

Family Cycling - Bikes trailers and a lot more besides

For many a motorised vehicle is the default option when family or load carrying is part of the equation. But having seen how many people transport goods and people by bike in many parts of Asia and India we would do well to follow their example. Children and carrying stuff has meant traveling by bike has had additional challenges. Over the past 15 years this has meant creative use of slings, child seats, trailers and attaching gear to various bikes.

I still own;

a battered [Bikehod](#)., a tattered [Chariot](#), a well used [Roland Big Boy](#) type, two [old style isla trailer bikes](#)., a new [Carry Freedom Y frame](#) large, a tandem (with crank shorteners from 8 upward s)

I can appreciate that not everyone will be happy cycling with young children in the city traffic but my experience has been very positive, as has many other people I have talked to about their experiences. Investing in good quality products means they are durable and if sold on have a high resale value. For the first 5 years we lived in Edinburgh (children started their cycling careers at ages 6 and 4) and since then Dunbar.

Sling

There are a number of versions- I used a [Baby Bjorn](#) from very early on. Aged six months my son was mesmerised by the passing tarmac. I felt happy cycling with my young charge safely strapped to my chest.

Front mounted child seats.

I found the cross bar mounted seats really excellent no discernible effect on handling. I sourced a very small saddle that didn't result in excessive bow legged riding. I matched it with the folding footrests from the out of production "Companion" seat. My passengers and I enjoyed the sociability of being so close together and they got a great view as opposed to looking at my backside. They enjoyed climbing up to their perch using my foot on the pedal and onto the footrests. I would get on the bike first and they would always get off first. I was able to have a passenger from around the age of two until six or even older for short journeys as my frame was large and had a horizontal top tube. The last decade has seen more designs widely available suiting those who are concerned for greater levels of safety.

Trailer Bikes

Trailer bikes that fix to a purpose built rack are more akin to the stable ride of a tandem than floppy seat post mounted versions. They allowed safe transport in the city before our children were ready for their own bikes. We could go on longer rides too, up to age 9, or give lifts where others might just use their cars.

The Making Poverty History rally 2005 saw us ride into Edinburgh from Dunbar via Dobbies garden centre 36 miles with chariot attached to the trailer bike. It helped that trailer was attached to a solid rack not the more usual seat post mounting. My son was 6 riding the trailer bike and my three year old in the Chariot. We caught the train home again, thanks to accommodating GNER staff. Small children often bring out the best in others.

Having recommended rack mounted trailers the [U plus 2](#) (no longer made) was great as it had two wheels – side by side like a trike but attached by way of a universal hitch to the seatpost. We cycled across Lewis, it had been dismantled and transported in the boot of the car to Ullapool. We had a large box on the rear rack and four large paniers containing camping gear, quite a load.

Child Trailer

We used a [Chariot Cabriolet](#) Great for all year round cycling as the passengers are protected from the elements. I am given much more room on the road. My partner was impressed with how easy it was to pull, especially when the gradient was modest. One of its features is its ease of folding, allowing easy storage and transport (although not officially allowed on ScotRail). I have taken a body board strapped underneath the trailer on a trip to the Outer Hebrides. I've used the child trailer with a Brompton folding bike, over the sea on the now defunct ferry, to Norway. It also has the advantage it is easy to clean - my youngest was afflicted with severe motion sickness which resulted in him depositing his lunch in the trailer on the way to the Ferry terminal – however it was raining so somewhat inconvenient. My other son who was sharing the trailer wasn't too impressed. You can even fold the back wheel of the Brompton underneath with trailer attached. I can recommend the expensive but very effective [Weber hitch](#) with integral lock increasing security.

Often there were warnings about not exceeding recommended speeds e.g. 25kph (Chariot) or 15 mph (U plus 2). However I rode at well over 30 mph with no problems.

Make sure you have well adjusted brakes. The extra weight on the back wheel does make the back brake relatively more effective.

Load Carrying Trailers

The [Chariot](#) has been a dual purpose trailer.

Other load carriers include the [Bike Hod](#) (made in UK) which has been useful for carrying a guitar and large rucksacks amongst other items. It is easily mistaken as a large shopping trolley and with the removal of the arm I have taken it on buses and other Public Transport (PT). I once had two attached one behind the other pulling around 100kg of compost from Redhall Walled Garden. It was either flat or downhill back to Carrick Knowe! Its easy to pull when off the bike making it great for trundling around the supermarket.

The "[Big Boy](#)" has mostly been used in wheelbarrow fashion hauling vast quantities of seaweed off the beach, great for the garden.

The [Carry Freedom](#) is a neat sturdy design and a Scottish company with a great ethos.

As part of my work with the Transport Office the Estate Team at the University of Edinburgh were equipped with a [Pashley Euro](#). A really solid bit of kit, (made in UK) again with the Weber hitch.



logs behind Mountain Bike on Chariot and Carry Freedom.
Hydraulic brakes come in handy



The Chariot trailer is currently used for carrying logs, seaweed, bags of manure, pallets and even an apple press. It's a challenge to secure the load, straps with buckles best, with bungees very useful.



Folding Bikes

I have carried, admittedly for short distances two children on the crossbar of a Brompton one seated side saddle and the other standing. I could say don't try this at home folks. With all the various methods of transporting people and stuff the only mishaps occurred when my son put his foot in my rear wheel and wrecked a Croc! (Superglue worked a treat), my body board got scraped badly when I hadn't secured the hitch properly and a mudguard got damaged, a casualty of a pallet rescue trip, both operator error.

Tandem

Its more intimate than a trailer bike and a better ride, takes up more room in the shed and more tricky to transport by PT. However in theory we could have six people either attached or on the same machine with the crossbar childseat, trailerbike and the trailer attached to the trailer. It would definitely need a long vehicle sign and some of the hills in East Lothian would test my fitness!

Four Wheelers

The only vehicle that didn't really work as family transport was [the ZEM](#) seen here being used in an electric assist bicycle project. It was a real head turner but a beast to ride. Great fun for cycle festivals but not really suited to regular family transport. Cycling that out to Dunbar was a stern test with my 18 month old son strapped to one of the front seats!

I have had a great deal of satisfaction from moving people and stuff using pedal power. Not always the easiest option but often fun and rewarding. Glad I am treading a little bit more lightly. Hopefully some of the above will inspire and encourage others.