



BROMPTON M6R

Price: \$1,944 as tested

Weight: 28.08 lbs.

Editor's note: Because nearly everything on a Brompton is built by the company, we decided to unravel some of the brand's code for features that were spec'd on the test bike.

TEST BIKE SPECIFICATIONS

- **M:** M-type handlebars
- **6:** Six-speed Brompton internal geared hub
- **R:** Rear rack and fenders
- **-12:** Reduced gearing
- **BK/BK:** Black main frame and extremities
- **SPT:** Telescopic seatpost
- **TYM:** Schwalbe Marathon Tires
- **HSU:** Firm suspension
- **FCB+sep:** Front carrier block and bag
- **REV:** Reverse brakes (standard for all U.S. bikes)

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BY SARAH BURCH

→ I PULLED THE TRIGGER while sitting on a park bench in a plaza in Puerto Chacabuco, Chile. I had hemmed and hawed about getting a Brompton folding bike for a while. As a minimalist, I preferred to own just one bicycle — my Surly Long Haul Trucker. But I travel often, both domestically and internationally, and traveling with a full-size bicycle is both cumbersome and expensive. After returning from Chile, I would immediately transition into a summer jam-packed with cycling adventures all across the U.S. Those adventures would necessitate various forms of transport — passenger vehicles, buses, and planes. A Brompton seemed the perfect two-wheeled companion to accompany me on my summer travels. Decision made! Sitting on the park bench, I fired up my iPad, connected to the town's free wifi, logged into a website halfway across the world, and placed a custom order for a Brompton.

Six weeks later, I returned home from my cycling adventure through Patagonia. Waiting for me was my Brompton. Having just arrived from London, my new bike, which I affectionately named Bromleigh, was eager to go for a spin. Her inaugural ride was 40 miles of urban errand running. Not long into the ride, I was smitten. Bromleigh was truly a fun bike. What I loved most was her versatility. At the hardware store, I folded up Bromleigh and wheeled her alongside me as I roamed the aisles. At the grocery store, I





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folded up Bromleigh and pushed her in the shopping cart as I gathered several days' worth of groceries. When we left the stores, Bromleigh effortlessly carried my goods.

I quickly baptized my Brompton into the world of touring. After the brief test ride, I spent the next two and a half months living on the bike. During those months, my Brompton and I enjoyed a solo bike tour through Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho; led Adventure Cycling's Tetons-Yellowstone trips; staffed Adventure Cycling's Black Hills event in South Dakota; visited a cousin in Colorado; and housesat in Florida. All in all, we took two bus rides, three plane trips, and traveled countless miles in vans and rental cars.

One thing is certain: you can't take a Brompton anywhere without being bombarded with compliments and questions. All sorts of folks — cyclists and otherwise — are curious about the bike's features, how it folds, how it carries gear, and how it travels.

The Brompton's features

My needs in a Brompton were threefold: the bike must be reliable, easy to travel with, and suitable for self-contained touring. After copious research, I identified the optimal touring configuration. The most important specification is the gearing: six gears, 12 percent reduced, shifted using an internal hub instead of a derailer. The 12-percent reduction replaces the standard 50T chainring with a 44T chainring, enabling easier hill climbing. Other critical customizations for touring include a rear rack, a telescopic seatpost, and firm suspension.

I made a few post-purchase upgrades too. I installed a wireless bike computer (the instructions didn't address calibration for the 16in. wheel), replaced the stock handlebar grips with Ergon grips (the Ergons needed to be trimmed by about three-quarters of an inch), and swapped the pedals for a pair of Xpedo quick releases. I also purchased a 15mm stubby wrench to assist in removing the wheels in case of a flat tire. Because the internal hub complicates removal of the rear wheel, I practiced removing and reinstalling before I embarked on my travels.

Folding the bike

The beauty of the Brompton is its innovative ability to fold into a compact (23 x 22.2 x 10.6in.), portable structure. I love that my bike conveniently fits under my tent vestibule when I camp. And I love that my bike easily fit into the trunk of a packed Prius when I hitchhiked on a day with 50 MPH gusts.

The Brompton's fold is achieved in four quick steps: 1) fold rear wheel 2) fold front wheel 3) lower seatpost 4) fold handlebars. Using the stock Brompton pedals adds an additional fold.

