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**P97 LONG TERM
TEST BIKES.**

“The bike mount has multiple locking points; it’ll take a Houdini to steal your bike.”

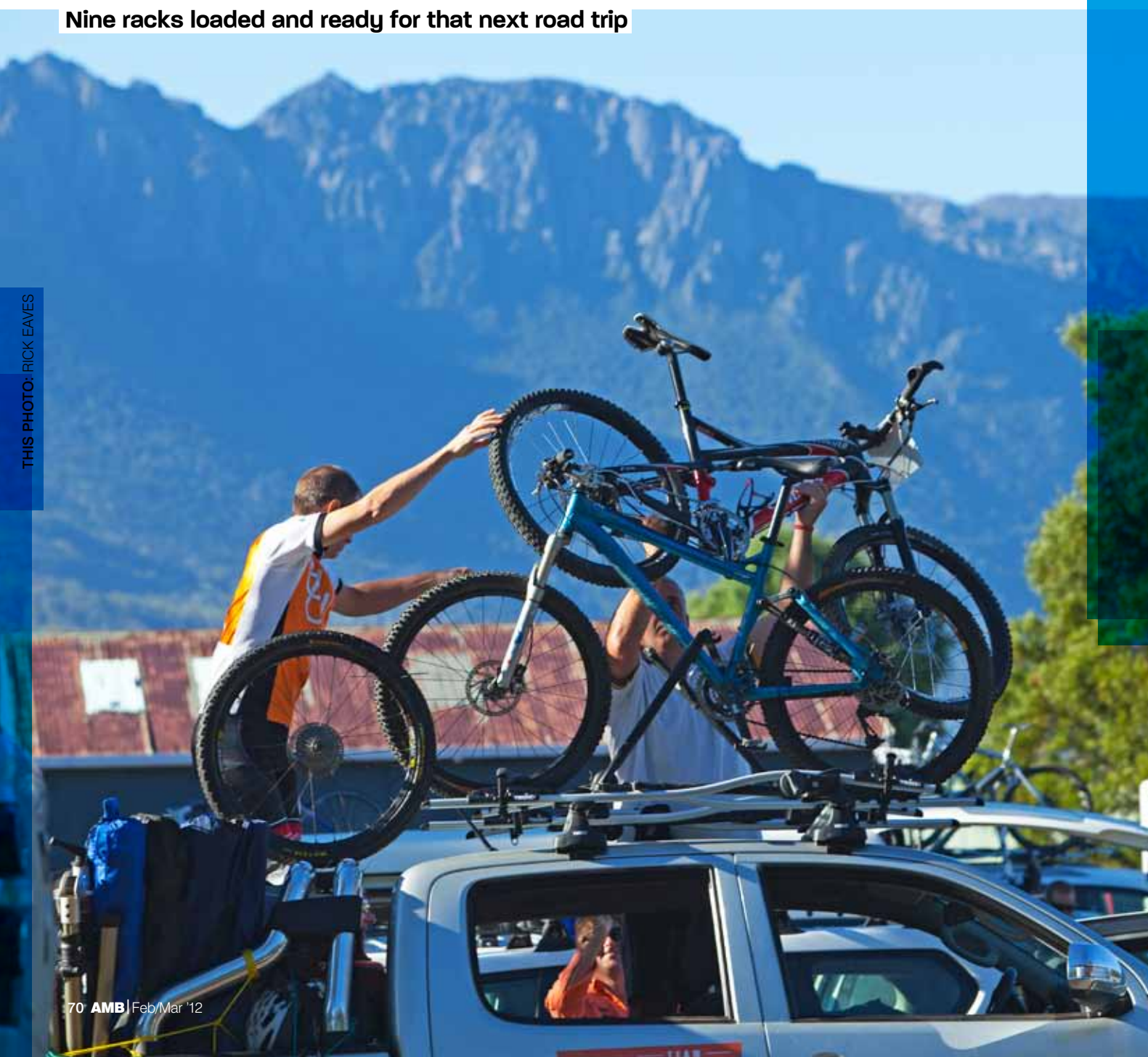
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words & photography Chris Southwood

Group test:

BIKE RACKS

Nine racks loaded and ready for that next road trip



Pack, rack and go

Few of us can afford the luxury of choosing our vehicle solely on its ability to cart bikes to the trail head. Sure, we’d all love a van kitted out with a neat internal racking system, bike wash bay and hot tub for post-ride soaks, but it’s not going to happen. The realities of work, transporting families, keeping up appearances, parking spaces and price mean that most mountain bikers drive a ‘conventional’ car and then spend Saturday mornings jamming the bikes in (or bolting them on) in whatever fashion is necessary to get to the trails and

back. And unless you don’t mind tearing your car’s interior to shreds with greasy chain rings, you’re going to want a bike rack of some description.

