



We put roof boxes through some pretty extreme tests

Water resistance

If you're holidaying in Blighty, chances are you'll get rained on at some point. We check whether the roof boxes are waterproof with a high-pressure jetwasher from the front and side to replicate heavy rain while driving at speed.

Safety of fittings

Roof boxes need to be tough. We load each one up with typical holiday gear, put them on a sled and put them through a low-speed collision. Afterwards, we check the boxes for damage and to make sure they have stayed firmly attached to their mountings.

Cycle racks also have the potential to be pretty dangerous – you don't want bikes falling off your car on the M4 and causing a pile-up. We make sure bikes stay securely attached to their rack on a gruelling test route that includes rough country roads, roundabouts and emergency braking from 70mph. We also check whether any racks affect rear visibility.

Siberia to the Sahara

We test the roof boxes for how well they withstand severe temperatures. We subject them to temperatures of -20°C for 12 hours and then drop them to see whether they have become brittle. Then we crank the temperature up to 60°C and check for any heat deformation. Extreme? Yes, but you're just as likely to use a roof box when going skiing as you are in high summer.

Up on the roof

Has your family got too much stuff to take on holiday? Beat the boot-space blues with our Best Buy roof boxes and bike carriers

Bikes, wetsuits, windbreaker, skis, shorts, bucket, spade, towels, tents, inflatable dinghy...Does your family wagon burst with the burden when going on holiday? Fitting a roof box or cycle rack is the work of minutes and an easy way to boost your car's capacity this summer. We've taken a look at what the market has to offer.

The good news is that you can get a Best Buy roof box and bike carrier for less than

£200, which isn't a big outlay, even for occasional users. Spending more than this is worthwhile only if you need greater capacity – more expensive roof boxes and carriers aren't necessarily any better than cheap ones.

Although none of the products we've tested here raised significant safety concerns during testing, remember that correct fitting is vital. On long trips, always stop to check and tighten fittings regularly.



80% Thule Ranger 90 Soft Box £154

The best-on-test Ranger isn't a hard plastic case like the other boxes we tested; instead, it's made of fabric and uses well-sealed zips for opening and closing. This means it can be stowed away in a roll when not in use. Not only will it take up very little space in your garage but it is small enough to carry around in your car's boot.

Far lighter than other boxes, it's one of only two on test that can be fitted easily by one person. Drawbacks are that it's easy to break into and doesn't have huge capacity but, overall, we were impressed by this clever design. Available from the Roof Box Company.

WE LIKE The Ranger can be rolled up and put in a convenient carrying case.

Available Online Maximum load 50kg
Capacity 175 litres



The Ranger is small enough to carry in your car's boot when not in use

73% Thule Spirit 780 £360

This sleek roof box can be opened from either side, making loading and unloading very easy. Its 208-litre capacity wasn't the largest on test but it can carry up to 75kg.

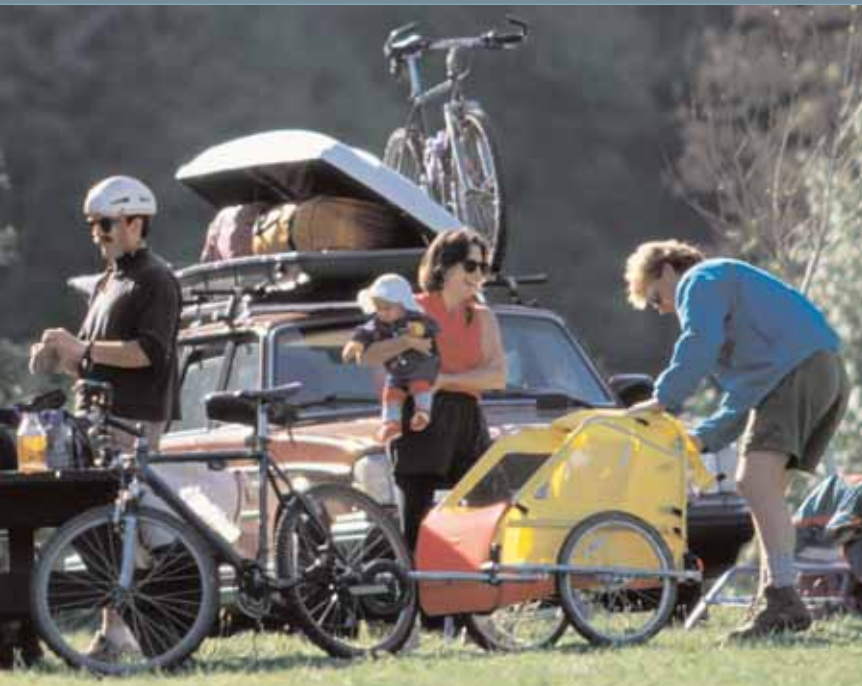
This box is tough, too: it survived all our temperature and crash tests, as well as remaining watertight in torrential conditions. It takes a couple of minutes to fit or remove the box from your car – the clear instructions and easy-to-use clamps make this a simple process.

