

# CAMERA BAGS & CASES

## Let's pack up that camera gear!

by Jack and Sue Drafahl

**C**amera equipment prices keep going up just like everything else. So, it only makes sense to protect your investments. Manufacturers have created hundreds of possible camera bags and cases to solve your problem. Except, that in itself creates a problem. Which one do you select? Read on, as we are going to give you information to help make the selection process painless.

### THE SHOULDER BAG

We're sure you have all seen cartoons of the "typical" photographer, with about 2-3 cameras slung around his or her neck clanking together, and there always is a bulging camera bag hanging from the shoulder to just above the ground. The photographer's shoulder is always drooping from all the weight of the bag's contents.

The shoulder bag is by far the most common type of camera bag. That is for good reason—because it makes it very easy to access your equipment. The center section of the bag usually stores one or two camera bodies and an assortment of lenses. The outside pockets are home to an array of accessories and flash attachments. You will even find straps to attach a compact tripod. Now you see why the cartoon depicts it hanging almost to the ground.

One thing we know from past experiences is that the shoulder camera bag you pack at home somehow gains weight as the day wears on. We don't know how it happens, but we can assure you that it does. This is a great style of bag for protecting and carrying your valuable camera gear, but we suggest when selecting

this bag, don't buy the biggest one you see. You will want to fill it full and if you do, we can guarantee it will cost you a trip to the local chiropractor! Instead, look at the mid-sized bags and be selective as to what equipment you really need to take. The larger bags do have the advantage of giving you room to take along a windbreaker or bagged lunch.

Camera bags come in a wide assortment of materials from durable nylon to canvas and most are waterproof or water-resistant. Be sure to check the straps closely. These are the lifeline for protecting your equipment. They should be reinforced at all the points that they connect



**Beseler Lifestyle premium shoulder bags** are waterproof and come with thick protective padding, cotton web straps and solid brass hardware. Accessory straps can convert the largest bag into a backpack.

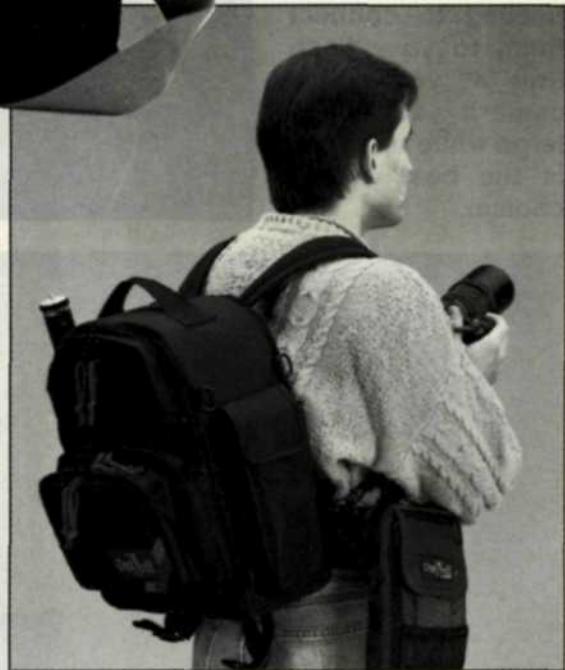
with the bag. Make sure the bag has wide, padded straps to help carry the load. Some of the bags have clips that attach the straps to the bag, so make sure that they are good and strong. Often you will find a handle on top of the bag that gives you an alternative to carrying the bag over your shoulder. Make sure the handle is heavily reinforced too.

Some of the shoulder bags incorporate a removable tray inside. This helps organize the inside of the camera bag, but makes it hard to access the equip-

ment on the bottom row. Quite a number of bags have Velcro-securing padded dividers to help organize the interior of the bag. This is great for making changes when you add or delete a lens from the travel manifest. Be sure that the clips or straps that keep the bag closed are easy to use. You would sure hate to see your expensive goodies roll out onto the ground as you pick up the bag.

### DAYPACK

The daypack is a great way to give your shoulder a rest. These bags have two shoulder straps so that weight is distributed across your shoulders and your back. Because the bulk of the bag is behind you, the daypack makes it easy to maneuver through crowds or down narrow hiking trails. You most likely would hang your camera around your neck and only put added lenses and accessories in the bag. The disadvantage is that if you need something out of the pack, you



**The OutPack Photo Daypack** from Domke and Saunders features up to 14 compartments and pockets for 35mm, medium-format or 4x5 gear. Also shown is the OutPack Minipack.