We’ve assembled nine great rack options this issue – from lightweight tow-ball racks to roof racks and beefy tow-hitch mounted systems – and put them to the test. They range in carrying capacity from two bikes to four bikes, and cover a wide range of price points. We fitted them to a fairly standard station wagon equipped with a 50mm tow ball (a Hayman Rees

tow-bar hitch). To get an idea of how well these racks handled the often complicated tube shapes and frame configurations, we selected three very different bikes that we thought would really stretch the versatility of the various racks: a Trek Fuel EX 9 (carbon frame with complex tube shapes and a fairly tight front triangle), a Specialized Camber 29er (with a longer wheelbase and a top tube-mounted shock) and a Morewood downhill bike (representing bikes with wide rear-hub spacing, wide bars, big tyres and more weight).

How we scored the racks

We assessed the racks on a variety of criteria:

- 1) Value** – Does the feature set and overall quality measure up to the asking price. Do you get plenty of long-term bang for your buck?
- 2) Ease of fitting** – Was dis/assembly easy? Was it simple to fit the racks? Were special tools required? Could a single person fit it easily, even if they aren’t particularly strong?
- 3) Ease of operation** – How tricky is it to get the bikes onto the rack? Can you get all the different frame shapes to fit? Can you fit the claimed number of bikes onto the rack? Can you still access the boot with the rack in place?
- 4) Build quality** – Is the rack well made? Do the fittings feel solid? Does the rack flex/bend when fully loaded?
- 5) Security** – Are the bikes held onto the rack firmly? Would you be happy to drive with this rack fully loaded on rough roads? Can the bikes be locked to the rack, or the rack to the car?

EziGrip MP Series

The EziGrip MP rack is one of the neatest offerings on test, with robust construction and straightforward design. The ‘two pronged’ rack mounts straight on the tow ball and is secured by two large grub screws, tightened with a supplied 10mm Allen key. While it’s not lightweight, it’s still easy to fit, even for a smaller person, and with no secondary straps or other faff to secure the rack, it’s on in seconds. The rack doesn’t fold down to allow you access to the boot, but the prongs can be folded with a quick-release mechanism when the rack isn’t in use for storage.

This style of rack’s simplicity is its blessing; it will work with just about any frame shape (though the bikes may protrude beyond the car’s profile

occasionally). The arms and upright strut are densely padded and we wouldn’t have any fears about the rack damaging bikes. We fitted two bikes easily, with generous real estate between them (though we’d recommend a rag or two on hand to deal with any potential rub points). The bikes are secured with long bungee cords, including one for looping through the wheels and back around the rack’s upright strut to prevent the bike-swing. While we’ve had past reservations about the security of this style of rack, the EziGrip’s upturned tips ensure that even if the bungee cords did come unfastened, the bike is unlikely to fall off. A refined and well-finished take on a practical rack design – we’re impressed!



SPECS
PRICE: \$275
CONTACT: groupesportif.com
Model Style: Tow ball
Capacity: 2 bikes
Value: 8
Ease of fitting: 9
Ease of operation: 7.5
Build quality: 7.5
Security: 7
Overall: 7.8
Positives: Tough construction. Fits just about all frame shapes / bike combos. Very easy to use.
Negatives: Bungees can scuff delicate frame finishes.

Rating
7.8



GripSport Hi-Ride Carrier

The Aussie-designed and made GripSport Hi-Ride rack is built to last, with large-diameter steel tubing supporting the bike carrier portion of the rack, and a beefy baseplate that fits underneath the tow ball. Installing the baseplate means removing your tow ball, but once it's in place, you can leave it there – the rest of the rack disengages with a bolt and quick-release lynch pin. In spite of the robust build, it's not overly heavy – one person could fit it. The upright arm folds flat, facilitating boot access for most vehicles (sans bikes, obviously), and easy storage. If the rack obscures your vehicle's lights, GripSport offers a HiR-Ride-specific LED lightboard

(\$138). The simplicity of its construction sparked admiration, though we were initially sceptical about the un-fancy foam padding and basic fastening dials. From a practical perspective it all makes sense – spares for any of the parts that could wear out should be very easy to replace.

