

# ROAD TESTED

## HOW WE TESTED THEM

**FIRST OF ALL**, we packed the bags with a standard group of everyday products to find out how much each could comfortably hold. Then we packed them with newspaper and stuck them under a sprinkler for half an hour to see how well they kept out water. And finally, we rode with them extensively, using various different loads. We marked them on how well they performed for their intended use, comfort, adjustability and durability.

**Our standard bag contents, if it didn't fit it shows in the photos**



### Construction

Most bags are made from nylon fabric, but weights vary considerably. Heavier isn't always better, especially if you're riding a long way; look for quality of construction and fabrics used. It's normally fairly obvious if a bag is well made or not.

### Straps and harnesses

Courier bags nearly always benefit from an additional sternum or waist strap to aid stability on the bike. Rucksacks often have chest and waist straps too, which distribute the load and keep the bag stable.

### Waterproofing

All these bags are showerproof, but some fabrics are designed to be more waterproof than others, and some come with features, such as roll-top closures and rain covers, to keep your stuff completely dry.

### Laptops

Some bags have a dedicated laptop sleeve; ideally this should be well padded with a secure flap to make sure your computer stays put. If you're going to use a hydration bladder, make sure there's an entirely separate compartment to house it – water and electronics don't mix.

### Organisation

It's handy to have some pockets for your stuff, and many bags feature nice touches such as a phone pouch or an iPod pocket with a headphone port.

### Capacity

How much stuff do you need to carry? The bags on test offer a wide range. The ideal bag for you will take everything you need, leaving a bit of space for emergencies.



## Bags of bags

Laptop, sandwiches, spare pants... whatever you need to transport, you need something to carry it in. We lift the flap on 10 messenger bags and 10 rucksacks



### Howies Chevron Bag £65

**THIS ROUGH 'N'** tough nylon bag has a whole lot going on. There are pockets all over the place, little slots for your valuables, a key clip, a mesh water bottle holder... it's busy. The internal computer pouch is well padded and it's even microfleece-lined so your laptop comes out shinier than it went in. Those whopping great chevrons on the flap are reflective, you get more light-catching trim on the shoulder pad and there's a loop for carrying a rear light – so it's got safety covered. The detachable chest strap is meaty enough to hold heavier loads steady and it's surprisingly water-resistant too.

[www.howies.co.uk](http://www.howies.co.uk)

Tough mid-size courier with a ton of features, and at a decent price

8

**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 1101g  
VOLUME 27L  
RAIN RATING 7



### Brooks Barbican Messenger Bag £250.35

**IF BIKE COURIERS** had been around in Victorian times, they'd have used bags like this. The wax-coated fabric actually looks better with age, while the finishing details are hard-wearing leather. Rain can get in, especially at the top corners if you really cram stuff inside, but for moderate loads little magnets hold the flap down fine. There's enough cushioning on the back for carrying a laptop and the deep shoulder padding adds more comfort, although the leather takes ages to break in. The waist belt helps distribute weight, but the stud closure isn't as straightforward as a simple buckle. A 12L version is available too for £236.77.

[www.brooksengland.com](http://www.brooksengland.com)

Quality courier bag with style – but it's pricey and doesn't stand up to rain

6

**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 1256g  
VOLUME 15L  
RAIN RATING 4



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 1040g  
VOLUME 16.5L  
RAIN RATING 8

### Alchemy Goods Urban £115

**ARE YOU GREEN-MINDED?** The outside of the Urban is made from recycled inner tubes, the zip-pull was once a valve, and the strap started out in life as a seatbelt... Those tubes have been seam-sealed to keep water out – rain can sneak in at the corners, but not much. The easy-access pocket on the flap has a water-resistant zip too, making this a good all-weather option. But bear in mind that although you can get a 17in laptop inside, there's no padding to protect it (or you from it). You do, however, get some neat internal pockets, a chest strap that can run either way and broad reflective strips on the back.

[www.urbanhunter.biz](http://www.urbanhunter.biz)

Water-resistant mid-sized option that's recycled and looks quirky

7



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 753g  
VOLUME 9.8L  
RAIN RATING 6

### Cannondale No-Kill Messenger £45

**THIS IS A** lightweight, slimline bag but it's hard wearing enough with some neat little features. The internal 15in laptop sleeve comes with generous padding, the shoulder pad is chunky to keep the pressure down and the waterproof, rubberised base adds durability. You don't get the capacity of the largest courier bags here but there are ample pockets, all of them easy to get at without too much rummaging, and we love the little sleeve in the flap for your mini pump. It's not particularly impressive in the rain and could do with a rear light loop, but reflective logos and tabs help you be seen.

