



Grouptest

Cargo bib shorts

Cargo bib shorts combine the comfort of padded lycra with the convenience of pockets. **Emma Silversides** tests four pairs



EMMA SILVERSIDES

Since retiring from professional road racing, Emma has continued cycling, particularly touring

Cargo bib shorts are not about top-end performance, aerodynamic fabrics, or muscle compression like race shorts. They're designed for convenience and functionality, with ample storage, quick-drying fabrics, and a durable seat pad, likely accommodating a more upright position.

For some the extra storage might be in addition to the pockets of a cycle jersey, for others a complete replacement. Cargo shorts are a popular choice with gravel riders and adventurers but they aren't limited to that. The fact that you don't have to reach round and locate and extract contents from rear pockets is an incentive to use them for any ride – club run, commute, audax, multi-day trip, tour, or an off-road foray.

The addition of pockets does push the price up. But the convenience of a leg pocket for quick access to food, wallet, or phone for a quick photo is not to be knocked. They are equally useful for shoving wrappers, gloves or packable shells into while on the move.

There are men's versions of all of these shorts.

Details WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1 Chamois
Look to the edge of the chamois for neat seams, as well as graduated padding within the chamois itself. Since we are all different, what suits one person won't always suit the next.

2 Pockets
Consider the top you'll wear with the shorts. With a traditional jersey, rear pockets on the shorts may be superfluous or awkward to access, so check you have the capacity on the legs that you want. Things can sometimes fall out of pockets when you stop for a call of nature.

3 Fit
Cargo shorts aren't often designed to compress. A road-rider

wanting that might need to size down. Check the width and design of leg grippers – are they to your liking for long days in the saddle?

4 Fabrics
Manufacturers are beginning to use recycled fabrics. Some offer water repellency, others UV protection. If you are purchasing for bikepacking or touring, look into drying times.

5 Bib design
Many shorts have rear zips and halters for easier comfort breaks. Alternatives include traditional straps or a full frontal bib, which can be a bit warm when it's hot. If bibs aren't for you, some manufacturers offer waist cargo shorts.



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Verdict

Rapha's shorts offer so much in terms of technical details but are let down by the fit. Try before you buy if you can. The 7mesh shorts are premium quality, and I found the fit great. The lack of give in the thigh pockets makes them less accommodating, and the Pull2P system is not the easiest I've encountered.

The Giro shorts are something of a halfway house: no thigh pockets, and the rear pockets aren't huge either. They do, however, make comfort breaks convenient thanks to the halter. Lusso's shorts look great and the thigh pockets are well designed. They also have the lowest RRP. A good choice for your first pair of cargo bibs.



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1 7MESH Wk3 Cargo Bib Short

£180 7mesh.com

THESE WERE THE snuggest fit, although the fabric is soft so it doesn't pinch. Silicon-dimpled leg ends are effective without squeezing. The pad is the neatest I've seen. It's seamless and offers sufficient support for long days. There's ample storage: two wide pockets at the rear and two thigh pockets. Rear pockets are very accommodating; the thigh pockets are better for slim objects. Straps are designed to be pulled down without taking a top layer off. 7mesh call it Pull2P.

▼ **Snug fit, superior chamois and, with four pockets, ample storage**

2 RAPHA Women's Cargo Bib Shorts

£195 rapha.cc

I FOUND THESE too generous in the hip/groin/leg area, despite following Rapha's size guide. The pad seams are very neat and there's plenty of protection for the sit bones, but this quality is hampered by the loose fit. The fabric is soft and dries quickly. Its water repellency is effective in light showers but seems less breathable. Storage options are good: two rear and two thigh pockets. All four are mesh fabric with an elastic top, making them easy to access on the move.

▼ **Very generous fit. The water repellent fabrics dry quickly**

3 GIRO Women's Chrono Expert Halter Bib Knicker

£119.99 giro.com

THESE OFFER A great fit around the legs and groin. The pad is flexible and comfy. The fabric is similar to that of conventional race shorts and, with no leg pockets, they look like them too. The leg grippers are a good depth and not constrictive. Storage is at the rear – three mesh pockets that are not deep but do have plenty of give. The mesh front and halter design is comfortable. A soft, stretchy strap makes comfort breaks slicker than normal.

▼ **Minimal storage. Good fit and an easy to use comfort-break halter**

4 LUSSO Women's Adventure Bibshorts

£115 lusso.bike

UK-MADE SHORTS offering a snug fit with an elasticated leg gripper. The pad is good for several hours in the saddle but I wouldn't chose these shorts for multi-day trips. The fabric offers good breathability. Two deep leg pockets are made of accommodating mesh that looks fragile but isn't, and items are held secure by an elasticated trim. The bib straps are 'traditional', with a lightweight mesh fabric that's discreet under any top.

▼ **Stylish, with good storage. Best for day rides on road and off**