



Grouptest

Bikepacking bar rolls

Soft bags that strap to the handlebar have become a staple for bikepacking off-road. **Guy Kesteven** tests four models



GUY KESTEVEN

Guy has been a bike tester for 25 years. He's a freelance technical editor for paper and online media and talks to himself while riding bikes at [YouTube/GuyKesTV](#)

Traditional handlebar bags have been popular for day rides and touring for years due to their 'under your nose' convenience, easy-to-organise box design, and their capacity to accommodate maps and light mounts. They're rattly on rough ground without a support frame, however, and their boxy, lidded construction can make them hard to stuff bulky gear into.

That's where stuffsack-style bar rolls come in. Perfect for cramming with bulky but light kit like sleeping bags, bivvy bags and down jackets, their soft, rounded design can also strap directly onto the handlebar to keep them more stable and quieter. If you're going far enough, fast enough then they're arguably more aerodynamic than traditional bar bags as well.

Different sizing, strapping, weatherproofing and accessorising priorities mean that choosing the right one for your bikepacking needs isn't always easy. Hopefully this test of four medium-capacity, standard drop-bar-compatible bags will help.

Details

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1 Capacity

We've tested smaller bags from 9-litres volume and up, but most have 12-15L or larger siblings. Watch out for handlebar space with those.

2 Mount

Direct strap-on mounts are the simplest but leave no room for hands on the bar centre and are more likely to rub on cables/frames. That's why many designs/riders use soft spacer blocks to give a grip gap.

3 Harness or all in one?

All-in-one, direct-strap designs are the most weight/bulk efficient. A separate harness/holster/hod can be left on the bike while

the bag goes walkies with you, however.

4 Weather Resistance

Finding your warm layers have got wet while you're riding is a potentially dangerous disaster. Look very closely at what the waterproof/water resistant descriptions actually mean. If in doubt, double bag.

5 Durability

Bar rolls don't get as filthy and rubbed up the wrong way as seat packs, but anything sawing around on your bike on rough terrain can wear. Grapevine recommendations count for a lot, but it's worth buying from a company with a good warranty service as well.



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Verdict

The Alpkit bag is the simplest, least stable, and needs a waterproof liner. I've little durability data on the lightweight fabric but the bag is keenly priced and the UK factory backup is excellent.

The Ortlieb sits at the other end of the engineering, price and weight spectrum but gives tons of lash-on options, full bar use, and bombproof, weatherproof performance.

Restrap's new combo impresses too, although the lightweight drybag is very thin and the mounting system adds potential paint-wear peril.

Apidura's Expedition bag is cleanly executed, compact, lightweight yet durable, and very weatherproof at a good price for the quality. You'll need to add spacers to get your bar tops back.



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1 Alpkit Kuoka

£46.99 alpkit.com

ALPKIT'S LATEST BAGS use X-Pac X11 fabric, a lightweight organic ripstop cotton with a recycled polyester waterproof backing. Untaped seams make a drybag liner advisable. The 14L tube rolls closed at both ends and has webbing daisy chains top and bottom. Two straps thread through these to compress the contents and lash the bag onto the bar. There's a stiffening square on the back and a light clip patch up front, but no head tube strap so the bag is free to bounce around. There are no bar spacers either, but it's less than half the price of the other bags. Weight: 250g.

▼ **Affordable bag in eco-friendly fabric that bounces in the rough**

2 Apidura Expedition

£96 apidura.com

APIDURA IS ONE of the original bikepacking brands. The bags' minimalism makes them a racers' favourite. The 9L Expedition pack is super compact (the 14L is £104) but has clips for adding an auxiliary 4.5L accessory pocket (£50). There's a bungee for spare clothing, while key areas are reinforced with Hypalon (rubber dinghy fabric). Waterproofing from the ultrasonically welded fabric is excellent, and despite the low weight the bags have an excellent reputation for durability. There are dedicated 7L and 11L Backcountry bags for flat bars. Weight: 300g.

▼ **Minimalist but super tough and weatherproof compact bag**

3 Ortlieb Handlebar-Pack

£105 ortlieb.com

ORTLIEB'S HANDLEBAR-PACK has a belt-and-braces bar attachment strategy, using broad rubberised velcro sub-straps with latched-buckle webbing straps over the top. The double-depth bar pads provide hand room, and the stiffened roll has a head tube strap for security. I tested the smaller 9L bag (15L is £125) but its fixtures and durable fabric still make it fairly heavy and pricy. The bag is so well sealed it has to have an air release valve for use after being rolled shut, so rain is no issue. There's an accessory pack add-on for £60. Weight: 450g.

▼ **A waterproof, bombproof bag for life with multiple fixtures**

4 Restrap Bar Bag Small

£109.99 restrap.com

RESTRAP'S BAR BAG is the only stuffsack-and-holster design here, which makes it the heaviest. Despite being 'Small' it's the joint biggest at 14L so you'll need to line up the separate dry bag evenly. It's the thinnest material here too, which causes some concern. Spacers give you the top of the bar back for hands, lights, etc, and there's a hod-top bungee for stashing a jacket. The QR bar buckles use a cam action to keep them tight, while lower straps loop up under the fork crown for excellent stability – but perhaps more paint rub. Weight: 310 + 160 = 470g

▼ **Versatile drybag-and-holster. Good stability but a thin sack**