[gb.cannondale.com](http://gb.cannondale.com)

Decently priced, solid mid-sized performance, with pockets aplenty

7



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 934g  
VOLUME 29.5L  
RAIN RATING 6

### Bontrager Messenger Bag £48

**BONTY'S BAG IS** rammed with useful features. One thing's for sure – you're never going to run out of pockets. The internal sleeve is large enough to take a 17in laptop, and there's plenty of padding to keep things comfortable. You also get water bottle holders at either end, quite a lot of reflective trim and a rear light loop. Perhaps showing its Californian roots, the bag doesn't keep the rain out particularly well, and the shoulder strap isn't quick-adjust, but you can run the stabilising strap in either direction across your chest or around your waist, which is handy.

[www.bontrager.com](http://www.bontrager.com)

Action-packed and computer-friendly, but not very water-resistant

7



### Knog Pig Dog £89.99

**THE HEAVY-DUTY PIG** Dog keeps out water really well – the seams are taped and fabric sections over the corners of the main body help keep your precious contents dry. A fleecy internal compartment will take a laptop up to 15.5in and there's so much cushioning that you stay perfectly comfortable even when it's fully laden. The shoulder strap isn't padded but it's ultra-wide to spread the load and a broad waist strap adds stability. Ratchet straps hold the flap down firmly and the only easy-access pockets are next to your body – good news for security but you wouldn't want to keep anything jagged in there.

[www.knog.com.au](http://www.knog.com.au), [www.moorelarge.co.uk](http://www.moorelarge.co.uk)

Luxury padding and water resistance make the Dog an excellent option



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 1506g  
VOLUME 24L  
RAIN RATING 9



### Bagaboo Pro Workhorse £164.95

**THIS HARDCORE BAG** will easily handle all the abuse you dish out. Inside the tough Cordura outer you get a separate tarpaulin layer to stop water, and the whole thing is seriously well put together. There's loads of padding on the back and more on both the main shoulder strap and the extra strap that you can clip in place over your other shoulder. You get an easily adjustable chest strap too, so even heavy loads stay perfectly stable. You can also spec a laptop sleeve as an extra option. In fact, you can custom-order pretty much whatever features you want. Available in plain colours (£149.95) and in sizes up to 40L.

[www.urbanhunter.biz](http://www.urbanhunter.biz)

Fabulous design and high strength build, though it'll be overkill for many



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 1440g  
VOLUME 23L  
RAIN RATING 9



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 714g  
VOLUME 24L  
RAIN RATING 10

### Ortlieb Zip-City £75

**IF YOU'RE AFTER** no-compromise, monsoon-proof performance, the Zip-City wins by default. You have to lube up the zip to get it running smoothly, but it's virtually impossible for water to slip in afterwards. You get just a couple of pockets inside – it's pretty spartan in there – and there's zero padding on the body of the bag, though the shoulder pad is comfortable enough. Being shiny, it slips about on your back when it's wet, so you need to fit the stabilising strap that comes as an accessory. The Zip-City is available in several different colours and comes in a 14.5L model too (£66).

[www.ortlieb.co.uk](http://www.ortlieb.co.uk)

Low on pocket count and padding for comfort, but exceptionally watertight



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 686g  
VOLUME 12L  
RAIN RATING 8

### Basil Blossom £29.99

**THERE'S LIMITED SPACE** inside this bag, so quite a lot of our test pack products didn't make it in, though there's enough room for A4 folders and a 15in laptop. The design is pretty simple – there's no padding on the body, just one zipped internal pocket – and you can't alter the position of the shoulder pad. But the Blossom does have a handy little secret: unzip a small panel on the back to reveal hooks for attaching it to a pannier rack. The fabric itself is waterproof – just the smallest amount of rain can get in at the top corners – while the inclusion of reflective strips on the sides make this an eye-catching piece of kit.

