



Tested

+
Australian designed,
tested and made

+
Good value with
light board

+
Easy to use

+
Solid fit to your vehicle,
with fitment options

-
I'd like longer
velcro straps

-
Could be better for
longer wheelbases

-
Pedal straps may be a
good add on for eMTBs
and rough routes

RRP: \$1590

From: gripsport.com.au

GRIPSPORT VERSA 1.4 VERTICAL BIKE RACK

Gripsport are one of the oldest names in bike racks and accessories in Australia, with a reputation of thoroughly designed and tested equipment that is made here in Australia. And in 2023, they have released the Versa 1.4, a 4-bike vertical bike rack. When we did our Vertical Bike Rack Group Test in 2022, I reached out to Gripsport, amongst a few other major rack brands, to check whether anything was in the works. While I got no details, it was a case of 'check back later'.

Fast forward to March 2023 and I spotted a Gripsport vertical bike rack at the Dragon Trail MTB Stage Race in Tasmania. It was big, black and red, and had a unique bike mounting design where the hoops pointed to the outside of the rack from the midline. A little over a month later I had one arrive at my front gate.

A CLOSER LOOK

The Gripsport Versa 1.4 is a 4-bike vertical bike available direct via the Gripsport website or via their dealer network, which is listed online. The rack uses a traditional vertical bike rack setup with one large vertical arm from the base, on a pivot that lets you lower down or to 3 set points. There are two pins with safety clips to hold it in place when on the road. Gripsport include a hitch pin that keeps the rack snug in your 50mm hitch, and the big anti-rattle assembly. They also include a light/plate board within the \$1590 price. It can mount on the base of the rack, or on the middle two back tyres of bikes fitted as shown.

The rack came unassembled and took about an hour to build. With the red powder coating on some of the members I did find some of the bolts were a firm fit when

building – but that also means they're a very firm fit when built! The four wheel hoops have double cradles (more on that later) and can be fitted in a range of offset positions that let the cradles pivot left to right to optimise space between bikes. The lower cradles on the base bar can be slid left or right and tightened up tool free, and this really helps optimise the positioning of the bikes you load up.

Those dual cradle hoops allow you to slot in 20-24" wheels without the need for any adaptors. And given you can flip the lower mounts so easily to reduce the wheelbase, this makes the Versa 1.4 such a great rack for families – of 4. There are inserts to use for even smaller wheels, and hoops optimised for fat bikes as well. Gripsport also have mounts for fatbikes and even trikes!

Gripsport use fitted velcro straps to lock the front and rear wheels into place on the rack. Like most systems, having them undone before loading is best.

I had an Isuzu DMAX X-Terrain loaned for this review – you'll see I didn't fit the number plate to the light board as it's sized for the accessory plate. The rack can mount at two points in the hitch and leans inwards towards the vehicle. The cradles can be setup a little more inboards too – but you'll need to check your own vehicle in terms of compliance with the 60% overhang rule. Most long travel bikes on this rack on this ute would be beyond the acceptable limit. There's plenty of ground clearance for the rack with a ute like this, but Gripsport also have gooseneck style hitch bars for lower slung cars with 50mm receivers, to lift the rack up higher. Of course, while this rack can take up to four 25kg bikes, the rack also weights about 40kg, so you need to check what your download limit is on your hitch. It's typically 10% of your unbraked towing limit.



LOADING AND UNLOADING

Firstly the rack – there are two handles on it and I found them very useful to actually fit and remove the rack from your vehicle. Yes, it is better with a second person, but these small additions help when solo, or assisted. There are three bolts to tighten up for the anti-rattle u-bolt and the hitch locking pin, and they snug it up perfectly.

By removing two pins you can lower the rack to a full stop position. I found I could wheel a bike up and nudge the front wheel into the cradle – just the same as any other rack with a function to lower. I loaded bikes from the inside out, and given the offset cradles even two 150/140mm 29er eMTBs setup for the same fit didn't have their bars hitting despite having overlap.

With bikes like this loaded I'd enlist help to push it into position, but there is a hard stop that is past 90 degrees, and it lines up perfectly to put the pins in. There is no chance it will move back as you're in there to fit the pins – unless you park on an uphill. The velcro to lock the wheels in is easy to use and strong, although on 2.6" tyres on wide rims I would have liked a little more length to yank on to get it tight. Gripsport do offer a longer velcro strap if that's what you need. When you're at the trails and need to unload, do remember the rack lowering is not damped, but it's not freefall either. Still, if it's loaded with more than one bike, ring in a friend to help lower it down safely.

Longer wheelbase bikes (1250mm+) ran near the edge of the lower cradles. It's actually the perfect position for around this length, but if you were to have a bike with a wheelbase over 1300mm long you might want a longer cradle. Gripsport are looking at a change to the base bar height drilling to accommodate this, as there is so much scope to run super short with the inverted lower cradles.

And in terms of the light board, for most mountain bikes it will mount on the tyres, not the rack. Two looped straps on the back are fast to fit and remove, and sitting against your tyres puts it in the perfect position as well.

ON THE ROAD

As mentioned, with the rack fitted up it is really solid on your car. What I was really impressed with was how close to the centreline of the car four bikes sat when loaded. Thanks to the 2 bikes on the right pointing to the right, and vice versa on the left, the lights on the D-MAX were completely visible. Even

with a lightboard included, it's still great to be more visible from behind for braking and indicating. It would also reduce the impact of the extra overhang, as the reason that's an issue is how far out things are from the turning point (rear axle) of your vehicle. It's a small difference but it will give you a little more clearance getting in and out of car spaces.

Glancing in the rear view mirror when driving, the bikes did move around a little more than a rack which uses pedal straps as a tie down. That's to be expected given the use of velcro, which is similar to a bungy in that it allows some give so there is no jarring force. While I used this rack on a few freeway speed trips, I'd probably consider supplementary pedal straps if I had heavy eMTBs on there for rough trips. When taking repeated speedbumps on rat runs the big 24-25kg bikes do move around a little. And I think part of that is having the rear tyre sitting on the edge of the back tyre cradle, which would be flexing around a little more. Again, nothing moved away from where it should be, but I think if the cradles sat a little lower it would be a better solution for the whole rack.

A neat feature is a place to fit two water bottle holders on the upright arm. I thought it was a bit cheesy, but for a place to store a couple of bottles if you're shuttling – it's a good idea.

OUR TAKE

At \$1590 the Gripsport Versa 1.4 is a well-built and well-designed Australian made rack that also carries a 5-year warranty. I found it was easy enough to build up thanks to some very thorough instructions, and it's a cinch to load and unload. It doesn't have the super fast experience of the Single Trail racks RFS system or pedal release, but it doesn't carry the same price tag either. And the Versa 1.4 doesn't have the damped lowering function, or the lifting function, of the Shingleback Sport or Boost. But again, it doesn't carry the same price of either of those racks. Just like Single Trail and Shingleback the Gripsport Versa 1.4 is a rack that is designed, tested and built in Australia. While I had a little bit of feedback around fitment elements, Gripsport were quick to take that onboard as well. I think they've done a great job with this rack, and given how easily it takes most kids' bikes without modification or extra parts, I reckon it is well worth a look for families that love to hit the trails and want a versatile rack at a good price point.

Mike Blewitt

