

ROLLER LOADER

BY AMAGANSETT BEACH COMPANY

For many people, the most physically demanding part of sea kayaking is getting the kayak on and off of their vehicle. While performing this task solo, there is certainly the risk of back injury and of dropping the kayak, damaging it or the car.

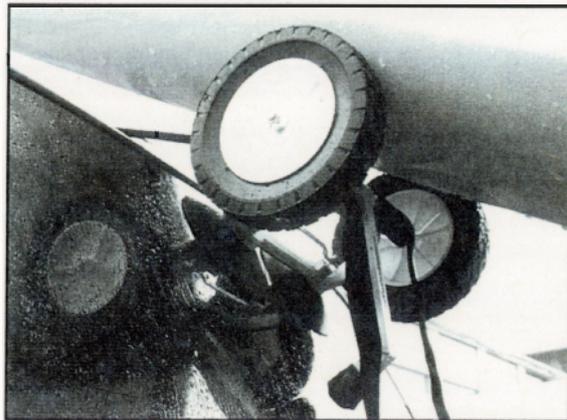
A strategically placed set of rollers greatly assists the process, especially if you have to get your kayak on the high roof of an SUV, van or truck. The Roller Loader from Amagansett Beach Company provides a simple and effective tool for getting a kayak up and down from a roof rack. Priced at \$139, the Roller Loader is a sturdy set of wheels that will attach temporarily, yet securely, to any smooth surface on most vehicles.

The sturdy aluminum framework of the Roller Loader weighs just under 10 lbs. Attached to one side of the framework is a set of suction cups, each 5" in diameter, the type that glaziers use to handle large glass panels. Opposite the suction cups is an axle with two wheels, each 7.5" in diameter, similar to those used on many kayak carts, placed about 14" apart.

I tested the Roller Loader on two vehicles, a Subaru Outback wagon and a Ford Ranger pickup with a fiberglass canopy. Installing the Roller Loader is simply a matter of attaching the suction cups at the desired location on the vehicle. On the Subaru, I pressed the Roller Loader into place at the top of the window of the hatchback.

The framework has a small aluminum arm with a protective rubber foot that rests against the window and stabilizes the Roller Loader. The suction cups are extremely strong; a small handle at the back of the cups releases the vacuum seal so that the unit can be removed. However, to prevent the Roller Loader from slipping down the window—which it'll do if the surface is wet—two straps, each with a plastic-coated metal catch, are attached to the axle of the Roller Loader. The metal catches are shaped to fit the edges of most hatchbacks, trunk lids and hoods. While they are not large enough to hook around the cross members of common rack systems, they could be clipped into a set of kayak saddles.

Once the Roller Loader was fully in place, loading my kayak was simple. I



lifted the bow and set it on the wheels of the Roller Loader. Then I went to the stern, lifted it and rolled the kayak up onto my racks. As I rolled the kayak into place, I noticed that the narrow portion of the hull near the bow rubbed on the metal framework between the wheels. Though the metal framework is smooth and didn't damage the bottom of my kayak, I was able to ensure that no scratching occurred by tilting the kayak so that one side of the hull rested on one of the wheels and the keel no longer made contact with the metal. Once the kayak was loaded, it took only a moment to remove the Roller Loader and stow it in the car with the rest of the kayak gear. When I got to the launch site, I reinstalled the Roller Loader, which only takes a few seconds, and unloaded the kayak by pulling it across the wheels of the Roller Loader and setting it on the ground one end at a time.

Installing the Roller Loader on the canopy of the pickup truck was similar

but required a small adjustment. When I stuck the Roller Loader to the back window of the canopy, the location was not high enough for a kayak to pass over the rear lip of the canopy without scraping the paint. The solution was to attach the Roller Loader to the top of canopy. Though the suction cups will attach to painted surfaces, you should make sure the surface is free from sand or road grime, otherwise the surface may be scratched. On

the canopy of the pickup, there wasn't a good location to attach the straps; however, I discovered that since the surface was horizontal, the straps weren't necessary as the suction cups and the stabilizer bar held the assembly securely in place.

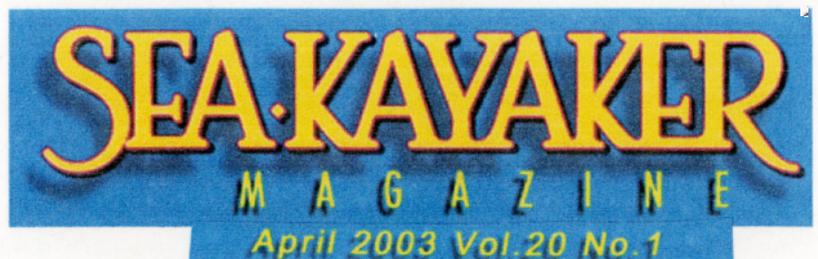
Loading a kayak onto a vehicle can be very difficult. The Roller Loader makes an otherwise backbreaking job easy. It would be especially useful for loading heavy kayaks or doubles and for people who aren't tall or strong enough to lift a kayak onto their rack. The Roller Loader's versatility and ease of use make it a great addition to car-topping systems.

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