



PHOTOS: MAURICE TIERNEY

PAC DESIGNS ULTIMATE SHOULDER BAG

For eight years I've been cycling with the same messenger bag, so I was excited to test the Ultimate Shoulder Bag (\$315) from PAC Designs. Pat, the fearless leader at PAC, has nine years of courier experience and began making bags in Toronto in 1989, before moving production to Manitoulin Island in Ontario, Canada.

I exchanged at least seven emails with Pat about custom bag options, colors, and embroidery, which is probably more than most people do for a custom frame. The result is one bad-ass, handmade bag that has not disappointed me in function or aesthetics. Two types of Cordura are used on PAC bags in three layers of construction, 1000 denier for the exterior and 500 denier for the interior, with a truck tarp middle lining. From a list of colors, I chose clay for the outside and tan for the inside. A fourth layer of ballistic nylon is used to reinforce the bottom.

A 2" wide main strap with 2" buckles is the primary weight bearer, with plenty of closed-cell foam padding sewn into the shoulder strap and to where it wraps around my rib cage. The main strap is finished with large D-rings at either end, for one-handed tightening and releasing. An anti-sway strap keeps the bag from slipping to the side, while suspension strapping positions the load to keep my shoulders comfortable.

In the main compartment there is a plethora of space, 2600cu.in. Inside and against the removable padded back is a Velcro divider with opposing pull-tabs. Across from that is a large mesh pocket with a key clip,

bookended by two smaller ones. On the front side, but covered by the flap, is a large outer pocket with a Velcro closure and a smaller zippered pocket inside. Extra cargo straps, reflective tails, a blinky loop, and a removable lined pouch are included with the Ultimate.

As for options, there are plenty to choose from. I chose the "X" strap (\$27), which is a removable, padded, opposite-shoulder strap that helps distribute the weight of heavy loads. It also keeps the bag centered snug against my body. When not in use, the "X" strap clips to the front flap and remains out of the way. A removable padded waist belt (\$27) with elastic bands for storing the strap ends is used when transporting bulky items.

Next to the large outer pocket are two of PAC's newest offerings: a small mesh pocket (\$8) and on the opposite side an easy-to-reach expandable pocket (\$20) used for items that I don't want to smash, like bananas and avocados for lunch. Also new is a strap pouch (\$44) that clips to the main strap for carrying an electronic device. It can clip to a belt too and be used as a wallet. Other options include a frame pump holder and tube holder (\$11 each).

Pat sewed a secret pocket (\$34) into the bag that I probably never would have found without her directions. With so many pockets, I have found a use for them all. It's great to have some organization and not a black hole that swallows my smaller stuff. This Ultimate weighs 5.04lbs. with the added features, but once on it fits so properly that weight is a non-issue.

The silver computerized embroidery (\$30) is a combination of my email signature and a symbol from my favorite firework that I submitted to Pat. (Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones also uses it.) Combining the two was her idea, and it blew me away how well they fit together. Pat also uses appliqué embroidery and silkscreening for customizing flaps.

The method used and the design determines the price.

Wow! That is a lot of bag, but it is the Ultimate Shoulder Bag, and every aspect of it screams functionality and durability. I've used it to transport a frame and wheelset, haul groceries around, carry a laptop and *Dirt Rag's* photo equipment, and have used it for the daily going-ons. It wears extremely comfortably, hugs me around the chest, and the upper and lower compression straps keep the contents from shifting. The Ultimate doesn't slip around when fully loaded and the flap configuration and materials ensure dry contents through downpours. It's exactly what would be expected from a well-thought-out cycling necessity. Note: Prices are in Canadian dollars. www.pacdesigns.com –Shannon Mominee