The interior space is slightly impractical because of some intrusions that can snag your luggage but, otherwise, this is a great product. Available from the Roof Box Company.

WE LIKE The comprehensive fitting instructions have clear dos and don'ts.

Available Online Maximum load 75kg
Capacity 208 litres





72% Kamei Delphin 375 £180

Delphin is a fatty substance contained in the oil of the dolphin and the porpoise. We wonder whether this is a clue to the Kamei's brilliant performance in our rain test? It's also the most secure box on test – it would take thieves a reasonably long time either to break into, thanks to effective locks, or steal, owing to very sturdy roof-rack fastenings. The downside is that, although it's not difficult to mount this box on the roof, the process is time consuming and there are too many fiddly and easily lost washers. Available from the Roof Box Company.

WE LIKE It has two locks compared with the one on most roof boxes, making it more difficult to steal from.

Available Online Maximum load 50kg
Capacity 293 litres

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

71% Thule Atlantis 200 £220

With a capacity of 296 litres and a maximum load weight of 75kg, this large box from Thule ought to be able to swallow up most things you can throw at it. The box can be opened from either side, so is easy to access, while installation and removal are a doddle, too.

This was the second most secure of all the boxes we tried, although after our impact test a small gap at the front of the lid did appear. We found a few drops of water inside the aptly named Atlantis after our severe rain test but nothing too serious. Available from the Roof Box Company.

WORTH KNOWING You can buy an accessory that allows you to carry skis securely inside the roof box.

Available Online Maximum load 75kg
Capacity 296 litres

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

What you should look for

WEIGHT LIMITS

Check the weight limit for the car's roof before you buy a big roof box (look in the owner's handbook)

ACCESS

Look for boxes with lids that open wide and can be opened easily from either side of the car



SECURITY

Opt for a box with decent locks, where possible

STORAGE SPACE

Manufacturers' own capacity figures can be misleading, so check that the inside of the box isn't an awkward shape for the items you will carry

FITTINGS

Check that the brackets that attach the roof box to your car are solid, without being over-complicated

Thule Platform EasyBase 949 £109

This platform fits on to your car's towbar to support Thule bike carriers and storage boxes

The EasyBase is a multipurpose towbar-mounted shelf that sits low behind your car. The idea is that it can be used to mount various add-on accessories from Thule, including an EasyBike cycle rack (for up to three bikes), a multipurpose soft EasyBag, and a hard storage box called the BackUp (which we didn't think was great – see 13 in the table, overleaf). The system is fairly easy to



use and very robust, but the cost of accessories adds up. You can buy better roof boxes and bike racks for less money.

Facts & scores

Facts you need to know to look after your box and belongings

Sold secure?

Although the Kamei scored well in our security tests, we'd urge you not to leave valuables in any roof box unattended for long – most others score poorly.

Wet luggage

The Thule leaks badly because it has spare screw holes in it that the instructions say must be covered up by the supplied stickers – but they're not up to the job.

DIY assembly

The Auto-plas was the only roof box on test that needed assembling before it could be fitted to the car. Its rating for ease of use suffers as a result.

	MODEL	SPECIFICATION			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE				SCORE %
		PRICE (£)	MAXIMUM LOAD (kg)	CAPACITY (litres)	SECURITY	RAIN RESISTANCE	DURABILITY	EASE OF USE	
1	THULE Ranger 90 Soft box	154	50	175	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	80
2	THULE Spirit 780	360 ^a	75	208	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	73
3	KAMEI Delphin 375	180	50	293	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	72
4	THULE Atlantis 200	220	75	296	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	71
5	AUTOFORM Nova 380 XR Silver	225	50	229	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	69
6	HALFORDS 250L Black	100	50	185	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	68
7	KARRITE Contour 470	200	50	328	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	67
8	THULE Atlantis 900	405	75	419	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	67
9	HALFORDS 470L Silver	200	60	329	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	66
10	HAPRO Probox 430	170	50	292	★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	65
11	HALFORDS Exodus 360L Carbon	184	60	222	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	61
12	FARAD Faradbox N2	165 ^b	50	287	★	★★★	★★	★★★★★	56
13	THULE BackUp 900	200	50	329	★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	56
14	AUTO-PLAS 415 A354 Travel Store	122	50	308	★	★★★★★	★★	★★	48

a £400 for glossy black or silver finish b £185 for metallic black or silver finish

USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. Prices for other models are a guide to what to expect. If you buy online, you may

need to pay extra for delivery. **Maximum load** The maximum weight that the box can safely carry, according to the manufacturer.

Capacity The usable storage space inside the box, in litres, based on our own measurements, not on the manufacturer's claim.

Test performance

Security How difficult it would be for thieves to break into the box or remove it from the car.

Rain resistance How well the box kept out water when sprayed with high-pressure hoses.

Durability How well the box and its contents survived an impact test.

Ease of use How easy it was to fit, remove, load, clean and store the box.

