

GripSport Bike Rack



by John Hardwick, Mountain Bike Australia - Sept/Oct 2007

Bike racks are a necessity for many. You may want to load up the kids, camping gear and bikes for a weekend away or have a small car that just doesn't have room for bikes. Perhaps you have a 'nice car' that doesn't agree with mud splattered bikes—either way, a rack can help to get your bikes on board.

However, most rear mounted 'beak' style racks are not designed with good quality bikes in mind. They use a narrow clamp that hangs the bikes from the top tube and they have been known to damage frames with thin-walled tubing. Besides, the complex frame shapes on most modern mountain bikes generally won't fit—you end up having to use crossbar adapters that mount between the seatpost and handlebar stem. As the bikes hang from the beak, they tend to swing around and can easily rub and damage each other in transit. By the time you fit the top tube adaptors and make some effort to protect the bikes with rags and bungee straps, the simple task of loading up takes a good 15-20 minutes—a right pain in the you know what! Some beak style racks offer a more flexible design with two separate bars that are spaced some distance apart. They are a distinct improvement when trying to mount odd frame shapes but you still have to stop the bikes swinging around and rubbing as you drive.

GripSport tackles the bike portage issue in a very different manner and this rack is aimed specifically at good quality road and mountain bikes. It is called the 'Hi-Ride Towbar Carrier' as it sits nice and high and keeps the wheels well clear of the ground. GripSport's design supports the wheels from underneath while a wellpadded hook holds the bike securely from above. As the bikes are secured by their wheels and the top tube, they



don't move around or swing on the rack. If the two bikes don't touch when you mount them, they shouldn't rub together while you drive. This design greatly reduces the chance of bike damage in transit. The rack bolts under a standard tow ball fitting via their 'Quick-Grip' hitch. You can then quickly and easily remove the main part of the rack by removing a pin while the compact hitch can be left in place on the towbar. The Hi-Ride Carrier will hold one or two bikes—you are out of luck if you need to carry three bikes or more.

Safe & Fast - Bike mounting is a simple task. The wheel hoops need to be adjusted to match the wheelbase length and the tyres slip down into the mounts. The hook then swings into place and holds the bike down. Mounting a second bike follows the same procedure. Most people will adjust the wheel

hoops for their two most regularly carried bikes and leave them in place. In this situation, mounting two bikes will take all of 30-60 seconds—a damn sight better than the 15 or 20 minute job of fitting top bars and padding the bikes up. Even if you have different bikes and need to move the wheel hoops, mounting the bikes will only take a minute or two. I tried numerous bike combinations and couldn't find a pairing that wouldn't work. The two top tube hooks vary in length and the swinging arm can be angled to suit. Sometimes I wound up with a wheel that overhung the side of the car a little but I always got the bikes to fit. It should work with the vast majority of road and mountain bikes—just keep the individual bike weight below 18kg.

My only criticism is that the winged adjustment bolts are difficult to tighten with cold or wet hands. They don't provide much leverage and people may find them difficult to use. Grip Sport chose them as they prevent heavy-handed people from over tightening the fittings and squashing the box sections of the rack. If you are the one who struggles to open the pickle jar, keep a pair of pliers handy to make the job a little easier. In either case, it is a good idea to regularly check the fittings for tightness on a longer road trip.

GripSport's Hi-Ride Towbar Carrier is 100% Australian made and retails for **\$378**. While this is a little pricey compared with a beak style rack, it could save your bikes from some very expensive damage. It was so fast to mount or remove bikes that I found myself using it all the time rather than putting the bikes inside the car. I think that it is a great design and money well spent.