Fanny or hip-packs are the hands-free alternative for active photographers, or people who want to lighten the load on their shoulder. Unlike the unpadded variety sold in general stores, photo fanny packs have protective compartments for cameras and accessories. The large Lowepro Orion AW model has a built-in waistbelt, lumbar support and shoulder strap. It holds one SLR with lens attached, two extra lenses, a flash and other accessories.

need someone to get it out for you, or else you have to totally remove the pack. This makes accessing equipment more difficult than with the shoulder bag, but it's more comfortable to carry.

#### FANNY PACK

If you don't have a lot of equipment to take with you, then the fanny pack might do the job. This compact unit straps around your waist, and the weight is distributed evenly across your hips instead of your shoulders or back. The pack can be positioned at your back, or you can slide it around to the side or in front. It looks like a smaller version of the shoulder bag as it has a center section for a camera and lenses and additional pockets for accessories. It makes accessing equipment easier than with the



Tamrac's Summit Photo Backpack has room for two 35mm or medium-format cameras with lots of lenses and accessories. Foam-padded shoulder straps and hip belt plus shoulder stabilizer straps and chest strap make it easy to carry all that gear.



## "The backpack is designed for the outdoor photographer who takes extended trips with lots of equipment"

tended trips with lots of equipment. The only way to carry it all is on your back. These packs have molded frames that help distribute the load evenly across your shoulders and back. They also have a lumbar strap to help limit sway and movement.

The interior is heavily padded to protect your valuable equipment. Most packs have Velcro dividers to allow versatility of

daypack, as you don't have to remove it. Be sure to zip the compartments closed as equipment could possibly fall out if you bend over.

#### BACKPACK

Now we are getting to some serious transportation for camera equipment. The backpack is designed for the outdoor photographer who takes ex-

equipment location. Some have detachable pouches and extra nooks and crannies for a sack lunch or snack. In order to access the equipment you must remove the pack. Of course if it is packed full, you will be glad to stop and remove it! You may even want to change lenses every mile so you won't look like a hik-ing wimp.

Backpacks come in a variety of sizes to accommodate the volume of equipment you need to transport. The smaller sizes are for shorter trips and the largest size will accommodate most everything for the long haul (kitchen sink not included). They even have pockets designed to hold your pocket GPS and cell phone. Isn't technology great?

#### PHOTO VEST

Photojournalists have set a precedent by making photo vests popular. These are traveling camera bag attire that has never grown out of style. They are made of lightweight cotton with mesh ventilation and come in a variety of stylish colors. These jackets resemble the fishing vests that have pockets everywhere. The difference is that you will be sporting film and lenses instead of lures. The pockets are slightly padded for equipment protection. Some photo vests even have a pocket in the back to carry a compact tripod.

You can access any of the pockets easily without removing the vest. The problem comes in remembering which lens is in which pocket! You can carry quite a bit of equipment in a streamlined method. The weight is equally distributed across your shoulders and back. This is a great alternative if you have trouble with your bag slipping off your shoulder as you shoot.

We find the photo vest great when working in crowds. We recently photographed a local parade and county fair.

We had all the equipment we needed



The Billingham Photo Vest from Leica has 16 pockets to accommodate gear and extras (but no back pockets, so you can sit comfortably while wearing the vest). It's made of Ventile cotton, which is naturally wind- and waterproof.

**AMBICO**

The Ambico line is designed for point-and-shoot, SLR and video camcorders. Bags and pouches are made of nylon and vinyl and come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Many have top and bottom sections that can be used together or taken apart and used separately. New to the line is the Campack combination BackPack/Carry case. The case features water resistant natural fibers and reinforced shoulder straps.

**BESELER**

In addition to Beseler's stand by LeBaron line of camera bags, the company now offers Lifestyle bags. This new line features waterproof cotton canvas, leather, cotton web straps, adjustable padded dividers and solid brass hardware. There are 3 bags in the line and accessory straps are available.

**BILLINGHAM**

The luxurious Billingham bags are handcrafted in England from poly-cotton material bonded to both sides of an inner layer of waterproof latex, with top-grain leather for all external bindings and solid brass fitting. A removable padded partition system lets you customize the bag for your gear. New is a water and windproof vest with 16 pockets.

