

Trailer Roundup

A cyclist wearing a helmet and a dark jersey is riding a green bicycle with a trailer on a paved road. The cyclist is in motion, and the background shows a clear blue sky with a faint rainbow. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

No other bike accessory has the potential to expand your cycling potential like a trailer. Have young children and want to go on a tour? No problem, just strap them in a trailer. Want to try back-country mountain-bike touring? There are trailers for that too. Do you long to use your bike around town more, or even live car-free? A trailer is your ticket to freedom.

We've rounded up nine trailers—both cargo and child carriers—and thoroughly flogged them on the streets and trails around our hometown of Missoula, Montana. All of the children's trailers—what we consider the best of the crop—have five-point safety harnesses and offer accessory stroller conversion kits. Here's what we think.

by Aaron Teasdale

BOB Ibex (\$359, \$389 with Dry Sak, 800-893-2447, www.bobgear.com)

Ten years ago, BOB single-handedly revolutionized the world of mountain-bike touring by introducing a stout, single-wheel trailer that could handle the punishment of off-road riding. This was



BOB Ibex

good, but the trailer had its limits.

Now comes the BOB Ibex with four inches of smooth, efficient suspension, and it is better, much better. We were amazed at the rough, steep trails we could pull this trailer down, even loaded with fifty pounds of gear. This increased smoothness and efficiency is noticeable on less-demanding terrain, like dirt roads, too. After several punishing trips with the IBEX, its suspension has proven as durable as it is plush.

The IBEX's steel frame can support seventy pounds of gear and attaches to a BOB-specific rear-wheel skewer. Its solid connection inspires confidence, and the trailer tracks beautifully. The available Dry Sak fits snugly into the cargo area and can hold fifty-six hundred cubic inches of loot. Excess gear is easily bungeed over the top. BOB has also added four sets of water bottle braze-ons to the IBEX, a real plus for touring.

Because of their single-wheel design, all BOBs demand that the rider put more strength into the handlebars — after all, you're balancing the trailer too. Parking also takes some getting used to, and backing up a bike with a BOB attached — when they seemingly become self-willed — can be a deeply maddening experience. These minor complaints aside, BOB has hit a home run with the IBEX — it's the hands-down, premier trailer for off-pavement load hauling.

Burley D'lite (\$429, 866-248-5634, www.burley.com)

Burley is probably the most recognized name in trailers and the venerable D'lite is their flagship model.

Though a sleek redesign has modernized its exterior, the D'lite's excellent frame design has gone unchanged. The frame is strong and light, its aluminum tubing protects passengers as well as any trailer we tested, and its capacious rear cargo capacity is approached — but not equaled — only by the CycleTote. This makes it the premier trailer for touring with young children and lots of gear. It also has the best warranty of any child trailer — lifetime on frame and parts.

Padded harnesses, a reclining seat, and tinted side windows ensure that kids stay comfortable. A seat divider — a feature unique to Burleys — makes it easier to segregate dueling siblings. Window coverage is good, though not as expansive as the Chariot and Wike. Folding the trailer for transport or storage is simple — though, again, not quite as fast as those trailers. Consider it a trade-off for the increased, er, burliness.

Although it's not the most aerodynamic trailer we tested (the side profile is boxy) it pulls smoothly and is stable on rough roads and over curbs. Burley's durable plastic hitch clamps onto both stays near the dropouts and is self-contained, meaning that, unlike all of the other trailers in this review, it requires no hitch-receiving hardware. This makes it an excellent hitch if you want to move the trailer quickly and easily from one bike to another, but this convenience can come at a cost: the heels of some riders, particularly men with shoe sizes of 9.5 or higher, can hit the hitch body while pedaling. Burley also warns against using or storing the hitch in temperatures below 32 degrees, a shortcoming in winter climes. They

do make an alternative hitch that negates these concerns (as well the conveniences of their standard hitch) and attaches, like all others in this review, to the rear axle. A final selling point for Burley is



Burley D'lite

their wide availability in local bike shops.

Burley Nomad (\$249)

The Burley Nomad hasn't received a lot of fanfare, but it's an impressive two-wheeled load hauler with some real advantages over single-wheel trailers. Utilizing the same hitch as the D'lite, it's essentially a waterproof nylon packcloth wrapped around a low-profile, lightweight yet sturdy aluminum frame. The interior is divided into two large compartments with several small pockets for sundries. It can hold an impressive eight thousand cubic inches of loot weighing up to one hundred pounds.

Because of its greater width and boxy shape, the Nomad is less aerodynamic than single-wheel trailers, but it makes up for this in stability at both fast and slow speeds. The Nomad affects handling noticeably less than single-wheel trailers. Because of its hitch and because it has two wheels, laying your bike down does not affect the trailer — another advantage over single-wheel designs that won't lay down and are more difficult to park because they must attach on both sides of the rear axle. The Nomad also has greater



Burley Nomad

cargo capacity, and a new cargo rack for the 2004 model increases cargo potential even more. Chronic overpackers might find this enticement dangerously alluring. A final advantage is portability. The Nomad folds flat and packs into an accessory carry bag for travel, a big plus for air or train travel.