Bike fitment was easy. Once you've configured the rack to your bikes, future fittings become absurdly fast. Pop the bikes into place, finetune the position with the adjustable wheel cradles so the bikes don't touch or rub on the upright strut, then tighten the dials. Next, slide the upper mounts down to secure the top tubes and tighten. Finally, slide the upper lock-ring into place to ensure the bikes can't vibrate or wobble free. The whole process takes less than two minutes, and subsequent fittings take about 20 seconds.



Rating
8.4

SPECS

PRICE: \$398
CONTACT: gripsport.com.au
Model Style: Tow ball
Capacity: 2 bikes
Value: 8.5
Ease of fitting: 7.5
Ease of operation: 9.5
Build quality: 9
Security: 7.5
Overall: 8.4
Positives: Simple but very effective. Should accommodate nearly all bikes. Robust. Speedy operation.
Negatives: Requires removal of tow ball for initial installation.

Hollywood Racks Road Runner 4

The Road Runner is built tough, with heavy-duty lynch pins and robust bolts. Probably the heaviest rack on test, it mounts off the tow bar (two-inch Hayman Reese fitting) rather than the tow ball. Less beefy individuals may need assistance with fitment. The rack features a clever tool-less tightening system that winds the assembly down firmly against the hitch pin. There's even a lockable hitch pin to prevent scum running off with your rack at the drive-thru. Bike security is via an eight foot-long cable lock that can be run through bike frames (and uses the same key as the hitch pin). We were surprised at how far the rack protruded from the hitch, but we suppose this beats a handlebar through the rear windscreen. A bonus: the rack tilts away

from the car, allowing boot access when loaded, and the arms fold flat for storage.

Fitting the bikes was reasonably simple, and we were surprised by how well the frame cradles accommodated our various bikes. Each cradle is adjustable, so it's easy to get secure bikes in place, and the rubber fastening straps are a decent length for stretching around big frame tubes. To prevent bike-swing, there are anti-sway mounts (an extra frame cradle that grasps the bike vertically, ideally on the seat tube) and a fold-down lower bar (with supplied strap) to secure the wheels. While the rack is designed for four bikes, three was quite squishy. If you want to brave bar-clash and carry four bikes, make sure you have some padding to prevent scratches.



Rating
7.2

SPECS

PRICE: \$378
CONTACT: velovita.net.au
Model Style: Hayman Reese
Capacity: 4 bikes
Value: 7
Ease of fitting: 6
Ease of operation: 7
Build quality: 7.5
Security: 8.5
Overall: 7.2
Positives: Robust. Handles odd frame shapes better than most frame cradle style racks. Folds down for boot access.
Negatives: Heavy. Big bolts and struts look unrefined.

Hollywood Racks Towball 2

The Towball 2 is a tidy two-bike system. It weighs very little, bundles up neatly for storage and even my mum could fit it to her truck. The rack mounts to the tow ball with a spring-loaded clamp – pushing down on the middle bar between the two main uprights locks the rack onto the ball (keep your fingers away from the mechanism or score the blood blister from hell). The clamp tension is adjustable, but even when cranked right up the rack can still swivel, hence the two stabilising straps that fix onto the boot (or similar panel) recesses. The straps' ratchets aren't the best, but we got everything stable without much fuss,



and not having to use any tools is a big plus. Removal is just as easy: pull up on the handle of the cross bar.

The rack is less brilliant at fitting bikes with odd-shaped frames. The frame cradles are angle-adjustable but narrow; our test bikes didn't sit in the rack as securely as we'd like. Hardtails or more traditional (thinner round tubing) frames would be fine. The rubber straps securing the bikes are tough and firm – we found them fiddly but maybe the rubber will soften over time. We also found spacing between bikes a little tight, so a bit of padding could come in handy. Despite its flaws for funky shaped frames, we were won over by this fast mounting system. If we had just the one bike/two hardtails to transport, it'd be a great option.

Rating
7.2

SPECS

PRICE: \$129
CONTACT: velovita.net.au
Model Style: Tow ball
Capacity: 2 bikes
Value: 8.5
Ease of fitting: 9.5
Ease of operation: 5.5
Build quality: 6.5
Security: 6
Overall: 7.2
Positives: Tool-free mounting makes for speedy installation.
Negatives: Tight for two bikes. Not very accommodating of some dual suspension designs or tube shapes.

