you safely with the added weight of a loaded trailer. Its gears must go low enough – or its electric assistance be powerful enough – to get you up the usual hills you'll encounter.

If you use a trailer between sunset and sunrise, it must have a red rear light and a triangular red rear reflector. Yes, triangular. I'm not aware of any trailer that comes with a triangular reflector

or where you might get one suitable for cycle use. On the other hand, it doesn't seem to be policed.

There are no specific restrictions on what you can carry in a trailer. Cargo models aren't suitable for carrying children, of course, and some have warnings to that effect. Conversely, child trailers will carry soft loads like shopping – along with one or two children, if everyone is comfortable.

To test these trailers under load, I mostly used logs – in bags or boxes where none was provided. My towing bike was a Jones Plus LWB with: a 20in bottom gear; Avid BB7 disc brakes; an M12x1.75 thru-axle for 148mm dropouts; and 29x2.6in tyres. It worked really well.

What to look for

One wheel or two?

Two-wheelers carry larger, heavier loads as they balance independently, and they're easier to manoeuvre on foot. Single-wheelers track the towing bike better, without cutting corners or clipping kerbs.

Load limit

All trailers have a maximum load limit, typically around 40–50kg. While they might carry more without breaking, handling could get dicey.

Attachment points

Flatbed trailers need attachment points for bungees or ratchet straps. Box trailers primarily need a decent volume, but attachment points are still helpful.

Overall width

Is the trailer narrow enough to wheel through gaps en route such as gateways or cycle-track bollards? This is vital when the trailer is loaded and helpful when it's unloaded.

Hitch

Most trailers attach to the rear axle, which minimises the tail-wagging-dog effect. With a seatpost hitch, a heavy trailer is more likely to lift the bike's rear wheel under hard breaking. However, high-hitch trailers are easier to wheel around on foot. Any hitch needs a safety strap.

Ease of storage

If storage space is tight or you want to take it on a train, get a trailer that will pack down easily. Anything up to 90x70x30cm and in a bag is luggage on a train. Flat trailers, particularly those with QR wheels, can be hung on a wall hook at home.