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# Guide to child trailers



*Cycle with your little one with a trailer (photo with permission from Thule)*

Bike trailers for cycling with children can be one of the most useful cycling accessories available. They offer a huge amount of extra carrying capacity, both as a comfortable place to put children while you pedal them around, and as a way to transport impressive amounts of less precious cargo, too

## The benefits

To understand the benefits of bike trailers for kids, first we have to recognise the limitations of other options, such as child bike seats. The issue of child numbers is an obvious stumbling block. As the father to twin boys, take it from me, without a cargo bike, a trailer is by far the easiest way to transport two youngsters at the same time.

Then there is the question of comfort. Babies can only use child bike seats once their neck is strong enough to hold their heads upright, but they can be placed in many infant bike trailers essentially from birth (do check your particular model, though, because some trailers have minimum age restrictions).

Most child-carrying trailers can be used for babies 12-18 months upwards. However, do recognise that at the other end of the scale, there are weight restrictions on all trailers. So, once your child or children become too heavy, it's time for a tag-a-long or bike of their own.

Once children are old enough to use a child bike seat, there's another strange phenomenon that invariably happens: they doze off and although there are child bike

seats that recline at an angle which are more comfortable, in a trailer children can snooze happily to their heart's delight.

Many trailers fit two children side by side so they can chat to each other. However, be aware your children are inside the trailer behind you, so you won't be able to hear them as clearly or check on them as often as if they were sitting in a seat right next to you. Looking over your shoulder lots and a bike mirror may help you see if they are asleep, happy or fighting!

Trailers offer benefits for the rider, too. There are no balance or control issues that having the weight of child and seat attached to your bike can cause. Because the child or children are underneath a canopy they are dry, and the rider also doesn't have to worry about whether they're sticking their arms out to the side or any other clowning around that can happen in a child bike seat.

Trailers also have a greater weight-carrying capacity than child bike seats, so you can keep using them even when your family has outgrown other options. And even when children have started cycling themselves, you can convert your trailer into a useful cargo carrier.

Finally, here's a nifty thing. Quite a few modern child trailers easily convert to a buggy or pushchair. So, once you have arrived at your destination, you don't even need to disturb sleepers as you would do if they were in either a front or rear child bike seat. Simply attach the necessary accessories and push on.



*Converting a trailer into a pushchair (photo from Thule)*

## Fitness

One downside is you need to be strong and fit enough to tow a trailer, but if you start when your child is lighter you will gradually build strength as they grow. Don't overdo it and listen to your body, especially if you are recovering from pregnancy and childbirth.

You might want to try out riding with a child bike trailer on a traffic-free route first to get used to towing a heavier load. You do need to be reasonably fit to tow a trailer with two children a longer distance or up a hill.

And do get off and push up hills if you find it a struggle. Having a bike with particularly low gearing for trailer duties is a good idea.

## Practical considerations

There is one initial concern that prospective child trailers users always ask: aren't trailers low, out of a driver's eyesight and therefore potentially dangerous?

There are three elements to answer this question. The first is that most trailers come with a large warning flag marking their presence. So what? you might ask, which leads us to point two: trailers are already large, reflective and brightly coloured bits of kits themselves — they're also attached to your bike, making for a total vehicle presence about the same as a small car.

The third point is: it's you, the rider, who is in charge of which routes you take.

## Road positioning

You will need to think more about your road position and how to help drivers see you when you are towing a trailer. You'll need to ride even further out from the kerb as you are a wider load. Ride at least a metre away from car doors, too.

## Attachment

Different trailer brands have slightly different attachment technology, but the vast majority work on the principle that you fit a coupling to your bike's rear axle quick-release and the trailer is attached to this via a long articulated arm. There will almost certainly be an extra retaining strap connecting trailer arm to bike frame for added security.

If you have more than one bike, or a trailer that will be towed by different people, choose a trailer type where you can buy additional hitches.

## Weight and tipping point

Although we've said trailers remove the balance problems that come with having the weight of a child seat and child fitted to your bike, they do come with their own control quirks. For example, that trailer arm is articulated, meaning it doesn't follow in a straight line behind you when you go round corners. A little bit of practice seeing how the bike and trailer behave together is necessary before you first use it for its intended job.



You also need to be aware of the maximum weight your trailer will carry and remember that bags and anything you stuff in the trailer's pockets and boot counts, too. Every trailer has a tipping point if it is overloaded, so don't take bends too fast and tight, and watch out for kerbs, even those that you might be able to easily mount on your bike.

In all other respects, though, bike handling with a trailer is surprisingly normal.

## What bike do I need?

So if all that weight of child and seat isn't on your bike, where is it? It's being pulled along behind you, which rather dictates what kind of bike you need to use with the trailer.

A skinny-tyred road bike might leave you going nowhere, spinning your rear wheel a cloud of rubber smoke (metaphorically speaking). You're going to need something with a decent amount of traction and relatively easy gearing to effectively transfer the torque needed to get the trailer rolling. A hybrid or mountain bike with fairly grippy tyres would be the obvious choice.

With the extra vehicle weight, make sure your brakes work well and check your bike regularly.

## Beyond child transport

Finally, let's also just give a quick word for trailers that aren't used for ferrying children around. Whether it's grocery shopping or even as part of your working life, trailers open up a huge range of cargo-carrying opportunities for those who don't want to be tied to the internal combustion engine or invest in a cargo bike.

For some cyclists, they offer specific possibilities. Touring tandem riders, for example, can only fit four pannier bags to their bike – half the number that could be carried by two solo riders – but trailers can help with increasing their luggage allowance.

Trailers are already a particularly good shape for carrying tent bags. Similarly, the current enthusiasm for bikepacking or rough stuff touring, means that off-road explorers can carry kit using products such as the BOB or Adventure CT1 trailer even if their chosen bikes aren't suitable for panniers.

For extreme sports fanatics, the Carry Freedom trailer can be converted to accept a surfboard. And of course, instead of children you might have an entirely different kind of loved one you want to transport in safety: dog-specific trailers are available, too. So buying a trailer might be a significant investment, but in a number of ways it might also open up a huge new range of possibilities in terms of what you can do with your bike.