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Need more luggage space for holiday trips? A roof box might help...

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Choosing a roof box for my car (and fitting it)

Gerald Morgan tells a

Disclaimer

This article should NOT be read as giving full advice on using a roof box. It is up to the individual to check the weight limit that can be safely used on their vehicle, and to ensure that the roof bars are correctly and safely attached to the roof of the car, and that the box is attached and packed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

I recently had a holiday in France, and was requested to make the interior of the car more comfortable for the drive to the gîte - i.e. don't pack so much stuff in the car.



The choice was to maybe buy a larger vehicle, or increase the space somehow on the current one. So, a new car, or get a roof box? I decided on the latter. I have a VW Polo, which is adequate for normal day to day driving, but is a little short of space for holidays with three adults. I previously wrote an article on Wheels-Alive about fitting some older Thule roof bars on the car

(<https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/new-model-of-car-new-roof-bars-thats-expensive-but-it-doesnt-have-to-be-that-way/>), so was keen to use these bars with a roof box. But which box?

I looked at a few websites to get ideas on the types of boxes available; long ones, short ones wide ones, tall ones... Did I want to pack skis or take bikes? Front opening, side opening, able to open either side?

I wanted a box that did not impede the opening of the tailgate, did not affect the aerial, and did not overhang the windscreen so that I would see it when driving. I also will not need to carry skis. That meant a short box. I also would not be carrying bicycles on the roof, so that meant I could get a wide box. I mainly wanted to store three cases of on-board aircraft suitable size.

Next decision was about opening the box once on the car. If it only opens on one side, there may be quite a stretch to get to the hinged side, and a front opening box may only help a little. I had noticed that there were boxes that could be opened from either side that looked interesting. The box also needed to be compatible with my Thule roof bars, and would easily fit the space between the bars.

To sum up, I needed a short, wide box that could be opened from either side and would fit on Thule roof bars.

On surveying the market, the Hapro Traxer 4.6 roof box seemed to fit the bill, so I ordered one on-line from The Roof Box Company, and paid for next day delivery. The box duly arrived the next day, complete with a storage kit to allow the easy storing of the box in the garage. Note that the roof box arrived in an even bigger cardboard box. I decided to keep

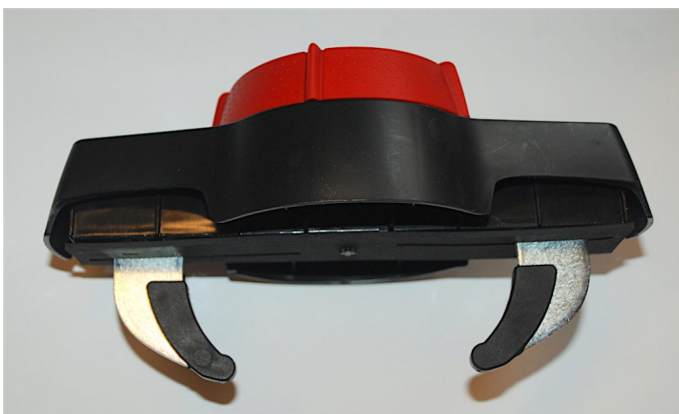


the outer box in case I need to make a return. I managed to flatten the cardboard so that I could store it easily in the garage. Recycling may be a problem later because of its size!

The box came with two keys, and it should be noted that when using the key, it is not possible to remove it again until the lid is properly closed. This means two things; when the key can't be removed, there is something stopping the lid from closing and locking; and it is probably best not to keep the key on your car's keyring as you might scratch the paintwork!.

The only setting up required was to push the four 'Premium-Fit' box to bar fittings through the rubber sealed slots, and to attach the two supplied luggage straps to the metal reinforcement bars inside the box. These are to strap down the luggage to prevent movement when travelling. I added a third strap as two were not enough for my needs.

Although the box can be lifted by one person, I found it easier to have help to lift the box on to the car. Once in position on the VW, and then adjusting it so that it was parallel to the body and centrally located, it was then easy to move the Premium-Fit clamps over the roof bars and to tighten them with the large adjuster knob. Once the ratchet noise was heard, they were tight. Then just press a lock in the centre of the adjuster and the clamp was locked in place. Easy! It all felt rock-solid too.



Clamp fully opened...



Clamp fully tightened...



Clamp passes through base of box...



