

## R&B is “Fab”: Packing it In

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One of the big differences between police bike patrol units and EMS bike units is that EMS units have a lot more equipment. Determining how to carry it all can be a real challenge. Several solutions exist, but most departments rely on panniers of some type. This has tended to limit operations to those that were only suited to panniers, which have their own limitations.

When we first started our bike patrol, we had only my touring panniers. While they were great for touring, the problem was that they were basically big bags with open tops. Small items and/or drugs would frequently migrate to the bottom of the bag, which resulted in half of our equipment being placed on the ground while we dug for the elusive item. The other problem we ran into was that sometimes we didn't need to carry all the stuff we had in the panniers, yet there didn't seem to be an obvious solution. Luckily, through grant money we were able to purchase a set of panniers designed specifically for EMS bike operations.

It should first be explained that our department has had a long-time aversion to “soft” or “nylon” EMS bags of any type. Drugs tended to get damaged and, like with the panniers, small items tended to get lost in the bottom. For many years, we used a hard case for all drugs and equipment that we kept on our truck. This case separated equipment behind a clear cover that kept everything in view where it could be instantly found. So, it was a great surprise to find that a set of bicycle panniers from R&B Fabrications offered a similar feature.

We purchased a set of R&B panniers, along with a Trauma/O2 pack trunk bag, in 2003. These unique bags are specifically designed for EMS bike patrol, and it is obvious that they were designed by someone with EMS experience. (*Note from the manufacturer: IPMBA president Jim Bowell of the Troy (OH) Fire Department advised R&B throughout the product development process.*) The left-side pannier is designed to hold a C oxygen cylinder, bag valve mask and oxygen supplies. The right side is designed to hold an AED and has internal pockets to hold items of your choice. Placing fragile items like the AED and drugs on the right (derrailleur) side of the bike minimizes the risk of damage because the bike is less likely to be dropped on that side.

Opening a pannier instantly reveals everything both in the large pockets and the smaller, transparent pockets. Because of this, even non-bike medics have no trouble finding things in our bags and the most commonly asked question is now “which side of the bike is it on?”

The addition of the Trauma/O2 pack allows us to outfit bikes in a mission-dependent manner so that we only carry what we need. The Trauma/O2 pack is a standard rack trunk bag with a couple of interesting twists. It can be used as a rack trunk bag to carry anything that will fit in it or, due to its ingenious design, can be used to carry a C-size oxygen cylinder with the regulator sitting in the overhanging rear pocket. For a full ALS outfitting, we carry both panniers and use the Trauma/O2 pack as a trauma pack. For a BLS crew where there is a vehicle present and no crowds (e.g., following runners in a 5K run), we carry two Trauma/O2 packs and set one up as an oxygen kit. We could even mix a full ALS bike carrying panniers and using the Trauma/O2 pack to carry jackets, lunch or whatever, while the BLS bike would carry the Trauma/O2 pack as a trauma bag.

We have just added another R&B pannier which has six transparent pockets on the inside. Our thoughts are to split our ALS kit into cardiac and respiratory so that two medics aren't carrying identical items. Time will tell how this works.

We only get two complaints about these panniers. These panniers are big and heavy, comparable in size to my touring panniers. If you ride a 26" mountain bike or a bike with short chainstays (which is another article altogether) you may have a problem with heel clearance. This isn't necessarily R&B's fault; it is just usually a byproduct of these types of bikes. I wear a size 13(48EU) shoe and would have problems if it weren't for using one of two solutions: get a bike with longer chainstays or go with a setback rack. Jandd Mountaineering's expedition rack, which has been around a while, will do the trick. This aluminum rack is rated to carry 50lbs and sets the pannier back a few more inches than a conventional rack. They've also improved it since 2002, most notably with a design change that made it stiffer. R&B stocks this rack on their web page. Another great rack that has gotten rave reviews from the touring community (which tends to carry lots of weight) is the Tubus Logo. It has a second set of rails below the platform of the rack that extend backwards. This allows you to both have heel clearance and more usability of the platform (for that Trauma/O2 pack). Tubus racks are made of CroMo steel or stainless (depending on the model), are rated to carry 88lbs, and have set the standard for strength in the touring community.

While we're on the subject of the size of these panniers, if you are going to utilize them, you should take the time to get used to riding with them. Panniers decrease your side-to-side clearance and change your center of gravity. The added weight also requires a little more finesse in handling. Adding this extra weight to the rear of your bike will change the whole way you ride and, depending on the quality of your wheels, your maintenance program too.

The second complaint I have with R&B's panniers is a lack of outside pockets. A couple of large pockets or loops to clip on pockets on the outside of the panniers would be perfect. We ride in ever-changing weather and frequently can't get back to the station to change. Because of this, we could use a place to stuff raingear, jackets, reports, repair kits, etc., that is separate from our patient care equipment. An outside pocket on each pannier could have remedied this but I wouldn't rule out these panniers for that reason alone.

R&B Fabrications makes bike panniers and a variety of other products for responders. More information can be found at [www.rbfab.com](http://www.rbfab.com). R&B participates in the PPP.

*Ed.'s Note:* R&B has recently released a new handlebar bag for bike medics. This two-pound bag has large and small storage compartments with dual zippers, storm flaps, and a Scotchlite reflective strip. A hideaway zippered map pouch can be used for referencing location or additional storage of medical supplies. It has a quick-release mounting system and a carry handle for use when disconnected from the bracket. No tools are required for installation or removal, and the bag is compatible with both mountain and road bike geometry. *IPMBA News* looks forward to a review of the handlebar bag in a future issue.

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