**COAST**

The line of Coast Mohawk bags features contemporary styling with black exterior and gray accent. There are six different models, from a point-and-shoot camera model to a larger size for a 35mm system. The new Coast NASCAR line of bags offers sporty graphics from the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing.

**DOMKE**

Domke, often viewed as the "photo-journalist's" bag, has recently added a line of rugged outdoor packs. The Outpack line includes the new Photo Backpack, Waist Pack and three small duffel bags designed to protect lenses. Also new are the "Leather Elite," a black nubuck leather version of their popular Reporter's Satchel.



Daypacks, like this Tamrack Model 750, are a viable alternative to hard-core backpacks, and will still hold a lot of camera gear. This one features a split design, with a camera bag on the bottom and a pack on top for extra gear or lunch.

35mm camera and one lens nestled in a deep pocket. The bag straps around your waist for comfortable distribution of weight. The top flap of the case has pockets to store film, filters and other small accessories.

**HARD CASES**

Up to now we have only introduced you to soft (but padded) camera protection. Now the big protection comes into play. Hard-shell cases come in different sizes and are made of a variety of materials. The smaller cases look like briefcases used for business. These usually have padded compartments that require you to break down your equipment to fit it all in, but the unit's compact size makes for easy transport.

The medium-sized cases allow for more equipment to be stored and the camera can remain attached to the lens for quick access. The cases have padded dividers to help keep things in order. There are even companies that offer hard-shell cases that have a full soft-shell camera bag inside. These offer the ultimate protection of the hard case for travel and the easy use of a shoulder bag once on location.

The larger cases resemble traveling suitcases and are definitely not compact. They are designed to carry a heavy load. Professional photographers use these to haul studio lights and large-format cameras. Recently manufacturers have taken pity on the struggling photographer by adding wheels and additional handles so you can

**"In addition to the ultimate protection that the hard-shell cases provide, many offer waterproof seals to protect your gear from moisture and dust"**

within our reach and we could move around without bumping our camera bag into fairgoers.

**TOPLOAD CAMERA BAG**

Topload bags are designed for fast action, since the camera is placed face down with the lens already attached. The bag is well padded and holds just a

**Hard cases are great for transport, shipping and rough handling because of their metal or high-impact plastic shells.**

The well-known Zero Halliburton line has joined the wheeled-luggage set with the Zeroller Transport System—a hard-shell camera case with built-in luggage cart.



easily roll along.

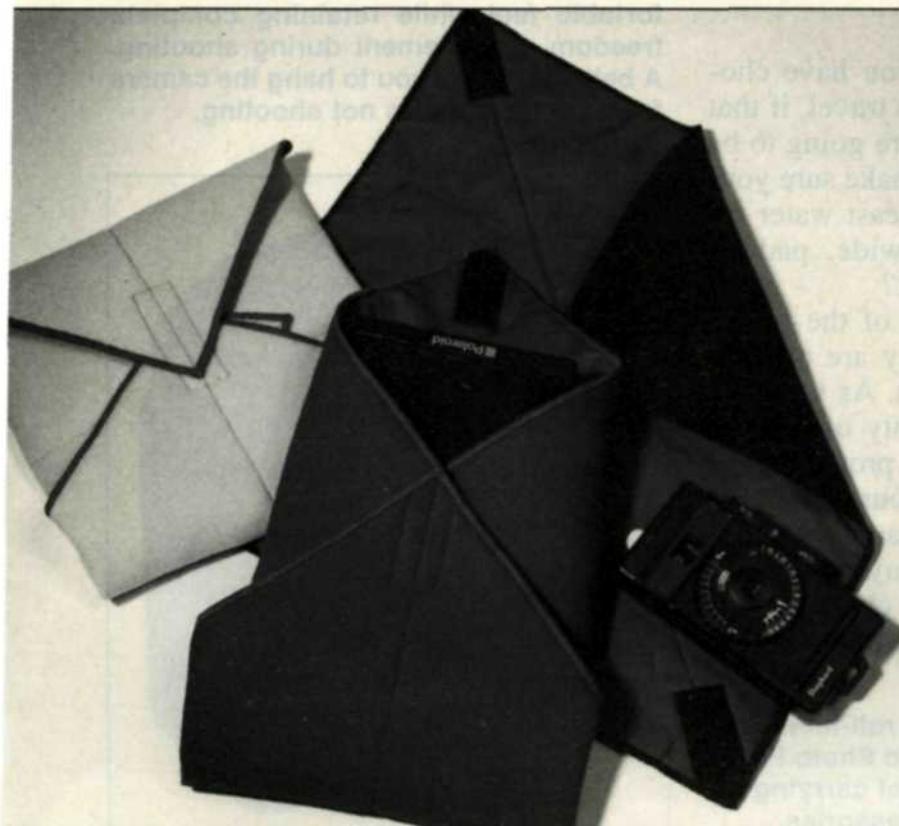
In addition to the ultimate protection that the hard-shell cases provide, many offer waterproof seals to protect your gear from moisture and dust. The downside to hard cases is that they do not provide quick and easy access to your camera equipment.