The Nomad is no match for single-wheelers on single-track or rough terrain, however. This is not the trailer for the Great Divide Route. It's too wide for all but the widest trails, and we found the trailer prone to tipping on rocky and rutted roads. If you plan to stick to paved and smooth gravel roads, however, the Nomad is an excellent choice.



Bykaboose Gecko

Bykaboose Gecko (\$200, 800-441-9163, www.bykaboose.com)

The Gecko is the simplest, lightest, least expensive trailer in this review and is a good choice for cyclists looking for, well, a simple, light, and inexpensive trailer. It features a rectangular aluminum frame wrapped with waterproof nylon walls and a removable nylon cover. Wheels are sixteen-inch plastic mag, and the floor is a mysterious plastic-like material the Bykaboose website calls a "strong lightweight material." The hitch is the pinnacle of simplicity, but does require the rear-wheel skewer be removed for attachment or disengagement. The trailer frame folds flat with ease.

The Gecko has some nice small touches too, like the small interior pocket, rear reflector, and the hitch's integrated locking cable (you supply the lock). The only problem we encountered was that the rear wheel occasionally rubbed the trailer arm on sharp turns. Due to its lightweight construction, we also would-

n't advise taking the Gecko on off-road tours, though it was a solid performer on Missoula's paved streets and bike trails. Bykaboose also makes the smaller Newt trailer.

Chariot Cougar II (\$375, \$350 for cycling kit, 800-262-8651, www.chariotcarriers.com)

Chariot has been coming on strong in the trailer market, and a quick look at the Cougar II shows why. It's smart and easy to use, plus it's racy and loaded with inventive features no other trailer can match. In short, it's the most versatile child trailer on the market. In keeping with Chariot's innovative thinking, the Cougar comes in one- and two-child versions (the Cougar I and Cougar II) and is purchased not as a bike trailer but as a two-wheeled stroller — the foundation of what Chariot calls its Child Transport System. Add one of five conversion kits and you turn the Cougar into a bike trailer, four-wheeled stroller, three-wheeled jogging stroller, skiing trailer, or a hiking trailer. Thanks to clever engineering, all conversions are remarkably easy and require no tools.

As a bike trailer, the Cougar performs very well. Smooth and stable, it is greatly aided by the built-in 1.5 inches of adjustable suspension. The suspension really works, both in trailer and stroller modes. The seats and harnesses are padded, the side windows are big and tinted, and there is a roof port for parents to view their urchins when they are using it as a stroller — a mode in which the Cougar excels. It easily makes the best stroller of any trailer we tested. Chariot also offers a uniquely wide range of accessories, like insulated child bunting bags, padded baby supports, and a storage/transport bag.

While its compact size makes it maneuverable and sporty, the Cougar is definitely more roadster than station wagon. Lack of cargo capacity is its biggest weakness. The rear cargo area and mesh pockets are useful for small items, but they carry a meager five-pound weight limit. The roof

Chariot Cougar II

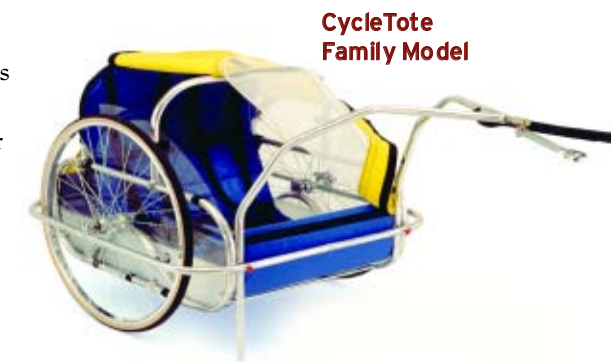


cargo rack accessory is clever and useful, but it too is limited to five pounds. We'd also like to see the aluminum wheels, which are not covered in the warranty, make the jump from twenty-four to thirty-six spokes. Finally, the Cougar's fabric is listed as water-resistant, not waterproof. While we didn't encounter problems during our tests, this is a drawback for tours or for the dedicated year-round cyclist.

Chariot also makes traditionally styled bike trailers, but if versatility is your priority, the Cougar is your trailer. It is available at an increasing number of bike shops and REI stores nationwide.

CycleTote Family Model (\$410, 800-747-2407, www.cycletote.com)

A small company based in Fort Collins, Colorado, CycleTote has a unique design philosophy. They're the only trailer company to use full-size 26-inch or 700cc wheels, and they use a center-pull, seatpost-attached hitch. The trailer frame, which comes with a lifetime warranty, is Tungsten Inert Gas (TIG) welded aluminum and an impressive piece of craftsmanship. Thanks to the big wheels, wide wheelbase, and low center of gravity, the CycleTote is exceptionally stable. Pulling it at an angle off curbs was no problem. The seatpost attachment also



CycleTote Family Model

there is never any concern over the rear wheel catching on the hitch arm or tongue in tight turns, or the rider's heel clipping the hitch — always a possibility with chainstay-attached trailers. CycleTote also sells a nifty automatic braking system, which isn't cheap (\$275), but it should make a real difference in braking distances with heavy loads.

