

PAC YOUR BAGS

Some use them for work, others for play, but there's no denying the convenience of a courier bag. We test two state-of-the-art bags from Toronto company Pac Designs.

It was a happy coincidence that just as my previous courier bag wore out, I heard from Pac Designs in Canada. A little research on the web confirmed what they claimed: they are at the top end of the professional courier bag business. The founder of Pac Designs, Pat McGibbon, worked as a cycle messenger herself for almost a decade, and now produces the bags as a family business with husband Dave.

Pac Designs sent us two bags: one was the 'Ultimate': the professional workhorse of the range. This we gave to the crew at Cyclone Couriers (see Velo Vision Issue 4) to use and abuse. A smaller, simpler bag intended for personal use, called the 'Diamond Street Scene' took the place of my own worn-out courier bag, and both bags had seen daily use for around four months when the pictures were taken.

THE ULTIMATE

Cyclone Couriers used the bag for despatch riding, so it was employed all day, every day for the urgent jobs – lots of pickups and dropoffs. It's about the hardest use they could find for it. We interviewed Chris and Joe of Cyclone, who've done most of the riding with the bag, to get their impressions. I've put their answers – together with a few comments from other Cyclone riders – all together, to save space. Incidentally the Ortlieb Messenger Bags, to which they refer, can be seen in the photos of Cyclone in Velo Vision 4.

First impressions, it's a pretty bag. It just looks great – way better than the Ortlieb bags we use. The build quality is amazing – you can really tell this is highly manufactured. All the components and materials are spot on. There are so many nice touches that just show how this has been thought through: like there's a little loop to hang a light on the flap, there's those reflective tags. It also sits well when you put it down – not like the Ortlieb bags, which fall over unless you lean them on something.

The other first impression is that wow it's complicated: compared to the Ortlieb there's way more straps

and buckles. I guess we're still leaning how to use them. It's relatively slow getting the bag on and off. But if you adjust it right you can get it so the bag will swing round in front of you, without you taking it off, and then you can open it up and have everything easily accessible in front of you.

It's also more flexible than the Ortlieb – I guess the capacities are similar, but for that occasional really big load the Pac comes through: you can strap most anything to it, whereas the Ortlieb is a bit more constrained. I took it away one weekend and it took my sleeping bag, three days' clothes and all my stuff. Fantastic.

When you've got a heavy load then you see the point of all those straps. The extra strap ('X-strap') on the top of the bag lifts over and then supports the bag off both shoulders if you need it. You've also got a hip belt – so when the bag's full, you have all sorts of options for supporting it – weight on your hips, or more on the shoulders. And the anti-sway belt really keeps it in place.

The adjustment for the main over-the-shoulder strap is fantastic – there's two big loops, one to release and one to tighten. They're so big and easy to use you can easily change the length as you ride along no-hands, without looking. Or with big gloves on. This is very handy when you want to shorten the strap to keep the bag tight on you after you've just dropped off a big load.



The Ultimate bag can be bewildering at first, with a plethora of straps and adjustments, but once you've got it set up right it excels, particularly with larger loads

The hip pouch which they also sent is a really good idea, and some of us are going to order more of them for personal use. You can use it to keep all of the fiddly stuff like notebook, pen, keys, personal mobile phone etc and it's all separate from the main bag, which you might swap with another rider or something. We don't really use the D-lock holder which is built in. We also didn't use the beautifully-made tube straps that came with it – if you carry tubes a lot they'd be perfect, but it's overkill most of the time, so we left them off. When we did get a tube we just used some elastic bands.

The Pac also has loads of useful pockets and compartments, which are great for keeping your personal gear, tools etc all separate. Again there are great touches like little loops etc to hang your keys or whatever from, and a zip pocket for your wallet.

One day after about eight hours in the rain a little water soaked through a seam into the outside pocket and got a book a little wet – one thing you can say for the Ortliebs is that they are totally waterproof. Then, they don't really have pockets. Apart from that though the bag has been fully waterproof – the flap goes right over the edges and seals it up well, and there's velcro all round to make sure it's securely fastened down. You can also strap it of course, and the straps are plenty long enough – we once had an A2-sized flat package strapped on the bag like this.

SUMMARY

We really rate this bag. Cyclone is pretty unusual as a courier company in that we supply bags for all the riders. The Pac is not so ideal for this use, as it takes so long for a particular rider to get it adjusted to fit – whereas the Ortliebs just go on and off, no adjustment.

But if you're buying a bag for yourself, or when it won't be swapped between riders, we'd

definitely favour this over the Ortlieb. The retail price is pretty similar. It looks way better, it's more comfortable and flexible, especially with big loads, and all the internal compartments and neat design features really make it a pleasure to use. The build quality is superb – it's a little dirty after four months of heavy use but there's no sign of it wearing out at all.

Definitely thumbs up from us!

Cyclone Couriers

Pac's smaller bag is simpler and cheaper, but still very capable



THE DIAMOND STREET SCENE



I used to be a pannier man – but once I used my first courier bag I was hooked. For convenience and, let's face it, vanity-massaging style, it's hard to beat a messenger bag. That first bag, a Timbuk II Dee Dog, was wearing out anyway when the Pac bag arrived, so it's now been gracefully retired.

The Pac Diamond is really a big step up in several respects. It's

bigger for a start (despite being the 'Small' model), and it's useable space. The straps to hold down the flap are double-length, yet cleverly don't flap around when they're not being used, thanks to an extra set of buckles on the top edge of the main bag. Forgot your panniers, but need to get some shopping in? Not a problem for this bag, even with my tools, spare top and general gubbins in there already.

The attachment system on the Diamond is simpler than on the Ultimate Deluxe tested by the couriers, but it retains the speed-adjustment of the main strap length. I find this a key feature; the strap needs to be really shortened up when the bag's empty, yet extended when the load bulks out a bit. You can do this instantly.

It's also waterproof (which the Timbuk II wasn't), beautifully-made and looks like new, four months on – and I've used it every day. I can strongly recommend this bag. If you come along to any of the UK events over the summer and see me around, you can take a look: I'll be using this bag, and that's for definite.

Peter Eland

AVAILABILITY

Pac bags are available direct from the manufacturer, Pac Designs. They export the majority of their bags so are used to sending overseas: Pac Designs, Box 303, 713 Josephine St, New Denver, B.C., V0G 1S0 Canada.
Tel +1 250 358 7925
Fax +250 358 7927
E-mail pat@pacdesigns.com
Website www.pacdesigns.com

Prices: The Ultimate starts at US\$190 (around £130, €210). The Diamond Street Scene (small) costs US\$99 (about £70, €110). There are plenty of optional extras available, too, and several other models of bag. Contact Pac for details of shipping costs.