

GROUPTEST

BAR BAGS

*A bar bag is the practical cyclist's nosebag, handbag or 'manbag'. Technical Editor **Chris Juden** shows what to look for and reviews four*

HERE IS where you carry things too valuable to let out of your sight or that you'll want in a hurry: important things like passport, money, phone, and camera; and handy things like gloves, sunscreen, a pen...

A bar bag never leaves your side, so it needs a quick-release attachment to the handlebar. Klickfix by Rixen & Kaul sets the standard. Many other brands use this attachment, even Ortlieb now. Choose something else and you can't fit anything else. And beware that some other bag holders are difficult to fit or use, and can be insecure. A common fault is weak clamps and/or a lack of anything under the stem to keep it from drooping, until bag meets frame or brake, which rubs a hole in it! And look out for bag sag, where the bag itself distorts and droops.

You want the shortest attachment that'll fit, to minimise the effect of bag weight on steering. Klickfix originally projected 5cm from the bar centre but is now at 6cm and Ortlieb 7cm. The Klickfix system has accessories to accommodate all common diameters and shapes of handlebar.

YOUR THOUGHTS?

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EXTERNAL FEATURES

External pockets are merely nice to have: they're unlikely to be waterproof or secure enough for valuables. Some bags also provide for an additional bundle to be strapped underneath. The most common extra is an integral or attachable map sleeve. Many are too small for published maps but are still handy for cue sheets and maps you've printed yourself. The map sleeve must be waterproof.

WATERPROOFING

Many of the valuables in a bar bag can't stand to get wet, so waterproofing is vital. External raincovers hinder access to contents. Tough, welded-seam construction is better, with a deep lid giving easier access than roll-top closure. Mere resistance to water may keep contents dry enough for half-hour commuting journeys

MAIN COMPARTMENT

Should preferably open towards the rider, with one hand, for easy access whilst riding and yet be secure against stuff jumping out. This is less important for city/commuter bags, where off-bike style matters more than on-bike performance. A flat base, so the bag stands stably upright off the bike, is also desirable.

CAPACITY

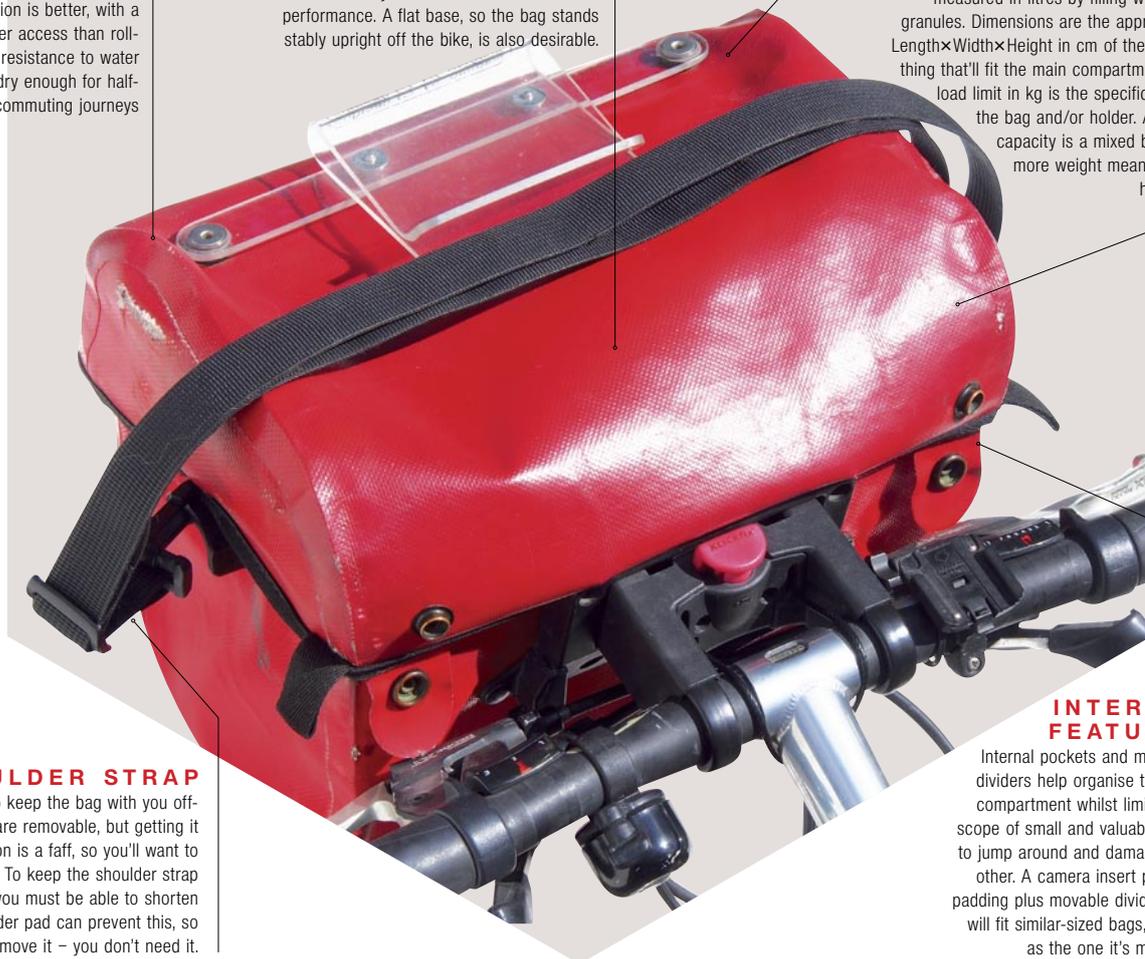
Of main compartment and pocket(s), measured in litres by filling with foam granules. Dimensions are the approximate Length×Width×Height in cm of the biggest thing that'll fit the main compartment. The load limit in kg is the specification of the bag and/or holder. A bigger capacity is a mixed blessing; more weight means worse handling.

