

NATIONAL PARKS TRAVELER

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Yakima offers a number of solutions to your gear-hauling quandries, and some even feature built-in bottle openers! Yakima images.

Gear junkies know that there are two general categories for gear: The items that you use when you're off playing, and the items you need to get the aforementioned items you use to the starting point. That's why, if you paddle or ski or bike, you need a good rack system.

These days there are two leaders in the rack business, Yakima and Thule. Due to compatibility issues, one usually ends up being a Yak fan or a Thule user. It really does come down to a coin toss. I must admit to falling into the Yak camp, for no other reason than when I got around to needing racks those friends of mine who already had them had Yaks and so I joined the band, as it were.

Whether you go with Yakima or Thule, you need a rack that works for you, not one that makes you work. In other words, if you're too short or not strong enough to hoist your mountain bike high overhead so you can load it on a roof-mounted rack, you might be wise to go with a rack that mounts on the rear of your rig (or carry a small step-stool, as one acquaintance of mine did).

The **Quickback 3** is Yakima's solution for hauling your bikes behind you, not overhead. Retailing at a buck shy of \$200, this trunk-mounted rack comes with a series of labeled straps to ease the learning process the first time you put the rack on your car. The buckles, of course, are coated and the mounting feet padded so as not to scratch your car's finish. While this model handles three bikes, Yakima also makes some cousins of the **Quickback 3** -- the **Quickback 2**, the **King Joe** (2 and 3), the **Little Joe 3**,

and **Super Joe** (2 & 3) -- to meet your needs in both numbers of bikes and whether you're driving a station wagon, an SUV with a hatch, or a sedan. They've even got a **Spare Joe 2** that mounts -- you got it -- on your spare tire, and, of course, there are racks for pickup trucks.

There also are solutions to getting your boat on your rig by yourself. Yakima's solution is the **Showboat**, a \$100 extension arm that slides out to the side of your roof, thus allowing you to lift one end of your boat onto the arm and then lift the other end and slide the entire craft onto your rack.

Thule answers the one-person dilemma with its **Hulavator**, a \$550 lift system that uncoils like a *Transformer* from the roof of your rig to the side so you don't have to shoulder-press your boat all the way up onto the roof. Once your boat is in the **Hulavator** you strap it tight and then push the **Hulavator**, which employs gas-filled pistons to help out your muscles, back into its ready-to-roll position atop the roof. (Note to Yak rack owners: The **Hulavator** will work with your base roof rack.)

Yet another solution to the boat- or bike-hauling dilemma is Yakima's **RackandRoll**, a two-wheeled trailer. Available in widths of 66 (MSRP \$2,149) and 78 (MSRP \$2,300) inches, these anodized aluminum units allow you to mix and match your gear as they can haul boats and bikes at the same time. Depending on how many bikes or boats you're hauling, you can even fit a cargo box on the trailer. Shocks are included to allow room for a little bounce down the highway without damaging your gear.

The trailer comes with crossbars, to which you affix the various accessories for hauling the toys of your choice. The 66-inch-wide trailer can handle up to 250 pounds, while the 78-inch version can haul 300 pounds. Accessories range from a kickstand (MSRP \$49) to keep the trailer's tongue elevated when it's not in your rig's hitch, a tongue-extension kit (MSRP \$179) if your boat runs up to 22 feet long, heavy duty shocks (MSRP \$119), a safety wand (MSRP \$29) that affixes to the rear of the trailer to help you out when it comes to backing up, and, of course, a spare tire (MSRP \$189). When you're not towing it, the trailer breaks down and can be left hanging on a garage wall.

Pros: These days there seems to be a rack design to meet just about everyone's tastes and needs, and they are fairly durable, so with a little TLC they should serve you well for many excursions. The Yak bike racks feature one other great innovation -- integrated bottle openers!

Cons: Just about everything is an accessory to the base model racks, including locks and/or locking systems, which means your investment can quickly ramp up depending on how many toys you have (road bike, mountain bike, skis, canoe, kayak, gear box...).