



## Swagman XC Bike Rack Passes the Test

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When I was selected for bike patrol in 2000, I traveled to the Dayton PD's bike school with a fellow officer. Dayton is about an hour's drive, so we hauled the bikes on the back of a cruiser. The members of our bike patrol provided us with a hitch-mounted rack with two bars from which the bikes hung. It looked like it came from found property and had been welded to the hitch by our Public Works Department.

School started at 0800 hours so we left at around 0600 to ensure that we would arrive on time. We had little experience using bike racks, so we weren't aware that as we drove on the Interstate, the bikes would swing back and forth. About a half hour into the trip, I looked back and saw one of our bikes hanging from only one of the bars. Since it was about to go tumbling onto the road, we pulled over to save the trusty steed. Once the bike was re-secured to the rack, we knew we needed to find a way to prevent it from swaying. As luck would have it, I found a bungee cord lying on the ground where we stopped, which was just what we needed to avoid disaster. We were able to complete our trip without the loss of either of the bikes.

After being on bike patrol for a few years, I embarked on a quest to find a more effective bike rack. The new rack would also be a hitch mount so we could try and prevent both security issues and damage to cruisers, which are more common with trunk-mounted racks. I found a rack that only had one bar to hang the bike, which enabled it to accommodate smaller framed bikes. The clamps for the bike rotated on the rack so the bike could be set level. Unfortunately, the weight of the patrol bikes caused them to rotate on the rack as you drove. It is an interesting sight to look back and see your bike pointing straight up in the air. That rack clearly wasn't going to work.

On a mission to try and find a rack that would hold a bike securely, I began looking into the style in which the bike wheels sit in hoops or a tray. The first place I looked was the Product Purchase Program (PPP), where I found Swagman Racks. My local shop carried Swagman so I was able to check out the quality before I bought. The Cross Country (XC) caught my attention and I spoke with Debbie at Swagman, who agreed that the XC would be a good choice for patrol duty. In the end, I was able to get the PPP price by buying the rack from a local shop. That made it win/win/win for Swagman, the local shop, and me!

The rack was easy to assemble, and I was able to attach it to the cruiser to make the final adjustments. The bike wheels sit in hoops that are adjustable for different wheel bases. The knobs that secure the hoops can be difficult to tighten down but the weight of the bike helps lock the hoops in place. The bike is secured to the rack with a frame hook that provides downward pressure on the top tube of the bike. Since the cables are mounted to the top of the top tube, I positioned the bike so the hook was over the cable mounts to prevent damage to the frame or paint job. Other than the frame hook, there are no other straps or tie downs required.



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One of the problems I've noticed with other racks is the amount of time that it takes to mount the bike onto the rack. In some cases you have to attach bungee cords or screw down a plate. I've even seen an agency put a big cable around the bike, and then lock part of the cable in the trunk of the car. The XC only takes a couple of seconds to drop the bike in the hoops and press down on the frame hook. Since seconds can count, I thought this was a great feature.

Police officers don't always drive in same manner as the general public. In addition, our bikes are loaded down with a "bit" more gear. All bike racks are designed with the general public in mind and so they are tested to their specifications. As I set out with the new rack in use, I found myself constantly looking back to check its stability. I was pleased to note that the bike seemed securely mounted to the rack, with only a slight amount of movement due to play in the hitch and receiver. The first time I drove on a highway at a speed "slightly" greater than the speed limit, the bike and rack did much better than with previous hanging style rack. I crossed several uneven railroad tracks and executed high speed turns with this rack, and the rack and bike stayed together.

The XC is set up to handle two bikes. The bikes can be loaded staggered so they don't touch each other. Once they are locked down, they don't move or sway like they do with the hanging style rack, so way they will not damage each other.

I've only found two issues with this rack. As mentioned earlier, the knobs that secure the hoops can be difficult to tighten, however, once they are tightened as tight as I can get them, the weight of the bikes keeps them from moving. I also noticed that after some use, the frame hook can stick, making it difficult to release the grip on the bike. Like with most moving parts, a little bit of lube, applied to the post, did the trick.

Overall, the performance and the price of this rack are great. After our Product Purchase Program discount, the XC was about \$150. It comes with either a 2" or 1 1/4" hitch and Swagman offers an adapter to convert the 1 1/4" into a 2". They are coming out with a new rack very similar to the XC; however, it will have a better adjustment for the wheel hoops and will be a bit more durable. The price will be slightly higher but the lower price XC will still be available for purchase. For more information, visit [www.swagman.net](http://www.swagman.net). To order at the PPP price, contact Debbie at 800-469-7924 or [debbief@swagman.net](mailto:debbief@swagman.net).

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