

ROOF BARS

We pick from 10 sets to make carrying loads easier this summer

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Every week, we extensively test all the latest car kit from tyres to trim cleaners. Log on to www.autoexpress.co.uk to look through our huge online test archive.

AE Henry Willis
 A SET of roof bars adds another dimension to your car's carrying ability, letting you fit a roof box or bike carrier, or strap items to the bars. And roof bars are cheap, widely available and fit most cars. This time we're looking at bars for roof rails, and tested 10 sets on our Dacia Duster. Vehicles without rails should have a roof gutter bolt or door frame clamp fitting, for which a different version of the bars we've tested should be available. Check with a specialist to find a set for your car.



NEED TO KNOW...
 "Neat extra features like locking mechanisms scored extra marks, but above all we were looking for bars to be easy to fit and remove"

How we tested them

WE were looking for bars to be as easy to fit and remove as possible – you don't want to leave them on, as the wind resistance means using unnecessary fuel. Aerodynamic bars don't only save fuel, they can also make less noise. We awarded extra marks for innovative features, with price our final factor; the figures we quote are the best we could find from various sources at the time of going to press.

Auto Express Verdict

BASIC yet slick operation gives Atera's aluminium Signo RT bars the edge over rivals from Thule here. The Thule SlideBar is good but pricey, and comes second ahead of the solid budget SquareBar.

1. Atera Signo RT
2. Thule SlideBar 891
3. Thule SquareBar 761



Atera Signo RT

Best price: £134.95
Rating: ★★★★★
Contact: 01539 621884, www.roofbox.co.uk

BEST BUY NOT only do these bars look great when fitted, the sleek frame adds to their aerodynamic appeal. They're quick and easy to attach, too, as the rubber-padded clamps grip the rails for one of the sturdiest fits here. Plus, Atera bundles a clever key into the Signo RT package, which you use when putting the bars on the rails, so you know when they're tight enough.

Thule SlideBar 891

Best price: £200 (plus Thule Footpack 775, £98)
Rating: ★★★★★
Contact: 0845 057 9000, www.halfords.com

RECOMMENDED UNIQUE feature makes loading the SlideBar 891s easy – the bars slide out to the right or left of your car, leaving the contents suspended and meaning there's no need to lean over the car or use a ladder or step. The roller system adds weight to the bars, so they're not very aerodynamic, plus they're pricey, which stops them winning. But they're clever.



Thule SteelBars 761

Best price: £39 (plus Thule Footpack 775, £98)
Rating: ★★★★★
Contact: 0845 057 9000, www.halfords.com

RECOMMENDED OUR pick of the steel, square-shaped bars. They're fairly basic, but the Footpack 775 scores marks with its innovative and intuitive fitting system. The hex key used to tighten the rubber fastening to the rails is a T-bar that pushes into each clamp, so is accessible at all times, and there are locks included all round. It looks neat and tidy, too.

Atera Signo AS

Best price: £114.95
Rating: ★★★★★
Contact: 01539 621884, www.roofbox.co.uk

ANOTHER solid set of square-shaped bars, the Atera Signo AS stands out with its splined, all-in-one locking and tensioning system – the same key tightens them. Simply twist all the way and the bars are attached very firmly. The keyhole is hidden under a flap, to keep out the worst of the elements, and the whole package has a reassuringly high-quality feel.



Summit SUM-522

Best price: £109.99 **Rating:** ★★★
Contact: 01525 383055, www.mountneyltd.com

SUMMIT aero bars were good, but fall down as they use the same clamp fitting as the cheaper bars, which we weren't keen on. This consists of two vertical brackets, which grasp the roof rails when fitted tight enough, but – unlike our favourite roof bars – don't hold the rails all the way around. The locks were fiddly to install as well.

Cruz Airo

Best price: £99.95 **Rating:** ★★★
Contact: 01539 621884, www.roofbox.co.uk

THE aero bars themselves are great – as they're aerodynamically sound, they were quiet on the road at all speeds. However, these Airo bars use the same fitting system as the cheaper Cruz bars (as well as the top-end Summit, left), albeit with a slightly better grip. They look nice, are top value for aero bars and lock on all four fitting points. They just lack the quality feel of the best.

Summit SUM-520

Best price: £59.40 **Rating:** ★★★
Contact: 01525 383055, www.mountneyltd.com

MUCH like a couple of the other designs here, the SUM-520 bars come with a fitting tool, so you don't need anything else to attach these – simply line them up and tighten the fitting. But these steel bars don't have the quality finish of rivals, as the plastics used for the bar ends and elsewhere look cheap. Still, for the price, they're decent value for money as a basic set of bars.



Sealey ARB120

Best price: £89.94 **Rating:** ★★★
Contact: 01284 757500, www.sealey.co.uk

TOOL maker Sealey's first roof bars are similar to other designs at this price. The aluminium aero bars look good when fitted, but like rivals, they feel basic. While all fittings are metal, everything is enclosed in plastic, which detracts from the quality feel. Locks are only included on two fitting points, which is disappointing. Still, a good pair of aero bars if you can find them at the right price.

HandiRack

Best price: £54.99 **Rating:** ★★★
Contact: 0870 961 9130, www.handiworld.com

STRAP the inflatable HandiRack to your car, and you won't be able to attach a roof box and carry luggage – you'll have to invest in a HandiHoldall, reviewed in Issue 1,318. But this is still a great-value solution that could be ideal for occasionally hauling ladders or awkward-sized objects. Fitting isn't the best, but when not in use the HandiRack can be deflated and folded for storage in your boot.

Cruz SR+

Best price: £49.95 **Rating:** ★★★
Contact: 01539 621884, www.roofbox.co.uk

BUDGET Cruz design uses the same fitting system as other budget options in this test, and again, we wish it was more precise in grabbing all around the roof rails. Plastic bar ends also feel cheap and the clamp system is the same vertical bracket. If you need a good-value solution, you can't go too far wrong with these roof bars, but don't expect much in the way of frills.