

SAMPLE IT

Biking with Fido shouldn't be a drag

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

Several days before a long bike ride last year, a friend of mine suggested that we get a bike trailer for my beagle, Hamilton. Forget it, I said. Concerned about anxiety (Hammy's) and burning quads (mine), I refused to entertain the idea.

But then I came across a kid's bike trailer, parked it in my kitchen with lots of treats and acclimated Hammy to it gradually. Surrendering, I decided that this would be a fun way to keep our pack together on long (and overnight) adventures.

This spring, we tested out a few dog-specific models on trails, boardwalks and pavement. The trailers were easy to assemble and fold up for stowing. All had similar attachments, and it was a cinch to hitch the tow arm to the rear axle of our bikes. Towing any kind of trailer requires more vigilance with turning, braking and shifting, and I found that it takes minimal swerve up front to make the towed dog fishtail.

Mostly, I was surprised at how easy the ride was and how little jostling and bumping I felt, even going over potholes and gravel. But that all changed with any hint of an incline, and I became acutely aware of pulling a 25-pound hound and a 20-pound trailer. My final test was towing Hammy up Capitol Hill, which I managed by shifting down to the granny gear. My quads? Still working on those.

Burley Tail Wagon

A big name in high-end trailers for kids, Burley offers the Tail Wagon, a bright yellow, highly visible, teardrop-shaped cabin for dogs up to 75 pounds. The 23.5-pound trailer comes with a thorough instruction manual that has photos and warnings against towing an "excitable pet." The design is simple, with a safety flag and pockets for gear. The mesh roof and windows have plastic covers that can be rolled up and secured with Velcro. The entire roof can be rolled back for a convertible look, but I found this far too risky, especially with the loosely secured "tailgate" in the back and the ab-

sence of an essential item: a leash that attaches the dog to the trailer. So I tested this trailer only in the alley, in case Hammy attempted what the manual calls an "unplanned exit." www.burley.com. \$399.

DoggyRide Mini Dog Bike Trailer and Original Dog Bike Trailer

If the Burley is an SUV, DoggyRide's domed-top green Mini Dog Bike Trailer is a Volkswagen Beetle: compact and adorable. The 21-pound trailer (larger "original" size is 38 pounds, in red) has smaller wheels and a fine UV-resistant mesh with a second plastic layer. Although the load-

able weight limit is 55 pounds (100 for the original), and the dimensions seemed adequate, Hammy was borderline too big, yet the sunroof was too high for him to pop his head out to sightsee. Hooray for the cabin leash with two hooks and for the orange safety flag, and I liked the large gear pouch with a bottle holder. www.doggyride.com. \$199, \$259.

Solvit HoundAbout II Bicycle Trailer, Medium and Large

Just like Goldilocks and her porridge, Hammy found a trailer that was just right. The cabin has a large zip-back sunroof, mesh windows, a leash and a low center of gravity. The 20-pound red trailer can accommodate dogs up to 50 pounds (up to 110 in the larger blue trailer, weighing 25 pounds). Hammy had plenty of room to shift positions, yet not enough to slip and slide, and I wasn't worried about his escaping. But it wasn't perfect — the instructions were the least user-friendly, with not enough images, and a screw for attaching the rear reflector was missing. The Velcro pockets on the side and back weren't secure enough, but, most important: Solvit, please include a safety flag!

www.solvitproducts.com. \$249, \$399.

PetEgo Cycleleash

For the dog that isn't overly challenged by running in a straight line, the Cycleleash allows you to ride without holding a leash by attaching a quick-release connection just below your bike seat. Fido attaches to a strong bungee cord, which should absorb much of the shock of a tugging dog. www.petego.com. \$58.

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Four legs, two wheels: In unscientific tests by Hammy the Beagle, DoggyRide's Mini Dog Bike Trailer, left, won points for safety. Solvit's HoundAbout II, above, fit just right.

PHOTOS BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN