



Grouptest

Rear racks

Richard Hallett tests four differently priced rear pannier racks for touring and utility use



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The rear pannier rack has long been the first choice for cyclists looking to carry a moderate-to-heavy load when touring or for utility cycling, mainly because it offers a convenient way to carry a lot of stuff on the bike, either stuffed in side panniers or tied to the top. The models on test will all support some sort of rack-top bag in addition to side panniers. Load capacities range from 25-45kg.

The most suitable racks have: rack tubes or spars that are the correct diameter for the pannier clips, which usually means 10mm; struts placed to prevent the panniers twisting into the rear wheel; a size that matches the cycle's wheels and tyres (26in, 650B, 700C, or 29er), so the top sits just above the mudguard and thus keeps the load's centre of gravity low. Some racks hang the panniers from a secondary rail below the rack top, which lowers the centre of gravity further but involves a weight penalty.

Details

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1 Load capacity

Important for world touring and heavy-duty utility use alike, but even a 25kg limit may exceed your likely load. Too much weight on the rear adversely affects handling. It is a good idea to spread heavier loads between the front and rear wheels.

2 Material

Tubular steel and aluminium are the most common, with stainless steel also popular for its durable looks. Steel is easier to repair, which makes it the better choice for far-flung expeditions.

3 Weight

Makes a difference to the feel of a bike when the panniers are removed, so lighter is better, assuming it will carry the required load.

4 Stiffness

An excessively flexible rack can allow its load to sway, leading to instability at speed. More and thicker tubes usually give greater stiffness.

5 Front strut adjustment

Since the rack must fit frames of widely varying dimensions, the struts that attach to the seatstays should be adjustable for length, height and width, and as rigid as possible once fitted.

6 Pannier attachment

The rack should have some sort of loop or peg at the bottom of each pair of side struts for those panniers secured using straps or elasticated hooks. Somewhere to mount a rear light is useful.



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Verdict

Rear racks all support a pair of panniers either side of the rear wheel using a reasonably standard set of mounting points. Of the various design differences, the two most noteworthy are the system used to attach the rack to the seatstays and the overall rigidity of the installed rack, which usually correlates with load capacity.

Of these racks, the utilitarian-looking Thorn is rated for the greatest load. The M:Part ATP3 is an effective way to carry light loads inexpensively. While the Tubus and Tortec both look great, the former is the more serious – and more expensive – and is surely worth the extra cost for anyone taking full advantage of a rear pannier rack's carrying capacity.



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1 Tortec Epic Alloy
£44.99 zyrofischer.co.uk

ATTRACTIVELY STYLED AND comprehensively equipped, the Tortec Epic has a neat front extension clamp system that makes installation fairly quick and easy. It's supplied with a kit for fitting to bikes with disc brakes. Construction uses 10mm aluminium tube with thick enough walls to provide rigidity not far off that of the Tubus Logo Evo. Weight is similar too. Maximum capacity, however, is significantly lower at 30kg. It's inexpensive but sturdy and good-looking. It's also available in black, and there's a stainless steel Tortec Epic with a load limit of 40kg for £20 more.

Solid performance at a fair price, and it looks the part too.

2 Tubus Logo Evo
£120 tubus.com

TUBUS HAS LONG been the go-to brand for heavy-duty luggage carrying, and the Logo Evo shows why. It is constructed from lightweight, thin-wall steel tubing with neatly-welded joints, is nicely laid out with the pannier mounting rails on the sides to keep weight low, and features small pegs to keep the pannier clips in place. There's a small rear lamp bracket, but the threaded mudguard stay bosses seen on some older Tubus racks are absent. The front extension clamp system is complex but very rigid once installed. Weight is an impressive 600g and it will carry 40kg.

Well worth the expense for serious expedition cycling.

3 M:Part ATP3 Trail Rack
£29.99 madison.co.uk

USING A DESIGN borrowed, apparently, from an old Blackburn rack, the ATP3 Trail is constructed largely from 8mm diameter aluminium alloy rod. It has a wide central strip along the top that should keep some muck off the rider if used without a rear mudguard. The small-diameter rod structure and thin chrome-plated steel strips used for the front extensions offer significantly less rigidity than the others on test and mean some pannier clip systems may rattle around, but the low cost makes this worth a look for commuting and light touring. It's rated to carry 25kg.

A thrifty biker's rack that works fine for lighter loads.

4 Thorn EX
£89.99 sjscycles.co.uk

ANGULAR, NO-NONSENSE lines give Thorn's EX expedition rack a purposeful appearance. It's strong, rigid, heavy, and frill-free. Built in tubular steel, it is rated to carry up to 45kg and is accordingly somewhat overbuilt for lighter loads. Installation is straightforward, although the substantial stainless steel front extensions need to be cut to length; the use of a series of bolt holes means it is pot luck whether the rack top is level or very slightly sloping once fitted. Threaded bosses are present for the attachment of mudguard stays.

Not the prettiest but very strong, it's rated to carry a hefty 45kg.