Score

This ignores price and is based on:
Ease of use **50%**
Resistance to rain, extreme temperatures and damage **45%**
Security **5%**

How to buy accessories

Check what will fit your car, then shop around online

The main factor to consider when buying a roof box, or roof-mounted cycle rack, is whether it will fit your car. This means making sure your roof bars are not too thick for the box or rack's mountings. If you don't already have roof bars, expect to pay around £60 for a good set.

Most of the products we looked at require bars less than 80mm wide and between 18 and 35mm in height. Also check the distance between the roof bars:

larger boxes may need the bars to be further apart for safe fitting.

Although buying large items such as roof boxes or bike carriers online may not seem ideal, it's actually a reasonable way to buy. The delivery charge isn't as bad as you'd think, at £6 or so from www.roofbox.co.uk or £15 from Halford's website.

The manufacturers' websites are worth checking out, too. Thule's site lets you check whether the roof box you want is



compatible with your car. You can even see how it will look atop your vehicle, thanks to the website's clever MatchMaker tool (above).

If you want to buy a roof box straight away, branches of Halfords are your best bet, although they generally stock only Thule and own-brand models.

Contacts

Autoform See www.roofbox.co.uk

Auto-plas www.auto-plas.co.uk

Farad See www.roofbox.co.uk

Halfords 0845 057 9000
www.halfords.com

Hapro www.hapro.com

Kamei www.kamei-online.co.uk

Karrite www.karrite.co.uk

Mont Blanc/Paddy Hopkirk

01525 850800
www.paddyhopkirk.co.uk

Roofracks.co.uk www.roofracks.co.uk
0845 166 2526

The Roof Box Company
01539 621884

www.roofbox.co.uk

Thule 01275 340404
www.thule.co.uk



Bike carriers

There are essentially two different types of cycle carrier: roof mounted and rear mounted. The first option is generally cheaper but you will need to buy one rack for each bike you want to carry. You will probably be limited to carrying two bikes on the roof because of weight and space constraints.

If you prefer a rear-mounted system (perhaps you want to take a roof box as well, or carry a greater number of bikes), you can choose between a towbar carrier or one that clips on to the back of your car. Fitting a bike rack to a towbar is more secure and safer than a clip-on, but then you have to have a towbar fitted (around £200). Whether you can use a clip-on model depends on your type of car, so check compatibility before buying.

Here are five Best Buys from the latest *Holiday Which?* test.

TOWBAR MOUNTED

87% Thule EuroClassic Pro 903 £264

A beast at 20kg, this carrier proved time consuming to assemble and load bikes on to, so an extra pair of hands is useful. The price is high, but it comes with a five-year warranty, a base rack for the bikes to rest on and an integral lighting board (which may cost you extra with other racks). Instructions were clear and the bikes don't obstruct the driver's vision.

WORTH KNOWING You can add capacity for an extra bike with an adaptor from Thule.

Available Online Maximum number of bikes 3
Weight of carrier 19.9kg

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

Score based on:

Safety and security	60%
Ease of use	20%
Disruption to driving	10%
Versatility	10%

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ROOF MOUNTED

91% Mont Blanc Barracuda £59

This pre-assembled, secure carrier comes with a three-year guarantee, a decent lock, and comprehensive fitting instructions, and is quick and easy to fit to the car. It suits any car with roof bars, although it can be tricky lifting the bike out of the groove.

WE LIKE It accepts all types of bike without the need for adaptors.

Available Online Maximum number of bikes 1
Weight of carrier 3.4kg

WHICH?
BEST
BUY



ROOF MOUNTED

90% Thule ProRide 591 £59

Despite the fact that the instructions consisted mainly of diagrams, this carrier was easy to fit to the car. As with the other roof-mounted carriers, it was awkward lifting the bike on, but it stayed perfectly secure during our road test.

WE LIKE This bike carrier comes with a five-year guarantee.

Available Online Maximum number of bikes 1
Weight of carrier 4.1kg

WHICH?
BEST
BUY



TOWBAR MOUNTED

85% Paddy Hopkirk QuickBall £43

Living up to its name, the QuickBall was quite quick and easy to fit, and it's blissfully tiny when folded away for storage. It proved to be perfectly secure and fits different types of tow ball. It is very good value, particularly for two bikes, but you will need to buy a lighting board if the cycles obscure the car's rear lights.

WE LIKE This bike carrier is very light for a towbar-mounted design, at just 4kg.

Available Online Maximum number of bikes 2
Weight of carrier 4kg

WHICH?
BEST
BUY



CLIP ON

77% Thule ClipOn 9101/9103 £75

(The 9101 and 9103 are identical) Assembling the ClipOn is easy, though long-winded, and attaching it to the car is straightforward. It was also the sturdiest of all our rear-mounted carriers. It suits only a restricted range of cars, and a frame adaptor might be needed for carrying children's and women's bikes.

WORTH KNOWING The ability to carry three bikes depends on your type of car.

Available Online Maximum number of bikes 3
Weight of carrier 6kg

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

