



Grouptest

Bar bags

For items you need close at hand, it's hard to beat the convenience of a handlebar bag. Technical Editor **Richard Hallett** tests four



RICHARD HALLETT

Technical Editor

Richard likes porteur racks for bigger front bags. In fact, he custom-builds them: halletthandbuiltcycles.com/racks.html

Besides adding a little extra carrying capacity, a handlebar bag provides convenient, accessible storage for lightweight or valuable items such as a camera or documents. Most bar bags can quickly be removed from the bike, so you can more easily carry these valuables on foot.

The drawbacks are minor: such bags prevent the use of handlebar-mounted front lights; and they have some effect on the cycle's handling. The first can be addressed by using a fork-mounted light or an extension bracket that places the light above or in front of the bag.

The latter is alleviated by keeping the weight of the contents to a minimum. Low weight is particularly important when (as with most designs) a quick release bracket holds the bag further away from the handlebar and the steering axis than is ideal.

In their favour, bar bags offer ease of installation and low cost compared with a larger 'randonneur' bag requiring a porteur-style rack to support it. Limited in capacity they may be, for sheer convenience bar bags are hard to fault.

Details

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1 Load capacity

The stated limit, usually between 3kg and 5kg, should not be exceeded for both handling and structural reasons. Small, rigid items such as a camera need padding to stop them rattling around.

use it, while Ortlieb's own lockable bracket is directly compatible. Both brackets are secure and easy to operate, though Ortlieb's may not be used with a carbon fibre handlebar.

2 Water repellence

Stuck right out in the elements and often used to carry delicate items such as a camera or documents, the bag should be highly resistant to water ingress through choice of material and the design of the top flap.

4 Weight Less is, of course, better, not least as it means less effect on handling.

3 Attachment

Ideally quick-release. The Rixen & Kaul Klickfix system is so popular that two of the bags featured

5 Features An internal pocket or partition helps keep documents handy. A map case on the top of the bag is useful for an Ordnance Survey map, a large-screen GPS device, or a smartphone. And a removable shoulder strap makes a boxy bar bag easy to carry off the bike.



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Baggage check

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Verdict

Placing their weight high and well out in front of the steering axis, handlebar bags are designed for convenience rather than capacity, and must not be used to carry heavy loads. Constrained by this and the space between the handlebar, all three conventional bar bags are much the same size.

The Ortlieb bag wins the weight war by some margin thanks to its hi-tech materials. It's also the easiest to open – and the only one with a lock – but the most fiddly to fit to the bike. Topeak's Frontloader isn't competing in the same ballpark but is worth consideration as a way of attaching more stuff to the bike if heading off-road.



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1 Altura Dryline 2 Barbag
£69.99 zyrofischer.co.uk

THE DRYLINE 2 is semi-rigid thanks to stiffening panels in the fabric. There are no internal dividers, so secure stowage may require some stuffing with soft items. Although the exterior has stitched seams, the bag uses Altura's patented Dryline waterproofing system, so no worries on that front. Features include a shoulder strap and a top flap with integral document pouch. It is attached to the handlebar using a Klickfix bracket. A plastic-coated steel wire looped under the stem and clamped by screws inside the bracket prevent it rotating downwards. Weight: 880g. Capacity: 7 litres.

▼ **No frills bag that's waterproof and works fine**

2 Ortlieb Ultimate 6 Classic 7L
£65 ortlieb.com

ORTLIEB'S BAG IS hard to fault, with clean lines, flawless fit, and a generous overlap on the top flap designed to ensure the Ultimate is impervious to the elements. The flap closes with a snap thanks to two magnets. The mounting bracket is part of the rear panel's rim strut. It's compatible with a regular Klickfix mount but is designed for Ortlieb's own bracket. This employs a single plastic-coated steel wire wrapped tortuously around bar and stem and then cranked tight – too tight for a carbon fibre handlebar. Weight: 725g. Capacity: 7 litres.

▼ **Usual Ortlieb build quality and imperviousness to weather**

3 Carradice Keswick
£78 carradice.co.uk

HANDCRAFTED IN THE UK from waterproof waxed cotton duck, the Keswick bar bag is such a feast of leather and chrome that the plastic Klickfix mounting bracket on the back looks inconsistent. Available in black or dark green, this is a fine partner for a classic Carradice saddlebag. It shares the thoughtful design of such bags, with internal pockets for documents and jangly stuff such as keys, plus a capacious map case. The military grade webbing used for the carrying strap should still be going in several decades' time, just like the bag itself. Weight: 1,230g. Capacity: 5 litres.

▼ **The traditionalist's choice, made in Britain from tough cotton duck**

4 Topeak Frontloader 1290
£50 topeak.com

THE FRONTLOADER IS handlebar luggage for bikepacking. [We requested a Topeak Tourguide bar bag but none was available.] The flexible mounting plate is secured to the handlebar by straps, and the 8-litre drybag is attached to the plate by more straps. It's classic bikepacking gear, designed to carry softer items such as a sleeping bag. Convenient it is not. The bag's contents can't be extracted without loosening the straps, and fitting is even more time-consuming. But it's lightweight and will carry a lot of gear. Weight: 480g. Capacity: 8 litres.

▼ **Big, waterproof bikepacking bag that lacks on-ride convenience**