



cycling fact sheet **21**

Bike carrier seats for important little passengers

Child carrier seats allow young children to be easily transported by bicycle but can take some getting used to as they affect braking distance and overall manoeuvrability.

The seats are generally not recommended for a child under 12 months of age, because the baby's neck may not be strong enough to support a helmet or the inevitable bumps from cycling. Check with your medical professional if in any doubt.

At about the age of four, children start getting too big for a seat and other options such as a trailer or child tandem attachment that join the adult bike via a hitch, can then be used.

Rear-mounted child seats are by far the most popular in Australia and must conform to Standard AS 4287:1995. They mount either directly to the bike frame or come with a separate rack that can be attached to the bike with or without the seat.



Because they are mounted over the rear axle, the child tends to feel every bump, although some expensive seats overcome this problem by having their own built-in suspension system. The rear seats make it harder for the rider to get on and off and can make the bike uncomfortable to ride while wearing a backpack.

Front-mounted seats that attach to the handlebar stem have become common in Europe but are a rare sight locally. They allow for more interaction with the child but also make the steering heavier. There is potential for a child to drop something into the front wheel or to be flung forward under hard braking.

Regardless of type, the seat must be fixed securely. If you are not very handy, bike shops will usually install the seat for a small fee.

Get into the habit of checking that all fastenings are tight before every ride and that the tyres are inflated high enough to cope with the additional weight. Always use the full harness. When you are not carrying the child, make sure the loose harness straps cannot get caught in any moving parts.

To increase night visibility, put some red 3M reflective tape on the back of the seat and some orange reflective tape on the sides.

Children in a seat must wear a properly-fitted helmet. Avoid the 'aero' shape because the tail of these helmets may hit the back of the seat and force the child's head downward.

Look for a seat with a headrest (some cheaper models only come up to shoulder height) that is offset slightly to allow room for the helmet. Some people also use a little blow-up pillow around the child's neck as extra support when they fall asleep. Most important of all - never leave a child unattended in a child seat.