SHOULDER STRAP

This is essential to keep the bag with you off-bike. Most straps are removable, but getting it out and clipping it on is a faff, so you'll want to leave it attached. To keep the shoulder strap off the front wheel you must be able to shorten it quickly. A shoulder pad can prevent this, so remove it – you don't need it.

INTERNAL FEATURES

Internal pockets and moveable dividers help organise the main compartment whilst limiting the scope of small and valuable items to jump around and damage each other. A camera insert provides padding plus movable dividers and will fit similar-sized bags, as well as the one it's made for.





1) ORTLIEB ULTIMATE6 M PRO E

£180 ortlieb.com

Instead of a map pocket (available separately), the lid of this state-of-the-art bag is equipped to carry a smartphone beneath its waterproof, touchscreen-compatible window. And if your bike is equipped with a generator and transformer: plug it into the handlebar bracket and integral cabling will charge that phone (or other device) whilst you ride. The electrical contacts between bag and bracket automatically disconnect. If you don't want these features, you can lose the 'E' and save 25%. The holder combines Ortlieb's under-and-over stem-wire security with Klickfix compatibility and features a lock that can also secure the bag lid. There's a front mesh pocket and under-bag bundle loops I had little use for. All the important stuff went in the main compartment. A zipped pocket, key-holder and internal dividers keep contents tidy, with magnetic catches to secure the lid, firmly or very firmly. My one annoyance is how the lid interferes with the shoulder strap. Weight: 698g (130g bracket). Capacity: 6½+½lt, 24x12x19cm, 3kg.

● **Top product, performance and quality, but expensive**

3) AVENIR 3-LITRE BAR BAG

£51.99 raleigh.co.uk

Says it's Klickfix compatible but doesn't fit any of the Klickfix holders on any of our bikes. Its non-standard attachment also needs filing to fit 26.0mm bars. Apart from that, and a small mapcase which is useless because it won't attach securely, the Avenir 3-litre is a stable, strong, waterproof and convenient little bag. But it's as heavy as most full-size bags – twice the weight of an Ortlieb Compact (which answers the same need) without being much cheaper. A lot of the excess is in a shoulder strap strong enough to lug the bike! Two internal Velcro dividers keep contents organised and the lid secures easily with a couple of elastic loops. However it flings wide open when released, so be careful on the move! Weight: 708g (124g). Capacity: 4lt, 20x11x17cm, 5kg.

● **Bigger and heavier than it looks, not actually Klickfix, useless mapcase**

4) BASIL SPORT DESIGN FRONT BAG

£59.99 basil.nl

The sporty name belies this bag's obvious city/commuter purpose. It seems just the thing for normal-clothes commuters who also want a non-bikey shoulder bag. It even features a zip-down attachment cover, to hide its cycling alter-ego and keep those clothes smart. A 'BasEasy' handlebar holder is included, but it's heavy, ugly and won't fit road bars without some fettling. I'd rather have the optional Klickfix adapter-plate and buy my own Klickfix holder! It's a big front bag and robustly made, but heavy. The top/front flap is thickly padded and can be opened to lay back over bars and stem, revealing a transparent pocket for your streetmap: on paper or more likely an iPad, hence the padding. The main compartment is not quite A4-sized, with a zipped internal pocket. There's also a slim front pocket. The bag is only showerproof, so a raincover is included. Weight: 1266g (206g). Capacity: 6+1lt, 26x9x23cm, unknown kg limit.

● **More features and weight than you may want – on your city bike or shoulder**

2) VAUDE AQUA BOX

£85 vaude.com

A simple box-shaped bag that's strongly made with waterproof welded seams. It comes with an authentic Klickfix attachment. The Aqua Box is well stiffened, does not sag, and is similar in size features and price to an Ortlieb Classic – with the mapcase included rather than an extra. And it's a good mapcase, provided you cut the covers off Landrangers. The shoulder-strap is good too – once you've cut off the pad! The main compartment has a large, removable, zipped pocket and a lid that can be relied upon to stay shut without pressing the press-studs. This bag is light, easy to fit and use on and off the bike. And from my experience of VauDe, I'd expect Ortlieb-like performance and durability. Weight: 770g (120g). Capacity: 6lt, 24x12x19cm, 7kg.

● **Excellent simple bag: best buy for touring**

