
BE A BASKET CASE SHOP BY BIKE!

BY TIMOTHY BUSTOS

As I lifelong bike advocate, I frequently ask friends and co-workers questions like “So, why *don't* you ride your bike the mile and a half to the farmers’ market or the grocery store?” The answers I get typically include something like “Well, I would ride my bike, but I have to carry stuff” or “How will I get my produce home?” The irony is that many of the same people think nothing of donning lycra and pedaling their bikes in a hundred mile circle on the weekend, but ride to the store? “What, are you kidding, and what if the four-figure, carbon fiber bike I ride gets stolen?” Okay, to be fair, these are all legitimate questions at one level. Here are some sensible answers.

The initiated—the bike commuters, the life-long cyclists, and those brave souls living their life car-free—can skip to the next article. But for the other 98% of the population (this is actually a fairly accurate figure, based on national studies and census data) who would describe themselves as “casual cyclists,” there is actually some very useful information out there that could help you re-think how you can meet your weekly shopping needs.

First of all you don't need a four-figure bike made of “un-obtanium.” Indeed, most high-end road bikes lack the structural integrity to carry much more than their rider, and most lack the braze-ons and other attachment points for racks and baskets. No, for most shopping purposes of five miles or less, all you really need is a “beater bike” that can be had at a garage sale or thrift store for under a hundred bucks. This is typically a steel framed bike built like a battleship that can handle a load quite well—and you don't have to worry about it getting stolen. Even a moderately priced hybrid (i.e., a bike with tires bigger than a road bike's but narrower than a mountain bike's

and most of the gears from both) will work just fine, and can these be purchased new for only a few hundred dollars. You can also convert a mountain bike into a city bike simply by switching out the knobby tires for ones that have a smooth tread, referred to as “slicks.” However, my all-time favorite “town bike” (or simply “townie”) is the classic 3-speed Raleigh roadster. These were made in England for decades—and most of them are still around. They're upright, comfortable, and if you can find one still intact, it has fenders, a sturdy rack, and a matching chain guard. It'll also accommodate a front basket quite well.

Okay, now that you've got your classic town bike (by the way, these are tragically hip these days), we need to get you outfitted—and you have *lots* of choices depending on your preferences. My favorite all-purpose shopping basket design is relatively inexpensive, easy to install, and best of all—it goes with you when you go shopping! Due to a very cleverly designed, low tech mechanism, all you have to do is lift the carrying handle upright, the basket comes off, *and* it doubles as a shopping basket.

One of the better designs I've seen for this type of basket is made by Wald, a company that has been making bike baskets since the early 20th century (no—really). And, for those worried about their small stuff falling out, there is also this very chic mesh pattern version with the same easy quick release

If you're really serious, you can get the Wald “newsboy special.” It's big enough to carry two large bags of groceries, a case of beer, or your favorite small to medium sized pet—and it sure beats those silly “dog purses.”

You can see the whole line of Wald baskets at www.waldsports.com.

Another option to consider, especially if you want to carry a bigger load with any weight, is to carry

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Photo courtesy of Wald

it low. The simplest way to do this is to get a rear rack to which you can attach classic bike panniers. (I would recommend against the foldable metal baskets that attach to racks. They look nifty but tend to rattle a lot. It's often hard to get loads in and out of them, and it's guaranteed that you'll hit your shins on them while trying to straddle your bike.) With panniers, you have several options. One of my favorites is the "grocery bag" pannier made by Jandd (see photo above). They fold up when they're not needed—without all the noise—and their quick release design allows them to simply be lifted off so you can take them with you when shopping. However, there are so many designs now available to bike shoppers and commuters—from economical models to the high-end "Ortlieb" panniers that are very strong and waterproof. I'd suggest going into your local bike shop to talk with the experts and see what works best for your needs.

Now if you really want to get serious and carry large loads—whether it's produce, groceries, or even gardening supplies—I'd suggest going with a bike trailer. As with panniers, there are many designs to choose from these days, but unless you have small children to carry, choose a trailer actually designed for carrying cargo. These tend to have a lower center of gravity and they usually have tie downs to keep your cargo steady. My favorite trailer is the single wheel "B.O.B." (i.e., "Beast of Burden").

The B.O.B. trailer is lightweight, narrow, and the single wheel design makes it very maneuverable. Another nice feature is the way it attaches to the rear forks of your bike, making it very stable—even when fully loaded.



All the basics

There you have it—now you too can be a basket case and shop by bike. Whether it's a simple matter of adding a bike basket, panniers, or even a bike trailer—you'll be glad you did. Additionally, if

you think about it, isn't shopping for groceries car-free more consistent with how you feel about your food? Most of the people I know want good organic produce that's locally grown and not trucked halfway across the country. Doesn't it make more sense to ride a bike the last couple of miles to actually pick your food up? Besides, riding a bike can actually make shopping for your next meal fun, sociable, and a good form of exercise—not to mention being good for the environment. So the next time you think about getting in your car to get groceries, burn food—not fuel!



The B.O.B

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