

GROUP TEST

BIKEPACKING SEATPACKS

*Panniers aren't the only way to carry luggage on your bike. **Dave Barter** tests the off-road alternative: bikepacking bags*

BIKEPACKING IS lightweight off-road touring. A growing interest in it has spawned new luggage. Bikepacking bags require no carrier racks. They attach: via straps at the saddle and seatpost, like these seatpacks; at the handlebar; and inside the main frame triangle. This minimises weight and holds that weight securely and closer to the bike's centre of gravity, so the bags won't sway or fall off off-road.

Most bikepacking bags can be used on full-suspension mountain bikes. They also suit minimalist touring on an adventure road bike – or just a road bike. Most bikepacking bags compress the luggage, so the contents don't move around even in a bag that isn't full. But they take longer to attach or remove than panniers.

FIXINGS

Seatpacks strap to the saddle and seatpost; you'll need at least 12-13cm of exposed post. Straps should stay fast; you don't want to be adjusting the bag every few miles. Note that you may need to relocate your rear light.



CAPACITY

A seatpack seldom holds more than 15-17 litres, and often less. You'll probably need a handlebar bag and/or backpack to carry enough luggage for a multi-day tour. Volume can be reduced by compression straps and (if used) roll-top fastening.

YOUR THOUGHTS?

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WEIGHT

Bikepacking bags are light.

All of those in this test weigh under 500g, including fixings. On a tour where every gramme counts, weight saved in luggage means more food or equipment can be carried.

A lighter bike offers better handling – and easier bike carriage – off-road.

ACCESS

Contents in bikepacking bags aren't as accessible as those in panniers. You will still need to get at your stuff, so how easy is it? Can you easily unclip fixings in the cold with gloves on?

WEATHER & ABRASION RESISTANCE

Conditions can be harsh off-road. Look for a bag that will keep the rain and wheel-spray out whilst standing up to a bit of abuse – whether that's being plastered with mud or snagging on foliage.



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1) ALPKIT KOALA

£65 alpkit.com

The Koala is a lightweight, all-in-one bag that attaches easily to the saddle and seatpost. The bag's three removable straps allow for plenty of adjustment, although both straps and clips are very thin; I wondered how durable they'd be long term. The pack is held solidly to the bike, with no discernible sway or bumping over rough ground. The capacity of 13 litres is enough by itself for an extremely lightweight summer trip, and the roll-top closure adds some versatility as the bag can be used to carry less. Alpkit will customise the Koala on request, changing colours or fixings. The bag's VX21 material kept the water out during my heavy shower simulation but is not completely waterproof, so you may want a drybag. The bright colour of the test pack provided added visibility. Weight: 269g

● **A well-designed and lightweight bag that's ideally suited to off-road touring**



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2) REVELATE VISCACHA

£126 backcountrybiking.co.uk

The Viscacha is an all-in-one bag that's held firmly in place by a large seatpost strap and a single fastener that clips over the saddle rails. The large clips require decent clearance between the rails and saddle top. The roll-top closure is easy to use, and I liked the inclusion of an interior strap to further compress luggage. Capacity is 14 litres. Stiffening panels provide additional support, so the bag keeps its shape and is held in position well. Four fixing points on top of the bag provide options for strapping on a waterproof or roll-mat. The bag did not fare well in my water test and quickly allowed moisture in via the seams. A drybag would be required in the UK. The Viscacha swallows a large amount of gear, however, and fits under the saddle so well I forgot it was there. Weight: 400g.

● **A great option for off-road trips requiring extra luggage but it's expensive and you'll need to factor in a drybag**



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3) BLACKBURN OUTPOST

£54.99 zyro.co.uk

The Outpost pack is a versatile option, as it comprises a harness (similar to the Wildcat Tiger) and a removable drybag. You could use the harness to carry other items or bags. The harness's three-strap fitting system is really easy to use, although it didn't fit as tightly as I wanted. It swayed a little on the trail, and I'd find this annoying on technical rocky sections. After a 13-mile ride, the seatpost straps had loosened a little. So the more adventurous may want to look for a system with a tighter fit. I found the drybag to be water resistant rather than waterproof; a little moisture got in. It was hard to fully compress the luggage in the drybag too. Capacity is approximately 13 litres. The attachment system allows for a waterproof or other item to be tucked under the straps. Weight: 458g.

● **Better suited to lightweight touring on roads, dirt roads and gravel roads than mountain biking**



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4) WILDCAT TIGER

£70 wildcatgear.co.uk

The Tiger is different in that it does not come with an integral bag. It's a harness, holding a third-party drybag in place using two straps and a large seatpost strap. An innovative looping system requires minimal saddle rail clearance in order to thread the straps through. The harness is held solidly to the bike, with no noticeable slackening after long off-road rides. Each strap ends with a small length of velcro, so excess strap can be neatly folded away. The Wildcat holds a drybag up to 8 litres in size, the smallest on test. The system sits nice and high on the seatpost and allows room for a rear light. While you'll have to get a drybag to use the Tiger, this does mean that any bag damage can be fixed with a replacement bag. It's very light too, even factoring in a drybag. Weight: 265g (with drybag).

● **A smaller-bag harness that's well suited to technical off-road riding, where weight and pack sway are critical**