On the down side, some of the trailer's finer points aren't as refined as those on trailers made by bigger companies. Initial assembly is laborious (it took us almost three hours), and the trailer doesn't fold nearly as easily as others. The hitch, while stable, isn't easy to swap from bike to bike, especially if the bikes have different-sized seatposts, in which case different-sized attachment parts must be ordered. With its high attachment point, you can feel the trailer jerking the bike on rough surfaces, which isn't necessarily a problem but should be a consideration if you often seek roads less traveled (the trailer pulls very cleanly on smooth roads and paths). Finally, the rear storage area, while generously sized and featuring a nice zippered pocket, is too short for a bag of groceries.

Though it's not as slick and convenient as some trailers, there's no doubt the CycleTote exhibits very high quality. The child seat is cushioned (though the harness straps lack padding), and the frame offers unsurpassed protection for our most precious cargo. Offering lifelong versatility, the same frame can be converted to a lower profile touring/utility unit. Perhaps most impressive is CycleTote's confidence-inspiring thirty-day return policy.

Kool-Stop Wildebeast (\$289, 800-586-3332, www.koolstop.com)

The Wildebeast is a clever retooling of BOB's basic single-wheel trailer design. Like the BOB, the Wildebeast is a rear-skewer, axle-attached, chromoly trailer with a seventy-pound capacity. Unlike the BOB — and this is the Wildebeast's biggest selling point — the trailer frame folds flat for easy transport. To achieve this foldability, the trailer's frame tubes are held together by twelve rotating plastic connectors. Each of these connectors has

three small metal bolts securing it. We didn't have any problems in our testing, though that's an awful lot of bolts and plastic for our liking, especially on a trailer design otherwise well-suited for tours in rough and remote locales.

The hitch, which consists of two long bolts that attach to metal brackets mounted on the skewer, made setup frustrating and caused concerns about the durability of the system over time. That said, it didn't fail during our testing, and Kool-Stop does offer a ten-year warranty. They also sell an accessory that allows two panniers to mount on the sides of the trailer's tongue, an ingenious way to increase the trailer's carrying capacity.

It's also worth mentioning that Kool-Stop is developing the Wildebeast II, a trailer identical to the Wildebeast but with two wheels. I tested a prototype that rode well.

Kool-Stop Mule (\$289)

For riders who loves panniers but are intrigued by single-wheel trailers, there is the Mule. A creative amalgamation of trailer and pannier mounts, it can hold six panniers weighing up to a combined one hundred pounds. Otherwise, it rides just like a standard single-wheel cargo trailer. It tracks well, handles the rough stuff with aplomb, and requires that you put more muscle into the handlebars. Unlike traditional cargo trailers, however, you can't lean it over and use the Mule as a kickstand. Recognizing this, Kool-Stop put a spring-activated kickstand on the bottom of the Mule, and though it feels a bit strange having an exposed metal spring on a bike trailer, the kickstand works.

The Mule's frame is stout chromoly, and it employs the same hitch as the Wildebeast. That said, Kool-Stop deserves credit for bringing new ideas to the world of bike trailers.

Wike Moonlight (\$299, 866-584-9452, www.wicycle.com)

Wike has been making bike trailers in Guelph, Ontario, for the last ten years,

Kool-Stop Mule



and their new Moonlight child trailer — available only via their website — may be the best value in this review. Sporting a unique, aerodynamic shape, it's a light, stable trailer that dispels the notion that cyclists must spend \$400 for a high-quality child trailer. The simple rear-skewer axle hitch is easy to use, and the hitch arm, or tongue, easily rotates back and converts to a minimalist stroller arm — the only trailer to convert to a stroller without additional accessories. The Moonlight also folds up for storage and transport as easily and compactly as any child trailer tested here.

From the passenger's perspective, the Moonlight has huge window coverage and the most legroom in the test. The only real minus is the lack of padding on the harness straps. The plastic floor is durable, but it can be noisy if there's a loose toy bouncing around. Also, while the Moonlight's status as the lightest child trailer in this review (beating the Burley by a few ounces) is even more impressive given that it includes a stroller conversion, it should be noted that the stroller is very simple, with a narrow, one-handed handle and no front wheels. A jogging stroller conversion kit — with a full-width handle and front wheel — is available as an accessory. Finally, the Moonlight is a bit lacking in rear cargo capacity — two grocery bags max.

Slight capacity deficit aside, the Moonlight tracks as smoothly and is as stable as any trailer we pulled.

It's available only on the Wike website, and its price includes shipping and a fifteen-day money-back guarantee. **AC**

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