JetBlack JetRack 3

While JetBlack has long been a distributor of bike racks; recently it has turned its hand to constructing its own. The JetRack 3 is a strikingly simple, three-bike carrier, using exactly the same principles as the EziGrip: keep it basic and you're more likely to be able to fit complicated frame designs. It's not a particularly refined rack in terms of construction. The bolt used to secure the top 'pronged' section to the upright strut looks very agricultural. We also found the tolerances a bit off, and it took some force to get the two halves to slide into each other. Installation is very easy, once again using two large grub screws tightened with an 8mm Allen key to fix the rack to the tow ball. (A handy size – most people will have an 8mm, should they lose the supplied Allen key.) We found it quite light to

manoeuvre into place and easy to tighten.

Fitting two bikes to the rack was cake-easy, but getting the claimed three bikes on without serious clashing was hard work. Positioning the bikes to reduce the number of contact points was a tricky process; we'd rather just stick to two bikes and have less chance of damage. Bungee cords are used to keep the bikes in place, with two provided per bike. Make sure the cords are tight, as the arms of the rack don't kick up at the end like the EziGrip so there's less security on rough roads. All up, this is a cheap and cheerful solution that will suit just about any bike on the market.



Rating
7.3

SPECS

PRICE: \$159
CONTACT: jetblackproducts.com
Model Style: Tow ball
Capacity: 3 bikes
Value: 8.5
Ease of fitting: 9.5
Ease of operation: 7.5
Build quality: 6
Security: 5
Overall: 7.3
Positives: Well-priced. Easy to install and will fit a wide variety of frame designs.
Negatives: Cheap finish and not particularly secure.

Pedal Nation Roof Frame Mount

The Pedal Nation roof carrier looks remarkably similar to Thule's ProRide 591 – but for inspiration from another design it's good to choose one that works so well. This carrier uses a full-length wheel cradle wide enough for beefy tyres, with two wheel mounts (with adjustable straps) and a down tube 'claw' mount. Assembling the Pedal Nation could've been easier – the process is simple, but the fittings and plastic mouldings felt cheap and tolerances of some of the plastic parts are hit and miss. Fitting the carrier to the Thule SlideBar was straightforward, but clunkier than with more precisely-built carriers.

The Pedal Nation can handle just about any frame shape – we had no problems getting the claw mount around our test bikes' frames. One person can fit a bike, resting their rig against the claw arm while tightening the mounts. When it came to cranking the mounts to secure the bikes, the quality was apparent; the claw's dial is flimsy and slow, and the wheel straps are hard to get snug (there's no ratchet mechanism). There are two locking mechanisms: a lock on the claw mount and another fastening the Pedal Nation to the roof rack. The material quality lets down what would otherwise be a decent rack, and we had to use a screwdriver to free up one lock after it jammed. The price is right, and this rack does a good job of carrying bikes of all shapes and sizes, but our overall experience wasn't up to par.



Saris Bones 3-Bike

The triffid-like Saris Bones has remained largely unchanged for a number of years now. Made from tough, lightweight polycarbonate, it should last for years; there are few parts that can rust. It's the only rack on test that doesn't need either a tow ball or roof rack. Instead, the rack straps onto the back of the car with six nylon straps, anchored to the edges of the boot/panels etc. with broad hooks. Versatility is key – the Saris can be fitted to almost any vehicle type. The initial setup is time-consuming if you haven't played with the Bones before; the four legs must be adjusted separately, to find that optimum mounting angle, and suitable mounting points must be found for the straps before they can be adjusted to length and tightened. The rubber feet

spread the load effectively so bodywork won't be damaged, but don't over-tighten the straps. It's easier to fit after that first setup – all you need to do is fix the straps. But if you fold it flat for storage, you'll need to set it up again!

Like many of the test racks that use frame cradles, the Saris works best with traditional-shaped frames. With its narrow cradles, wide, funky tube shapes are hard to fit, and the straps only fit big-diameter tubes at a stretch. The cradle angles can't be adjusted independently, making it awkward to get bikes to sit securely. It's best suited to hardtails or dual-suspension bikes with thinner tubes. Additional straps on the underside of the rack-arms stop bikes from swinging. We could only fit two of our bikes on the rack (leaving ample room to prevent damage), but with narrow handlebars three bikes would be possible.

