



Reader wouldn't swap his Fiat Coupé (top) for Brera

### BRERA: NO THANKS

Having waited for many years for a car capable of replacing my ageing Fiat Coupé Turbo, I looked forward to your test of the Alfa Brera (5 April). After reading the comparison test on the 2.2 JTS I have come to the conclusion that I can save myself about £25k by keeping the Fiat. It has four useable seats, more boot space, better economy, and much more pace than the Alfa. I know there'll be a quicker version of the Brera, but that will cost even more.

The Brera might be a tad prettier than my old Fiat, but falls short everywhere else.

**Colin Simpson**  
via e-mail

### F1 IS THE FUTURE

If F1 is the pinnacle of motor-sport, then surely the teams



Should F1 teams be given free rein?

should be encouraged to spend money on whatever technology they like.

The real road-car technology has come from when the F1 teams were allowed to develop what they needed to be competitive. Traction control and active suspension are good examples; both have become available in cars because of competition in F1.

**Hugh Hatrick**  
via e-mail

### ROAD ANGEL COMPACT

#### THIS WEEK'S STAR LETTER WRITER

will receive the UK's best-selling safety alert system, Road Angel Compact, worth £199.99. For details on Road Angel products, visit [blackspot.com](http://blackspot.com)



## OFFICE BANTER Burning issue

**BIGGEST LAUGH** this week? For us it was assistant editor Matt Saunders returning from California looking like he'd been the victim of some gruesome medical experiment. Our man had been interviewing Katherine Legge at her first Champ Car race (see p60) but clearly forgot that it has a tendency to be a bit sunny on the West Coast of the USA. The result?



Saunders: also available in white

He's now blotchier than a slice of corned beef – and about as attractive to young ladies as well. Put it this way: we've had to ask the office caretaker to crank up the air-con, such is the heat radiating from Saunders' mug.

His next assignment will be to the Middle East, and we've warned him that it's quite hot there, too. Matt: please pick up some sun-tan lotion at the airport...

## THIS WEEK'S ESSENTIAL

In association with  
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The stuff that's worth your time (and money)

### Rackinabag X Rack

★★★★☆

**What's the point?** Universal, lightweight luggage carrier

**How does it work?** A system of straps tie it to your car

**Price** From £25 plus P&P

**Where can I get one?** [www.rackinabag.co.uk](http://www.rackinabag.co.uk)

**GOT A LIFESTYLE?** Of course you have. That's why manufacturers are tripping over themselves to offer us an ever-increasing number of 'lifestyle' vehicles – crossovers, MPVs, 4x4s and, of course, estates. Fact is, however, that it's still tricky to cram your lifestyle into the car, especially if you're a surfer, or skier, or maybe just a DIY-er who needs a big ladder.

So what do you do? Car manufacturers' own-brand roof racks generally start at £90 or more, and even a generic roof rack is likely to cost at least £60 – assuming you can find one to fit your car. The answer, or so British firm Rackinabag would have us believe, is its fabric X Rack, which costs from £25.

The X Rack is a collapsible fabric roof rack which rolls up to fit in a 60cm-long bag. A central fabric 'blanket' with foam cylinders inside sits on your car roof, to which it is attached by means of four large nylon webbing straps. The rear straps connect to the inside of the car boot using either metal hooks or more foam cylinders, while the front webbing straps attach to a pair of wire hoops, which you fit to the front door hinges.

Fitting the rack for the first time is not the work of a moment: even with the fairly decent instructions it took half an hour and a bit of nous. Once you've adjusted everything to fit, however, you can affix or detach the rack in minutes.

Fixing stuff to the rack is reasonably easy, using the straps provided, if your cargo is the right shape. On the move it all seems pretty secure, too, even at motorway speeds.

So, the X Rack seems ideal for occasional use, is small enough to leave in the car boot for Ikea emergencies, and at £25 for the smaller 'Pro Sport' version and £35 for the larger 'Tourer', it's good value. All you need now is that lifestyle.

## THE ALTERNATIVES

### 1. HandiRack

£49.99, [www.handirackuk.com](http://www.handirackuk.com)

Two pairs of inflatable nylon tubes that attach to the roof and include built-in straps. Easier to fit, but twice the price of X Rack.

### 2. Thule 750 system

From around £100, [www.thule.co.uk](http://www.thule.co.uk)

Conventional metal roof bars from the best-known brand. Pricy but highly effective, though you'll need a fitting kit (£29.95 minimum) for each different car.

Once adjusted for size, X Rack is easy to fit