[www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk](http://www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk)

Small and simple shoulder bag with the power to transform into a pannier



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 1316g  
VOLUME 19L  
RAIN RATING 8

### Vaude Gustav £75

**THE GUSTAV IS** from Vaude's Tarpaulin range and it's impressively waterproof, with extra panels of fabric to stop too much rain getting in at the top corners. You get plenty of pockets and compartments for neatly squirrelling away all your gubbins, but we've had the bottom edges wear away on previous versions of this model. The main body is divided into two compartments and you also get a removable internal sleeve that will hold a 17in laptop, though it's not especially well padded. The shoulder pad is pretty minimalist too, but the beefy waist strap adds useful support. The Gustav is available in several different colours.

[www.vaude.co.uk](http://www.vaude.co.uk)

Water-resistant stowage in a well made package, but short on padding





**Ergon BC3 £149.99**

**THIS BAG IS** fitted to a plastic frame that's rigid enough to take a lot of weight off your shoulders and put it onto your hips. Also, the shoulder straps are attached via a ball joint, so your upper body can move without the bag swaying as much as usual. It might sound like snake oil but the system works, although it's more useful for mountain biking than commuting – which is why you get space for a hydration bladder inside. You get several useful pockets, compression straps to keep half-loads in check, and absolutely no water at all got in during testing.

[www.extrauk.co.uk](http://www.extrauk.co.uk)

Great waterproofing and novel motion-control system, but pricey



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 1448g  
VOLUME 25L  
RAIN RATING 10



**Banjo Brothers Waterproof Backpack £89.95**

**THIS COMBINES A** bombproof nylon outer with a replaceable waterproof liner, and the top of the echo-chamber main compartment rolls over so water can't get in there either. You get useful pockets and slots under the flap, the side pocket can hold a mini U-lock, and there's a mobile phone pouch handily positioned on the strap, but we still felt a pocket short. The back padding is a little skimpy, but the shoulder and sternum straps and the waist belt make for super-steady carriage, while reflective stripes and a light loop add safety. A smaller (24.5L) option is £10 cheaper.

[www.urbanhunter.biz](http://www.urbanhunter.biz)

Cavernous and waterproof, but we'd like to see another pocket or two



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 1196g  
VOLUME 33L  
RAIN RATING 10



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 911g  
VOLUME 28L  
RAIN RATING 6

**Deuter Cross City £44.99**

**THIS TARDIS-LIKE BAG** held all our test pack products with room to spare. A padded sleeve will take a 17in laptop securely and there are pockets and slots everywhere, some being hidden away. An expansion pocket holds your helmet when you're not riding and compression straps stop things swaying about when the bag's not full. The deep, lightweight back padding is superb and really lets the air flow so you don't get too sweaty, and the straps – shoulder, sternum and waist – are equally comfortable. But there's very little reflective piping, no rear light loop, and rain eventually works its way in.

[www.i-ride.co.uk](http://www.i-ride.co.uk)

Well organised and deceptively large, with plush levels of comfort



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 543g  
VOLUME 14L  
RAIN RATING 5

**Look Small Sports Rucksack £42.99**

**THIS IS A** sound bag but it doesn't boast nearly as many user-friendly features as the higher scoring models here. We fitted a 15in laptop inside the main compartment, and you also get two zipped outer pockets, a couple of mesh pouches for water bottles and a bungee arrangement for storing your helmet. All our test pack products were swallowed up easily enough, but water did get in fairly quickly. Foam bubbles provide surprisingly effective back padding and the broad shoulder straps are comfy too, but although there's a sternum strap, you don't get a waist belt to spread the load.

[www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk](http://www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk)

Solid enough design, but lacks stand-out features compared to others



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 791g  
VOLUME 18L  
RAIN RATING 8

**Rapha Large Fixed Backpack £125**

**TYPICAL RAPHA, THIS** pack is stylish and well made. The padded laptop sleeve is roomy enough for a 17in computer and you get two large main compartments, although not enough overall space for all our test pack products. Lots of pockets enable you to stow everything away neatly and you can fit a hydration bladder if you want to head for the hills. The back and shoulder straps are padded and comfortable, while the sternum strap and waist belt take the pressure off just fine. Reflective pin-dot panels get you seen at night and the whole thing keeps water out really well.