Clamp locks on to roof bar...



Clamp pushes through slot in rail on box...



Premier Fit clamp has large adjuster wheel,
with 'press down' lock in centre...

Off to France

Remember that when booking a ferry it is best to state that you will be taking a roof box on your car (that and the bars could add 60 cm or about two feet to the height of the vehicle). If you don't and the ferry is very full, you may not be able to go on your selected sailing as you may have been pre-allocated a space on the low headroom vehicle deck. Probably rarely happens, but be aware!

It was useful being able to access the roof box from either side as it was easy to reach



inside. From a safety point of view, it means that the box can be accessed from the pavement whether in the UK or Europe. I packed the box with two cases strapped down in the central area (it is recommended that 50% of the load is central, with 25% each at the front and back). The third case was strapped in at the back, with softer items packed around the rest of the space. It was necessary to make sure that the Premium-Fit clamps were not covered as these should be checked for tightness after 50 km (about 30 miles) driving, and then after every 100 km (60 miles or so). In actual use I noticed that one of the clamps needed a slight tighten on the first check, but was OK after that. None of the bags had moved whilst we were travelling. I also experimented stacking the cases three wide on their sides, but there was not enough room - it was OK with two on their backs side by side though.



Central hinge at each end, and lock connected to metal bar and straps...



We kept to the speed limits, or just under, on normal roads, and drove at 60-70 mph on dual carriageways and autoroutes. The maximum speed recommended is 130 kph, or 80 mph (which seems too high to me!). There was some noise from the wind around the box, but no more than expected. The fuel consumption increased by about 13% with the box on. It, and the roof bars, were removed once at our destination. The return journey to the UK saw a similar increase in fuel consumption. We didn't encounter any heavy rain en route, so could not check the how watertight the box was. However, there is a video on the Hapro website showing their boxes undergoing testing.

Once back home, two of us carefully removed the roof box and I gave it a quick wash to remove dirt and grime from it. The surface cleaned quite quickly, ready to be put away for another time.

Storage

The two hoist straps that were supplied needed four metal plates to be screwed to the timbers in the garage, and then the straps put through these plates. Connect each strap so that it forms a large loop, and then the roof box can be placed between the loops. Tightening each strap a little in turn slowly lifts the box up and out of the way. Of course, if the garage was used to store a car in, the process would be easy!



Specifications

The Thule roof bars weigh 7 kg (about 15 lb), and the Hapro box weighs approximately 15 kg (33 lb). As the maximum load on the VW Polo is 75 kg (165 lb), the maximum weight that can be carried in the box is 53 kg (117 lb).

Hapro Traxer 4.6 Details

L x W x H outside	148 x 97 x 42 cm (approximately 58.3 x 38.2 x 16.5 in)
L x W x H inside	143 x 92 x 41 cm (approximately 56.3 x 36.2 x 16.1 in)



Volume	370 L (13.06 cu.ft)
Empty weight	15 kg (33 lb)
Max. allowed load	75 kg (165 lb)
Openings	2
Locking	Central locking
Luggage straps	2 supplied, can add more
Mounting system	Premium-Fit
Metal reinforcement rail bottom	Yes
Warranty	5 years

Overall Impression of the Hapro Traxer roof box

I liked the size of the roof box for the car. The ability to open from either side is very useful. It is very easy to fit to the roof bars - and is very secure too. Opening and closing the lid can be a little awkward because of the size of the ABS plastic. However once I got the knack right it was OK. The fact that the key cannot be removed until the lid is properly closed and locked is very useful - and stops the worry about it flying open whilst driving. The increase in fuel consumption was less than I had feared, but should be a consideration when thinking about getting a roof box. Best to remove it from the car when not required. No need to return the roof box as being unsuitable, so now to recycle that packaging....

Useful links:

<https://www.roofbox.co.uk> has a very useful guide to choosing which box to buy. They also have a 90 day returns policy, which also means they sell any returns a bit cheaper.



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<https://www.vdlhapro.com/en/travel/roof-boxes/model:traxer/tab:faq.htm>

https://www.halfords.com/motoring/roof-bars-roof-boxes?cm_re=mmmotoring_-_RoofBarsandBoxes_-_RoofBarsandBoxes

<https://www.thule.com/en-gb/gb/cargo-carrier>

<https://www.kamei.de/en/products/transport/roof-boxes/>