

GROUPTEST

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS JUDEN

Expandable rackbags

A rackbag with pockets that unfold into drop-down panniers makes room for extra cargo. Technical Editor **Chris Juden** reviews four

IF YOU'VE got a small amount to carry and a rear carrier rack on the bike, a rackbag is ideal. It's neater than two half-empty or one lop-sided pannier, more aerodynamic, keeps the load centred, at a convenient height for access, is easier to carry off the bike and, provided you do have a mudguard, remains cleaner than a pannier down by the muck-spreading wheel!

Disadvantages are many leaky seams and zips (you'll want a rain cover) and worse vibration on top of a rack than in a pannier suspended from it. So a rackbag isn't such a good place for things that can't stand wetting or shaking. And rackbags are small. Even with an expanding top, which most have, a rackbag struggles to hold 10 litres.

If you need more capacity, the side-pockets on *these* rackbags unzip, unfold and drop down to make like panniers. Some add only a few litres, whilst the larger examples may be sufficient for light touring. They're also a good commuter solution.

3 Capacity

I measured the min and max in litres by filling with packaging granules. You'll find other figures, usually bigger, in catalogues. Centimetre dimensions are the approximate Length × Width × Height of the biggest thing that might just fit.

4 Compartments

A padded base for the main compartment reduces jarring of contents and stiffened sides keep the bag from flopping. Internal dividers, zipped pockets and elasticated pouches keep loads tidy. An expanding top increases capacity by anything from a quarter to half as much again. There may be extra pockets or pouches on the outside, and/or a shockcord on top that'll hold a rolled-up jacket etc.

5 Rain cover

Some bags don't have one, or not big enough to cover the panniers.

6 Lamp loop

They all have one, some more useful than others – beware of droopy lamps!

7 Attachment

It's usually by a Velcro strap at each corner, wrapped around the rack's sidebar and stuck on the bag. This works on narrow racks (down to 9cm) as well as the standard 12–14cm width. Others have a strap and buckle at each corner. Straps passing under both sidebars are secure only on standard carriers. Some bags have quick-release systems or need a special carrier.

1 Shoulder strap

These bags can be heavy and awkward to carry off the bike, hence the included shoulder strap. Some bags also have a hand strap or two. Or the shoulder strap can (usually) be left at home, saving 50–80g on day-rides.

2 Drop-down pocket-panniers

The side pockets have a stiffened outer surface, which flaps down when the pocket is totally unzipped, forming the back of the pannier compartment that unfolds, usually with an elastic cord and hook tether to the carrier foot. There's a trade-off: the bigger and better they are as panniers, the less capacious they are as (pannier stuffed!) pockets.





ALTURA ARRAN TRANSIT £39.99

980g, 9–14lt. Things rattle around in this featureless box-like main compartment (8lt, 31×14×15cm). It doesn't expand but its few seams and close-fitting lid give some rain resistance. And just as well, as it doesn't come with a raincover. When they're not deployed as small (3lt, 24×6×21cm) rounded panniers, a two-slider zip and external mesh pouches make the slim pockets more useful. The bag clips and sticks (with Velcro) to a waterproof panel (with flimsy rear lamp loop) strapped on top of the rack. With an integral shoulder-strap-cum-carry-handle, this fitting makes for quick bike/walk transitions.

zyro.co.uk

It's a solid, simple, and economical bag but heavy and short on features, except speed of de/attachment



AXIOM PADDYWAGON EXP19 £55

680g, 7–15lt. Great expansion from the well-padded main compartment, which has a capacity of 6–9lt and measures 27×14×15–26cm. It features a moveable Velcro divider, a valuable pouch at rear and mesh pouch inside the lid. Slim outer pockets unzip to form small (3lt, 20×6×25cm) panniers. There's also a useful rear pocket, with a loop that holds a lamp well when the pocket is full. Other external features are Velcro loops for a pump on the left, a shockcord on top and a carry-strap in front of the lid. A clip-on shoulder-strap and raincover (just for the main bag) is also provided. Fitting is by the usual four corner Velcro straps.

paligap.cc

Good features, size and weight, although a little pricy



TOPEAK MTX TRUNKBAG DXP £79.99

1220g, 9–25lt. The expanding main compartment (6–8lt, 29×14×15–23cm) features a moveable Velcro divider and lid pouch. Double slider zips enhance the pockets, each of which becomes a pannier (8lt, 28×8×36cm) the size of a full A4 ring-binder! There's also a bottle holder at the rear (with lamp loop too near the bottom), plus a short shockcord and mesh pouch on the top. It has carry handles and a clip-on shoulder strap. There's no raincover. Fitting is slick and secure to any Topeak 'Quick Track' carrier. They're good racks and come in varieties to fit most bikes, including beam racks, though I'd get one with legs to support up to 25 litres!

extrauk.co.uk

The most expandable rackpack currently sold, but it's heavy, expensive and needs special rack



VAUDE SILKROAD PLUS £45

580g, 7–13lt. The expanding main compartment (6–8lt, 27×13×17–24cm) has a tough waterproof base and features two internal pockets: at the rear and mesh in the lid. Soft sides make it easier to stuff the lateral pockets, which drop down to form small rounded panniers (2.5lt, 20×6×21cm), each tethered to a leg of the rack by a Velcro strap instead of the usual elastic hook to the foot. This neat bag also has a shockcord on its lid, a raincover that adjusts to fit just the bag or panniers too, a lightweight shoulder-strap and a droopy lamp-loop on the back. Fitting is by the usual four corner Velcro straps.

vaude.co.uk

The lightest and, given its features, best value rackbag, but also the smallest