[www.rapha.cc](http://www.rapha.cc)

Classy and practical with some excellent features, but a pricey purchase





### Twinsix Back Sack \$130 (£80)

**WHETHER IT'S JAM-PACKED** or almost empty, this big commuter bag sits comfortably thanks to the cushioned back, padded shoulder straps, and both a sternum strap and a waist belt. Everything's really quick and simple to adjust and there's loads of space in the main cargo hold. You don't get slots for your pens, mobile phone and so on, but there are six different pockets, all zip or Velcro-closed, so it's easy to organise your stuff. The exterior fabric is very tough and a ripstop lining adds more protection, while the whole thing stands up to water brilliantly.

[www.twinsix.com](http://www.twinsix.com)

Loads of space and a comfortable harness make this a great design

8

**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 1205g  
VOLUME 26L  
RAIN RATING 8



### Ogio Politan £39.99

**IF YOU LIKE** to keep your stuff well organised, the Politan has billions of pockets and compartments. You get a stash for a multi-tool, a key clip, mesh water bottle carriers, a weatherproof and fleece-lined MP3 pocket... it's all here. We had no worries getting a 17in laptop inside and there's plenty of padding to keep you comfy and the computer safe. The sternum strap holds bulky loads stable. The only major

downside was water getting in. [www.madison.co.uk](http://www.madison.co.uk)

Pocketful, laptop-friendly backpack that's comfy but not great in the wet

7

**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 543g  
VOLUME 14L  
RAIN RATING 5

### Cyclodelic Rucksack £75

**THIS IS A** pretty basic women's bag - there's just one big compartment and a zipped rear pocket, but there was enough room for our test pack products. It's made from tough Cordura with a water-resistant, ripstop liner, but despite a flap over the drawcord top, water gets through. The padded back stops pointy things digging in but the shoulder straps aren't cushioned and stabilising straps don't feature.

[www.cyclodelic.co.uk](http://www.cyclodelic.co.uk)



**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 655g  
VOLUME 17.5L  
RAIN RATING 6

Simple design for lighter haulage, but not the most practical option

6

### DHB Elsted 30L £34.99

**THIS ISN'T THE** most hi-tech bag out there, but at this price it's a steal. The main compartment isn't laptop-specific but it's big enough to fit a 17in model. There's also a helmet stash, mesh water bottle pockets and two zipped internal pockets, although we'd have liked a couple more. The Elsted is hydration bladder-friendly and compression straps keep things taut. There's comfy padding on all the straps, and a removable rain cover does a decent job of keeping everything dry.

[www.wiggle.co.uk](http://www.wiggle.co.uk)

**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 964g  
VOLUME 30L  
RAIN RATING 7



Plenty of comfortable stowage at a price you can't complain about

8

### Kriega R20 £59

**THIS PACK IS** designed for mountain biking and motorcycling, so it's built super-strong. We didn't quite fit all our test pack products inside but we did secure a 17in laptop in the hydration bladder sleeve. You get two large pockets, waterproof fabric, and the external zips are water resistant too, although rain did get in through the seams. The harness is ultra-sturdy, the back and strap padding is breathable and compression straps hold

smaller loads firmly in place. [www.upgradebikes.co.uk](http://www.upgradebikes.co.uk)



Strong, well made pack that anchors your gear firmly in place

7

**TECH INFO**  
WEIGHT 1053g  
VOLUME 20L  
RAIN RATING 7

## THE VERDICT

### WINNER



**OF THE MESSENGER** bags, the Bagaboo is about as hardcore as it gets. Strong and waterproof with a load of different strap options, it can handle pretty much anything. It's just a bit excessive for some people, and a tad pricey too.

The Ortlieb Zip-City is the stand-out choice if you absolutely have to keep everything inside bone dry. As long as you don't go scuba diving or fording deep rivers, it won't let you down.

Our winner, though, is the Knog Pig Dog. It might be a little heavy for some, but it's extremely comfortable, laptop-friendly and was almost completely waterproof in tests. Excellent.



On to the backpacks... The Deuter Cross City is incredibly comfortable whether it's half full or packed, and you get pockets for storing absolutely everything. When the rain comes down, though, it doesn't put up much resistance.

The Ergon BC3 and the Rapha Fixed are excellent in their own ways, but very pricey, and though short on features the Banjo Brothers Backpack is faultless when it comes to keeping the rain out.

But our winner is the DHB Elsted. It's not as high performance as some of the other packs here but it does a very good job across the board, and takes the title by virtue of its fantastic value for money.