SPECS

PRICE: \$240
CONTACT: monzaimports.com.au
Model Style: Straps only
Capacity: 3 bikes
Value: 7.5
Ease of fitting: 6
Ease of operation: 6
Build quality: 9
Security: 7
Overall: 7.1

Positives: Great build quality. A good solution for those without a tow bar. Fits nearly all vehicles.

Negatives: Initial setup is a long process. Hard work with unconventional frame shapes.



Rating
6.4

Rating
7.1

SPECS

PRICE: \$150
CONTACT: ocbicycles.com.au
Model Style: Roof rack
Capacity: 1+ bikes
Value: 7.5
Ease of fitting: 6
Ease of operation: 6.5
Build quality: 4
Security: 8
Overall: 6.4
Positives: Very well priced. Versatile design will accommodate nearly all bikes.
Negatives: Poor quality makes for fiddly assembly and operation.

Thule EuroWay 928 G2

The Thule Euroway is an impressive piece of hardware. For a tow ball-mounted rack, it's pretty comprehensive: there's a robust sub-frame supporting two full-length wheel cradles, plus two clamp-arms to lock the bikes in place. There's also a light system as your car's lights will be obscured. Despite its size, it is seriously easy to install. Lower it onto the tow ball and push down the rubber lever to lock it in place. With adjustable clamp tension, it's easy to generate enough clamping force to eradicate any movement.

There are hits and misses to fitting the bikes: The hits are that any bike (or bike combination) will fit – it's just a matter of working out the clamp-arm positions. The downside is limited adjustability in the side-to-side positioning of the bikes (the wheel strap mounts aren't adjustable). Occasionally, you may need to remove or lower a seat post to prevent bar and post clashes (see photo). We were impressed by just how securely it holds the bikes. The soft rubber jaws of the clamps will not damage your frame, and the bikes ain't moving once they're locked – it's perfect for rough roads and high speed journeys. Being able to lock the rack to the car and tilt the whole rack down to access the boot is another plus – and with the built-in lights, you won't be hassled by the law.



SPECS

PRICE: \$899
CONTACT: thule.com.au
Model Style: Tow ball
Capacity: 2 bikes (expandable to three with Thule 9281 – \$269)
Value: 7.5
Ease of fitting: 8.5
Ease of operation: 7
Build quality: 9.5
Security: 10
Overall: 8.5
Positives: Exceptionally well made. Immensely secure.
Negatives: Fitting bikes can be time consuming.

Rating
8.5



Thule ProRide 591 & SlideBar combo

The ProRide and SlideBar (separate items) work so well as a combo that we felt compelled to review them together. The ProRide bike mount is Thule's premium roof-top bike carrier, for bikes up to 20kg, without removing a wheel. We mounted the ProRide to the new SlideBar roof rack system (available in three widths: 127cm, as tested; 144cm; 162cm). It took us a little over half an hour (including fitting the roof racks to the car). The IKEA-perfect instructions meant no mistakes or frustration, and once the roof racks are on, they stay on. (Or Thule can fit the racks, for a fee.) The whole assembly – racks included – locks to the car, and the bike mount has multiple locking points; it'll take a Houdini to steal your bike.

When it comes to bike mounting, the SlideBar's beauty is clear. The roof rack slides out, so the bike mount sits away from the car-side, and you can lift your bike into place without stretching up over the roof. No more leaning against the car in filthy riding kit or dropping a chain ring onto the roof – for shorties, skinnies and those with heavy bikes, it's a blessing. The rack slides both ways too, to fit bikes to both sides. The ProRide bike mount is similarly well engineered and easy for one person to operate. Lift the bike into place and secure the down tube in the frame-holder's soft rubber jaws, then turn the knob at the base of the holder to lock it all in place. A tough and reliable strap-and-ratchet combo secures the wheels to keep everyone happy.



SPECS

PRICE: ProRide 591 \$245; SlideBar \$349
CONTACT: www.thule.com.au
Model Style: Roof rack
Capacity: 1+ bikes
Value: 7
Ease of fitting: 8.5
Ease of operation: 10
Build quality: 10
Security: 10
Overall: 9.1
Positives: Very easy to fit bikes for a roof-rack system. Holds bikes securely. Lockable. Great build quality.
Negatives: Hmmm...

Rating
9.1

