

Crate Works Pro XLC Plastic Bike Box

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I recently had the opportunity to review the Crate Works Pro XLC Plastic Bike Box. This crate is designed to protect bicycles during shipping or while being transported on airplanes.

I received the box via Fed Ex within a couple days of ordering. When the box arrived it was broken down to about half the thickness of the assembled box, which is great for storing when it is not in use. I opened the carton and found all of the components as well as the easy-to-understand assembly instructions. Within five minutes I had the box ready to receive the first bike.

The next portion of the instructions walks you through the disassembly of your bicycle. They direct you to remove the pedals, seat post, wheels, wheel skewers, stem from the fork, and the front brake cable (only if the cable is too short).

I started off the test by tearing down a small-framed bike, a Fisher Mt. Tam. The bottom of the fork hit the front of the box and the rear derailleur hit the back. I was able to create a few more inches of space by removing the derailleur. At this point, the bike fit into the box perfectly. Next, I used the numerous hook and loop straps to secure the bike. After tying the frame down, the divider sat over the frame so the wheels could be laid on top. Once the wheels were strapped down, I put the top on and used the included "H" strap to secure the lid of the box. You can purchase an optional wheel caddy to make the box easier to maneuver.

Now came the fun part. Since I wasn't actually shipping the box, I was able to use my imagination to simulate how shippers or baggage handlers might abuse the box. I cartwheeled it end over end, dropped it, and pushed it over several times. When I opened the box, I was pleasantly surprised to find the bike just as I had left it – I had been skeptical since the box is made from corrugated plastic and cardboard.

I also tested a smaller framed road bike (Burley Wolf Creek) and two of our department's police bikes. The Burley fit in the box without removing the derailleur, however, I tied the derailleur to the chain stay with a zip tie. I put a medium bike from our fleet in the box with ease. Up next was the "semi truck" of the fleet, a 21.5 inch Trek Police mountain bike. It was a really tight squeeze, but amazingly, it fit. I did have to remove the rear derailleur and spin the fork backwards. I could have removed the fork to create even more room had it been necessary.

Lt. Marc Zingarelli, the Bike Patrol Coordinator and EMSCI for the Circleville (OH) Fire Dept. owns the Pro XLC Plastic Bike Box. He is able to fit his XL framed touring bike or his 21.5" hybrid bike into the box; he turns the fork backwards and ties the rear derailleur to the frame with zip ties. He said that the box he shipped from Alaska arrived home with shards of wood from the trailer in which it was shipped embedded in the plastic box but the bike was not damaged.

Marc found there is enough room in the box for additional souvenirs/equipment, such as camping gear that was not allowed on the plane (camp stove and fuel canisters). He added that EMS personnel have enough room in the box for racks and fenders – they have to remove the racks from the bike, but they still fit nicely after they are wrapped in bubble wrap. He also throws his pedal and allen wrenches into the pedal bag so he can rebuild his bike when it arrives at its destination. Once the box is sealed up, Marc tapes the straps down to keep them from getting caught on anything during shipping.

Crate Works is a small company with the bike boxes as their headline product. They offer two models, the Pro XLC Plastic Box (\$169.00), which I tested, and the Pro 1 Cardboard Box (\$109.00). According to the web site, the plastic box will last for years. The cardboard box is good for 5-10 uses. The optional wheel caddies come in two models, economy (plastic) and heavy duty (aluminum and larger wheels). The economy are \$35.00 and the heavy duty \$45.00. The boxes can be ordered on line at www.crateworks.com or by calling 1-800-934-5214.

Overall, I liked the Crate Works box because it is more economical, lighter, and easier to store than traditional hard plastic cases. It was easy to load the bikes into the box, where they were held safe and secure. I trust my bike will not become damaged during my travels to the 2007 IPMBA Conference in Baton Rouge.

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