

Useful extras

A pump and a puncture outfit are essential on any ride that goes further than you'd want to walk back from. So what about other accessories?

Bells are required to be sold with all new bicycles. It's up to you whether you keep the bell on the bike. Bells can be useful for alerting pedestrians or horse-riders to your presence, particularly on shared-use paths. They're less useful in traffic. Car drivers can't hear them. If a pedestrian suddenly steps into the road in front of you it's safer to shout a warning and either brake or take evasive action than it is to ring your bell.

Mirrors are useful for keeping an eye on children travelling behind you in a seat, trailer or trailer cycle. You can keep an eye on following traffic too. Don't depend on the mirror before any manoeuvres. Looking behind gives you a better view and lets motorists know you're about to do something.

Mudguards

Getting rained on is bad enough but the constant spray of cold, dirty water from your wheels on wet days is worse. Unless you ride in full cycling kit, you'll want mudguards.

You can fit some sort of mudguard to any bike. Mountain bikes can be fitted with partial guards. They attach at the rear to the seat-post and at the front either to the down-tube or under the fork crown. They won't keep you completely dry but they will keep the worst off.

Road bikes and hybrids that don't have sufficient clearance for full mudguards can be fitted with partial 'guards. They look like sawn-in-half 'guards and fit to the fork and seat-stays.

If your bike has mudguard eyelets and enough clearance – you need about 10mm of air between tyre and mudguard to let grit rattle through – fit full mudguards. They come in all kinds of widths and for 700C or 26in wheels. Better quality one (£18-£25 a pair) offer valuable safety benefits: the front stays are designed to snap off and release if anything gets jammed under the 'guard, which could prevent a nasty accident. You can fit 26in-wheel 'guards to a child's bike with 24in wheels. There's enough flexibility for the tighter radius bend and they don't wrap so far that they hit the ground.

Car racks

Strictly speaking, a bike carrier is a car accessory, but then the car itself is a cycle accessory, inasmuch as it gets bikes and cyclists to the start of rides. That might be a mountain bike ride, a ride on a Sustrans trail, or the family holiday where the bikes go too.

Two adults can use a cheap, strap-on bike carrier to transport the bikes, or else put the partially disassembled bikes in the back of the car. That's not an option for the average family of four. At best there will be room for one bike (wheels off) in the boot, maybe two if it's a big car, because the seats will be occupied.

While some have room for three, strap-on racks aren't really sturdy enough for more than two bikes. That leaves tow-bar mounted racks and roof racks, which will each carry up to four bikes.

Tow-bar racks are much easier to get the bikes on and off, but make the vehicle longer and harder to park. The bikes get dirtier too. Wheel-support tow-bar racks hold the bikes better than those that hook the top-tubes on support arms. Many wheel-support racks will pivot out of the way to give access to

the boot. You'll obviously need a tow-bar, and you'll likely need a lighting board as it's illegal to obscure your rear numberplate and lights.

Roof-racks put the bikes out of the way, so long as you're strong and tall enough to get them up there. The vehicle will be much higher, so low-bridges, branches and car-park barriers will be impassable. Fuel efficiency drops significantly whenever you carry bikes outside the car, and roof-mounted bikes are the least efficient. You'll need to buy roof bars and then as many bike supports as required. You can fit four on most cars, by having the bikes face alternate directions, or two plus a roofbox.

Strap on racks cost £50-£100. For tow-bar or roof-racks expect to spend £200-300, maybe more once you factor in all the bits.

Don't forget to lock your bikes onto the rack when you leave the vehicle!!