



CYCLING FACT SHEET No. 1

Bike carriers for cars are not all the same

Having the ability to carry a bicycle or two on your car means that you can travel great distances and still enjoy the many benefits of cycling.

There are three main types of carry racks that can be purchased and each has its pros and cons. The most popular type uses a metal frame that attaches either directly to the vehicle's towbar or slides onto a separate base plate that is bolted around the towbar assembly.

Most rack models have built-in clamps to hold the bike in place. In the absence of clamps, the bike frame has to be tied to the arms of the rack with straps. Some have a tilting function that allows you to access the car boot easily .

Another form of rear-mounted rack uses straps or hooks that attach to the boot lid or rear window. These do not require a towbar and can be mounted on a wide variety of vehicles.

Although these types of racks are reasonably sturdy, they are not recommended for long journeys over rough roads.

It is important that rear-mounted racks are not overloaded. Always read design specifications to find out the maximum number of bikes or total weight the rack can support. Once loaded, it is also a good idea to tie the front wheel to the bike's cross bar so that the handlebars do not wobble and scratch the vehicle.

If the vehicle is involved in a crash you may not be insured for any damage done to bikes being carried at the time. Check with your car insurance company to see whether they cover items that are temporarily attached to the vehicle.

Less common are roof-mounted bicycle racks. These avoid the risk of damage to a bike in the event of a rear-end collision and can often be adapted to carry other cargo such as a windsurfer. Some models require you to remove the bicycle's front wheel while others simply clamp both wheels in place. Wind resistance created by the bikes will increase vehicle fuel consumption substantially.

It can be difficult to lift a heavy bike up onto a roof-mounted rack and once in place, there is an obvious need for extra clearance. More than one driver has forgotten this and driven under a carport with disastrous consequences.

None of these types of carrier will offer total security against theft, even with the addition of good quality locks. If your bicycle is likely to be left unattended on a rack for extended periods of time, it may be better to use a vehicle with a large covered cargo space that you can slide it into or perhaps give some consideration to buying a folding bike.

