

DOES BIKEPACKING FIT FOR ME?

I usually ride with my 1982 steel frame road bike. I think it's a piece of pure Italian craftsmanship, with its Columbus SL pipes, Campagnolo conjunctions, everything welded by an artisan in his workshop in Milan. I have a project for this bike: ride all over the world, starting with the Camino of Santiago, in Spain.

But there's one great problem: I cannot install a rack on it. It's a road bike, there's no holes for rear rack and no space for panniers. And now? May I have to give up my dream?

I think an alternative is to discover the world of **bikepacking** (we already spoke about this [stuff](#)) but I'm not so inside the problem. I have two options to increase my poor knowledge: spend hours over hours on the web reading bikepacking sites or ask directly to someone who made those bags. I know, I know, this seems like going to the fruit seller and ask if his tomatoes are good or not, but...I'm so lazy sometimes, am I?

I send an email to **Apidura**, a firm in London specialized in bikepacking bags. Tori, a very kind woman and long distance bike tour expert, answered me and tried with me to solve my problem. The question, one of them that were virtually running inside my brain, was: "Why I should prefer bikepacking if my bike can ride racks?".

"Me and my colleagues started travelling with racks and panniers, as usual. I participated in an off-road race from Canada to Mexico, called Tour Divide in 2011. The race involved a route covering 4,400 kilometres (mostly off road) and around 60,000 metres of vertical. It was clear that my traditional rack and panniers were not going to be up for the task. Fortunately, a good friend introduced me to someone who was selling homemade bikepacks and I was able to purchase some gear to satisfy most of my needs, and then improvised the rest. I was totally impressed by how nice it was to ride without a rack; there was no way I could ever go back to a rack and panniers. Bike handling was better, which was important on the gravel and single track. The overall load was lighter, which was

important on the climbs. And I was able to use the bike that I wanted, instead of being constrained by one that had rack mounts."

But, when I read the bike long trip reportages, I see tons of picture of bicycles equipped with rear and front racks, full of bags and gears, tools, tent and sleeping gears and it seems so strange that all those experienced cyclists made the wrong choice. *"Traditionally" answers Tori "multi-day cycling experiences have required the use of a rack and panniers, an approach that adds considerable weight and mechanical complexity to the cycling experience, sometimes necessitating the purchase of a specialized touring bike. The emergence of rackless systems (or "bikepacks") has opened the door for new possibilities for bicycle adventures by alleviating the need for a rack. In your case, for example, you wouldn't use your bike, because it doesn't fit racks"*

So, if I would like to use my old road bike for long journeys, bikepacking could be the right solution? Or I must act like a lot of spanish cyclists along the Camino, who are used to arrange a car to carry equipment and luggage? *"Bikepacks offer a number of advantages over the traditional rack and panniers. First, they are lighter weight. For the equivalent carrying capacity, bikepacks are about 1/3 of the weight of a rack and panniers, which means cyclists can travel faster and farther. Second, bikepacks offer better bike handling. By distributing the weight more evenly over the bike, bike packs create a more natural and enjoyable riding experience, which means that cyclists can travel more comfortably. Third, bike packs attach directly to the bicycle frame, making it possible to carry gear on almost any bike and without the need for tools. This means that cycle touring is more accessible to aspiring bikepackers, since there is no need to purchase a specialized touring bike, and the more adventurous cyclists can venture off the paved roads to explore a greater variety of terrain."*

Regarding my problem, I have no idea about find the right gears for my trip along the Camino. How can I do?

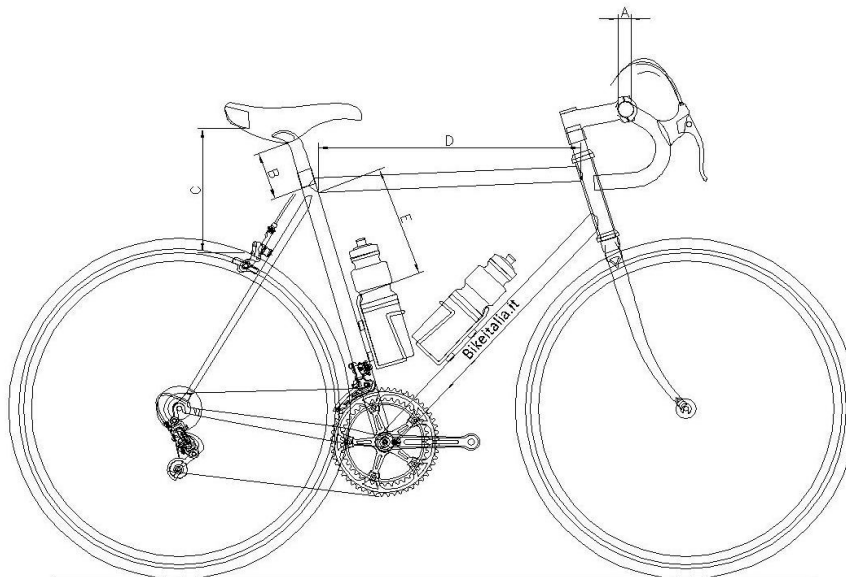
"I've seen people cross a continent with only a Saddle Pack...and I've seen people go on a 200km ride with the full suite of gear. The amount of capacity that you will need on the trip will depend on:

- Accommodation: Whether you plan to camp or take a hotel.
- Comfort: How comfortable and clean you like to be while on a cycling trip.
- Conditions: Whether you expect rain, snow, or other conditions that warrant extra gear"

So, trying to translate everything in a practical way, I can act like this:

1. **First**, find the route, define the accommodation and study the weather conditions on my trail;
2. **Second**, write a list of equipment to carry with me, based on the first step consideration;
3. **Finally** find the right bag for me;

In substance, bags must fit to the equipment.



BIKE MEASURING		
COD	DESCRIPTION	VALUE [mm]
A	Handlebar free space	
B	Seatpost clearance	
C	Saddle rails – rear wheel clearance	
D	Horizontal frame clearance	
E	Vertical frame clearance	

Tory advises me about an important thing: I have to verify if my bike frame can fit one bikepacking bag or more, because also they need space to be installed. For the saddle bag I need to verify the space between the saddle and the rear wheel. For the handlebar bag I will measure the right handlebar length (my 40cm road bike handlebar isn't the best way to bikepacking gears!). Finally, for an eventual frame bag, I will measure the space inside the seat tube and the steering tube. Using this measurement I have to check, with the design, if my first choice bags are suitable for my bike. This is important, because if I would have a very narrow space under my saddle, the rear wheel can damage the bag or a bigger handlebar bag can reduce my bike handling.

Regarding the starting question, the choice between a traditional support system and a bikepacking gear, depends on some criteria:

- Type of bike: my example is perfect. If your bike is a touring one, you can install rear or front racks and their bags. If you cannot install racks, bikepacking could be the solution for you. Just take a measuring to avoid problems;
- Trip type: if you want to travel light and fast, because you are randonneur or ultracyclist or only because you like to eat the route, bikepacking offers advantages. Use a rack permits to carry more equipment, weight and provisions, but it reduces the handling of the bike;
- Number of bikes: If you have more than a bike (example, I have 3: road, mtb and a folding one), bikepacking can be a good solution to reduce cost. Indeed you can use the bag for all bikes, just take out from one and install to another. This aspect can increase your travel opportunity and you can also use them for commuting (*"We find that Frame Packs and Saddle Packs are popular items among commuters and urban cyclists"* says Tori). You can do this also with racks but is more difficult, and you need all bikes with holes and space;
- Cost: evaluate the general investment. Divide the total capacity amount of a traditional rack system for its cost, and you will find the "litres for euro". For

example a new rack system with panniers costs 100€ and give to you 30 litres. 30 litres/100€ means 0,3 l/€, that is you spend 1 euro to have 0,3 litres. Find an analogue solution with bikepacking bags and make this calculation and find where you spend more money to have less volume. Can be the traditional or the bikepacking one, evaluate it;

- Feeling: there are cyclists that cannot see them riding without a rack and other ones saying that bikepacking gives them freedom and lightness. It's a matter of comfort and riding feeling and this, in my opinion, is the most important issue, because we have to spend a lot of time on the saddle and we must feel at our best. Why not trying both system during a small riding near home and register your sensation? You can switch from one to the other system every time you like.

In conclusion, regarding this criteria, I can say that for my situation and for my travel idea bikepacking can be the right solution. Now I have to try and verify this theory, and tell my sensation to you.

“Rackless packing systems is relatively recent” concludes Tori “there is still a lot of work that can be done, which, in our opinion, makes bikepacking one of the most exciting segments in the cycling world. You can expect to see a continuous flow of refinement and innovation from us over the coming years.”