### ACCESSORY CASES

In addition to camera cases, manufacturers seem to make cases for tons of accessories. There are padded filter cases to prevent breakage and allow quick access to your more popular filters. You will find cases to hold medium-format film magazines, 4x5 film holders, tripods and even studio lights. There are cases that attach to your belt so you can carry an extra telephoto lens with you. You can even purchase extra protection for your equipment with photo wraps. These padded cloths wrap around your valuable toys and secure with Velcro.

### THE PURCHASING PLAN

Since there are so many means of transporting your equipment, you need a plan in order to avoid mistakes when making your purchase. Grab a pen and paper and make a list of all the camera gear you have and the approximate dimensions of each item. Now here's the fun part. Make a list of all the new photo toys you plan on adding in the next year. Look at the list and decide which pieces of equipment you would not want to leave home without. Most photographers have more gear than they need for a single photo excursion, so you don't need to carry it all. You might think about two different-size camera bags.



**Equipment wraps** can give your camera extra protection inside a camera bag. These Domke Protective Wraps come in three sizes and are infinitely adjustable with their four Velcro tabs. They come in red, black and yellow for color-coding purposes.

We have talked about the different styles of camera-carrying gear, so now you have to decide if your shoulders can handle the weight for hours at a time. Maybe you need to spread the weight across your shoulders with a backpack. If you only plan to take a small amount of equipment, then the fanny pack might be best. If you need to move around quickly in crowds, then the photo vest might fit nicely in your wardrobe. Of course, the serious backpacker will have already made his or her choice.

## "You need a plan in order to avoid mistakes when making your purchase"

Take a trip to your local camera store and check out the possibilities. Talk to a salesperson—they are usually photographers too, so learn by their mistakes. If you don't have a lot of equipment, bring it with you, so you can see how it will fit in the bag you choose. Take your time, and make your selection wisely. Remember just how much you paid for your equipment—you don't want have to replace it due to damage in transit.

Here are some questions you might ask yourself when making your selection. Does your bag have plenty of storage space for all the film you will be taking? Does the bag feel comfortable when full? Do you still think you need a bigger bag? Do

### DOSKOCIL

Doskocil offers economical cases in high-impact plastic. The Seal-Tight and Designer series have cubed foam interiors, lockable latches and come in black or metallic gray.

### HAMA

Hama offers stylish bags in fashion colors (i.e., hot-pink or turquoise), as well as traditional black bags.

### LOWEPRO

LowePro "camera bags for the real world" are geared to active outdoor shooters—5 backpacks (backpack harnesses available on 8 other models), holster-style bags and hip/waist packs, as well as traditional shoulder bags, all tough and weather resistant.

### PELICAN

Pelican cases are submersible, corrosion-proof, virtually unbreakable and lightweight. These high-impact plastic units come in numerous sizes and colors. The Convertible Travel Bag has a shoulder bag fitted inside a hard case.

### PERFECTED

Perfected Photo Products offers pouches that attach to belts by a steel spring belt-clip, and hold filters, battery packs, 4x5 film holders and all medium format roll-film magazines.

### PHOENIX

The stylish Phoenix FS line offers black with gold accents, green/tan, black/pink and black/green bags. A zipper transforms their small and medium backpacks into rectangular shoulder bags (with waist straps) when the backpack is detached.

