

Groupstest

Child seats

A child seat is an economical way to transport a toddler on your existing bike. Cycling journalist **Ben Searle** reviews four

A child seat can be used to carry an infant from the age at which they can sit up unsupported, usually by about nine months. The maximum weight limit is generally 18kg (US models) or 22kg (EU models) – in practice suiting children up to about 4-5 years old. The reviewed seats all conform to British Standard: BS EN 14344:2004.

Harness

For maximum security, the harness should adjust in height (so that straps start close to the shoulders) as well as length. The BS approval requires that the child cannot undo it, but some can be a fiddle. Can you undo it with one hand so that the other can steady the bike?

Rear – rack mounted

Such seats attach to a dedicated or particular rack. Seat position adjustment is generally very limited. If you want to swap the seat quickly between bikes, get an extra rack. Since you can't generally use panniers with a rack-mounted seat, front panniers are very useful. They also help balance the bike.

Foot supports

Adjustable foot supports give a better fit, while straps keep feet still. Feet in the spokes cause half of all the hospital visits by child seat passengers – so use those straps and/or cover that wheel!

Visibility

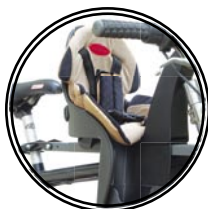
Make sure you can still easily fit lights, fluorescent material and reflectors as required.

Reclining seat

Some seats recline, enabling a child to sleep without slumping forwards or sideways – where support from the seat and its straps is limited. Younger ones (under two) are most likely to nod off, so it's a key feature for such passengers. As they weigh less, shifting that weight further back doesn't affect balance too much.

Shell

Sides that wrap around the seat will offer increased protection should the bike fall over, and will help support a sleepy child. Check that the design allows comfortable use of a helmet if your child will be wearing one.



Front mounted

These give your passenger a clear view but also mean more wind-chill. Compared to rear seats, your child is at more risk in frontal collisions or if you go over the handlebars. The less substantial shell also means less protection in a sideways fall.



Rear – seat tube mounted

A cantilevered support bar attaches to a mounting block clamped to the seat tube (*not* seat post). There's more vertical and horizontal adjustment, making it easier to find the optimal position. The support has natural flex (disconcerting at first), absorbing shocks.



HAMAX KISS £54.99

Weight 3420g

The Hamax range of child seats is pretty extensive; it's a long-established brand. Unlike some seats, a wide range of spares is available for the Hamax, including alternative support bars to perfect the seat's fit, if required. The Kiss is one of Hamax's more basic models and is seat tube mounted. A rack-mounted version is also available.

Compared to the Qibbel, the Hamax mounts higher up the seat tube so there

is less chance of also fitting a rack, and the support may not clear some frames around the seat cluster area. There is plenty of fore-aft adjustment but it does not recline. The harness would beat a budding Houdini but can also be a bit tricky for parents to release – it's a two-handed job. In summary: good value and good enough, but the alternatives are better designed and built. Max weight limit 22kg. www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk

QIBBEL £79.99

Weight 4737g

From the Netherlands, the Qibbel has a contemporary appearance and an air of quality. It's also pretty hefty, with a double-walled shell and a steel frame. There is plenty of vertical adjustment on your bike's seat tube, and fore and aft on its support. The whole seat quickly pivots to get it vertical or to recline it. The fittings, strap buckle and adjustment points are both very easy to use and very secure.

I did have some quibbles, however. The seat back narrows and so offers little side protection. The bolts that secure the seat to the support from below have no means to prevent them unscrewing, so be sure to do them up firmly and check them regularly; a spot of thread-lock would not hurt. The instructions supplied were very poor, but it's an excellent seat at an attractive price. www.halfords.com



WEERIDE KANGAROO £70

Weight 2850g

The WeeRide fits a wide range of bikes, mounting above the top tube (minimum length 52cm centre-to-centre) on an adjustable strut. You may need to re-position your handlebars to accommodate the 'cushioned pedestal', which your child holds or rests upon.

It has little effect on handling but you will need to bow your legs out to clear the seat. This was pronounced, although my wife got on much better than I did. You

can't step forward when you stop, and therefore need to be able to balance in the saddle. Our 24-month old daughter loved being 'in control', but did manage to slide the harness off when she had a tantrum. Strangely, foot restraints are not provided. You'll probably love or hate it. We felt it was okay for shorter rides and best for children under 85cm high. Minimum age 1 year, maximum weight 18kg. www.weerideuk.co.uk

COPILOT LIMO £109.99

Weight 3650g (inc rack)

A long-established benchmark seat from the US. The back is 6cm higher than the next best – the Hamax – and with good wrap to the sides. The harness clip is not as foolproof as the others but the flip-over hand-rest makes it difficult to reach, and this bar offers additional security. Off the bike the bar can be flipped over to stand the seat up, which is useful for feeding. The back of the seat can be reclined, and the foot rests adjusted, by

toggles. These are a little fiddly, as are Velcro foot restraints.

Despite some minor shortcomings, it's an excellent seat, especially if you regularly use panniers when the seat is removed, since the price includes the decent Blackburn EX1 rack. It's the best seat here for taller children, bearing in mind the maximum weight limit of 18kg. The simpler Taxi model is £79.99. www.madison.co.uk