Although folding the bike took focus at first, I can now collapse the bike in my sleep. The folding design is brilliant, tucking the delicate drivetrain within the sturdy frame and wheels. Plus, three steps in the folding process serve additional functions, positioning the bike in its kickstand mode and transforming the bicycle into its compact, towable, and easy-to-carry configurations. It's quite the transformer!

Carrying a load

A front carrier block, which is located on the head tube, cleverly carries weight independent of steering. Although this maximizes stability, it takes getting used to because the front bag continues to face forward even when the handlebars are turned. The manufacturer offers an expansive line of proprietary bags that couple with the carrier block. I chose the T-Bag because of its impressive volume. Rectangular in shape and with a roll-top closure, the bag accommodates both small and large loads. The T-Bag has plenty of pockets for organization, including two exterior pockets ideal for toting water bottles. The T-Bag is made of a tough, water-resistant Cordura fabric and comes with a bright yellow, reflective waterproof cover.

I use a backpack for my rear bag. Having a regular backpack is a plus when I combine biking with hiking or sightseeing trips. The backpack is attached using a homemade PVC contraption that hangs from the saddle (instructions can be found at

unfoldedpath.blogspot.com) as well as two shock cords integrated into the rear rack. This setup firmly anchors the bag; subtle movements, such as those due to cornering, have an insignificant impact on the bike's stability.

I repurposed a chalk bag from my rock climbing days to be used as a small goody bag. Attached to the cockpit-side of the handlebar, its location is perfect for easy-to-reach items, such as my phone, keys, and snacks. It can also serve as another bottle holder.

Transporting the bike

When transporting the bike in an automobile, I simply fold the bike and it's good to go. When transporting it via other modes, I remove the pedals and the hardware for the hinge clamps that hold together the frame and the steering column. I also remove the telescoping seatpost, wrap it in packaging material, and strap it to the top tube.

Although Brompton sells a pricey

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soft-sided carrying case, I opted for a less expensive Dimpa storage bag. They're not as sturdy as Brompton's B-Bag, but Dimpa bags can be purchased from Ikea for a few dollars and can be easily stowed when not in use. As there is minimal handling when riding a bus or train, I place the Brompton in a Dimpa bag without additional protection. However, when I'm traveling via plane, where the bike is susceptible to rougher handling, I place the Dimpa bag within a second Dimpa bag and insert layers of cardboard between all sides of the bags.

Once it's packed in its carrying case, I have only three bags to maneuver. I wear the backpack on my back, the Dimpa bag over one shoulder, and the T-Bag over the other. This setup is much easier to handle than my traditional touring setup, which includes a monstrous cardboard bike box, two rear panniers, two front panniers, and a handlebar bag, all awkward to carry.

It often costs \$150 to transport a full-sized bicycle on an airplane, but a folding

bicycle counts as a regular piece of checked luggage — on most airlines, the bike pays for itself in no time.

My takeaways

Although Bromptons are small in size, their rigid steel frame and robust load-carrying capability make them workhorses. The upright geometry ensures comfort for long hours in the saddle. The steering is twitchy at first, but I soon appreciated the bike's agility and responsiveness. Although the tiny wheels prompt me to steer around potholes, the bike performs surprisingly well on dirt trails and on tamer gravel roads. Folding bicycles are notorious for becoming jittery with excessive downhill speeds. Reaching a maximum of 35 MPH, I never noticed the jitteriness; it may have helped that I was carrying a front load.

A diehard Schwalbe fan, I opted for the Marathon tire upgrade. After 1,200 miles of use, the tires remain flat-free. The small Marathon tires lose air relatively quickly so I top off the tires every few days. Conveniently, the bike comes with

a pump that fits snugly into the rear triangle.

The only downside of the Brompton is the gearing. Although the internal gearing makes for less maintenance, which is a plus, I wish the bike had a more favorable range for climbs and descents. The gearing has been adequate for 95 percent of my riding, but I struggled to pedal over Teton Pass while carrying a load (the final 2.7 miles are a 10 percent grade), and I topped out at 20 MPH in pedaling a long stretch of moderate decline.

Despite the gearing, my Brompton is everything I had hoped for and more. While the bike isn't suitable for handling the treacherous roads I cycled earlier this year in Patagonia, and while I will choose to ride my Surly for adventures that are exclusively bike tours, for all other purposes my Brompton is my go-to bike. **AC**

A full-time wanderluster, Sarah Burch loves adventuring, laughing, finding shapes in the clouds, bathing in the forest, maximizing happiness, and sucking the marrow out of life. You can follow her muses on her blog honoringmycompass.com.

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