### PHOTOFLEX

Galen Rowell bags feature removable waist belts and straps in shoulder, waist and chest models. The Performance series includes the shock-absorbing Reporter, the Xtreme with Show-All top, the Action with built-in waist belt and lumbar support; and the Event, which converts from shoulder to waist bag.

## PORTER CASE

The hard-shell padded Porter Case II quickly converts into a rolling tote or luggage cart. Other gear can be loaded on top of the case in its cart configuration for easy cartage.

## SUNDOG

SunDog bags are available in backpack, shoulder and waist-fanny styles, in sizes that hold one 35mm SLR and film to much larger bags.

## TAMRAC

From hard cases and photo vests to hip bags and backpacks, Tamrac has it. The new Rolling Strongbox Model 652 is a large camera case on wheels. The Photographer's Daypack looks and functions like a fashionable daypack with shoulder straps, but the lower half hides a fully functional, padded camera bag.

## TENBA

Tenba pro-oriented bags feature a Lens Protector Divider System and stiff padded wooden bottom liners for maximum impact protection. Styles include hands-free Bear and Cub waist packs, Express Paks for small SLRs and Car Cases for larger equipment.

## TUNDRA

Tundra Ruff Pack and Targa lines include camera holsters, a Pro Bag with built-in day-pack, padded tripod bags and versatile black-nylon shoulder bags with leather handles and attractive trim. Tundra Sea King ABS plastic hard cases are waterproof down to 30 feet.

## ZERO HALLIBURTON

Zero Halliburton offers their popular Zeroller Transport Case in a pro textured black finish with a modular divider interior. Most other Zero Halliburton cases originally supplied with foam interiors can be fitted with the new modular divider. Like all Zero Halliburton cases, the Zeroller meets airline carry-on specs and can withstand just about anything.

A desiccant such as the Multisorb DriCan Desiccating Canister added to your camera bag will help protect your equipment and film from humidity.

you think you will be able to lift it if you buy the larger one? Maybe two smaller, different types are a more logical choice.

Can you get to your equipment easily? Is the lens you need going to always be on the bottom of the bag? Will the bag carry all the equipment you need? Or at least, what you think you need? How is the workman-

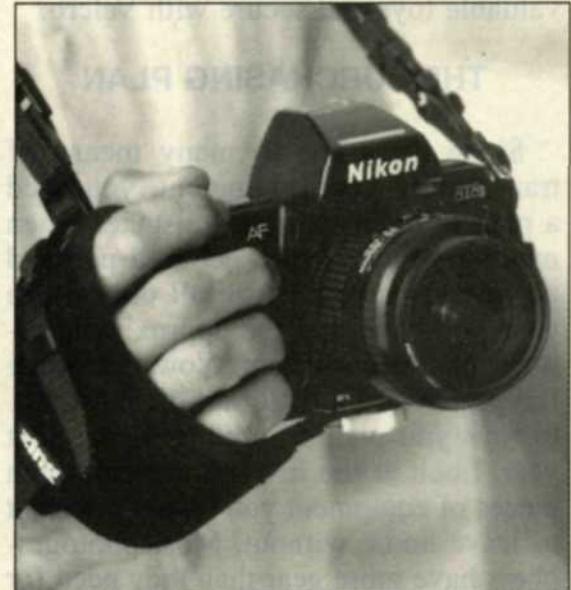


**"Protection is the name of the game, but comfort and efficiency are also up there at the top of the list"**

ship of the bag or case you have chosen? Will it survive airline travel, if that is your direction? If you are going to be taking pictures outdoors, make sure your case is waterproof, or at least water resistant. Does it have a wide, padded strap for ease and comfort?

Protection is the name of the game, but comfort and efficiency are also up there at the top of the list. As we have shown you, there are plenty of choices available when purchasing protection for your camera gear. Take your time, analyze your needs, and research your options to avoid costly buying errors. Remember, your ultimate choice is going to be your photographic traveling companion for years. □

**Accessory cases like this roll-film magazine pouch from Perfected Photo Products provide handy ways of carrying all of your needed photo accessories.**



The Zing SLR Action Strap fits most newer SLR cameras, gripping your hand around the camera for a secure and comfortable feel while retaining complete freedom of movement during shooting. A belt clip allows you to hang the camera from your belt when not shooting.

