

The Top Six Points When Selecting a Rolling Camera Bag: If Your Gear Isn't With You, Where Is It?

- By Doug Murdoch

A rolling camera bag (roller) is a large storage or transportation solution on wheels for photographers that carry a lot of gear to a location. When an airplane is the transportation choice, there are some careful considerations a photographer should make before investing in a rolling camera bag. For this reason, I will present the six most important qualities when deciding on the purchase of a rolling camera bag for both long- and short-term travel:



(LEFT TO RIGHT) PHIL BORGES, DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHER/ VIDEOGRAPHER; JOHN SHAW, NATURE PHOTOGRAPHER; DENIS REGGIE, (CQ) WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER; AND REED HOFFMAN, PHOTOGRAPHER/ EDUCATOR IN REYKJAVIK, ICELAND.

- 1 CARRY-ON SIZE LIMITS: BE SURE THE BAG WILL FLY!
- 2 STORAGE CAPACITY: WILL YOUR EQUIPMENT FIT?
- 3 WARRANTY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE
- 4 DURABILITY AND QUALITY
- 5 SECURITY AND PEACE OF MIND
- 6 SOLUTIONS FOR CARRYING A LAPTOP COMPUTER

1 CARRY-ON SIZE LIMITS: BE CONFIDENT THE BAG WILL FLY!

Think Tank Photo rollers were designed backwards from the size requirements of airline overhead bin dimensions so that they hold the maximum amount of photo equipment within those dimensions. The strategic goal is simple: photographers want to keep their valuable equipment safely near them at all times. This means that their rollers must comply with the airline's size requirement, otherwise their valued gear will have to be checked into the airplane's cargo hold. During the product testing process, we traveled with our products on flights around the world, taking pictures to share. We know that seeing is believing!

While there is no specific standard for carry-on baggage dimensions — there are common sizes that meet most requirements. They are 9 x 14 x 22 for USA domestic and 8 x 14 x 21 for International. A good place to compare carry-on dimensions for many airlines is Rick Seany.com. Go to <http://rickseaney.com/airline-carry-on-baggage-chart/>

Once your roller is safely on board, you can be reassured that it will fit into the overhead bins or under the seat in front of you. Here are photos of our rollers on actual flights.

Putting the roller straight into the overhead



On the majority of planes this roller fits easily straight in, which is the preferred storage method. Remember to have the wheels facing out. The lids actually curve around the roller wheels when closed. Loading and unloading the roller is easier if the roller features a handle on the bottom of the bag.

Note: this photo shows the wheels in first.

Putting the roller sideways in the overhead.



Some planes have smaller overhead compartments, forcing passengers to put their rollers in sideways. Again, it easily fit in the overhead compartment.

Putting the roller under the seat in front of you.



If for some reason there is no space left in the overhead compartment, it will fit under the seat in front of you, as this photo shows.

2 STORAGE CAPACITY: WILL YOUR EQUIPMENT FIT?

When you travel, the general goal is to put the maximum amount of photographic gear into the smallest bag possible.

The interior of a Think Tank roller is molded around the handle which only goes halfway down into the bag. This maximizes the side and bottom spaces, and allows for the big lens hoods to fit into the bottom, like the 300 2.8, 400 2.8, and even the 600 4.

Rollers that have removable trays or backpack straps actually reduce the amount of interior capacity or make the exterior size bigger, which is contrary to the original goal of putting the maximum amount of gear in the smallest space possible.

Below are some configurations used by working photographers for the Airport International V2.0. Notice how the dividers aren't always in the same arrangement and are reconfigured by the photographers to fit the exact gear they need to carry.

Complete DSLR set up with a 300 2.8 lens



This roller holds a surprising amount of gear—a complete kit for most photographers. This includes two pro-sized DSLR's, two strobes, two pocket wizards, a 16-35 2.8, a 24-70 2.8, a 70-200 2.8, a 300 2.8, and much more. It is important to note that the cameras can be packed with or without the lens attached.

400 2.8 and 500 f4 lenses



Large lenses with hood, like a 400 2.8 or a 500 f4, fit into our rollers. The handle system is uniquely designed so that the handle does not extend all the way to the bottom of the bag. The result is a deeper area in the bottom of the bag that allows you to carry more gear. Featured in this photo is a basic "sports" set up, with a 400 2.8, a 70-200 2.8, a wide angle, two DSLR's, and, of course, a Pixel Pocket Rocket.

Inner Lid Pockets



The pockets on the inside are ideal for storing maps, pens, pencils, press passes, instruction books, energy bars, notebooks, and other essentials. One nice detail is that the zipper sliders have cords and the slider head goes into a fabric "port" to protect your camera gear from the zipper heads when the lid is closed.

Another way to determine which roller is right for you is to view how sports photographers configure their gear. Shooting sports requires that photographers carry a wide spectrum of gear, so they tend to stretch the boundaries of roller carrying capacities.

Sports Photography — Basketball



Gear: 300 mm 2.8 Lens/ SLR equipment. Submitted by: Robert Hanashiro, USA Today

Sports Photography—Baseball



Gear: 400 mm 2.8 Lens/ SLR equipment. Submitted by: Brad Mangin, Sports Illustrated freelancer

Event Photography



Gear: Nikon 200 f2 AFS VR and more. Submitted by: Jeff Snyder

Sports Photography



Gear: 400 mm 2.8 Lens/ SLR equipment. Submitted by: John Mabanglo, EPA

3 WARRANTY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

Truth be told, rollers get pounded on and, regardless of brand, moving parts will wear out. So, if something should break, you want the reassurance of knowing that you can get it fixed or replaced quickly, with no hassles. Here is what Think Tank Photo offers you:

“No Rhetoric Warranty” -- To the original owner, we guarantee and warrant the bag against any defects in material or workmanship. If you have any problems with the bag, please contact us at warranty@thinktankphoto.com before sending in the bag.

Customer Service – We pride ourselves on helping photographers capture images, not logging complaints with the “Help Desk.” Our customer service team is manned by real people—working photographers—who are available by phone and email.

4 DURABILITY AND QUALITY

Our designers listened to scores of professional photographers who have collectively logged millions of miles of travel while on assignment. Their input guided us in creating the following features:

Replaceable wheels and high wheel housings



Wheels can be replaced from the outside of the bag with a hex key. Their open design prevents pebbles and other objects from catching in the wheel. With regard to the wheel housings (the barrier protecting the area above the wheels), our rollers are designed to protect the roller's fabric. If you've ever pulled a rolling suitcase up stairs, you know how vulnerable this area is to being damaged.

Replaceable handle



Let's be real: photographers can carry upwards of 60 to 80 pounds of equipment in their bags. Furthermore, professional photographers use their bags daily, not just every few months. Even just those two factors amount to a considerable amount of wear and tear on a rolling bag's handle. This is why the retractable handles on

our rollers are designed to be replaced as needed. We also heavily test the durability of our handles to make sure they can withstand regular use.

Zippers and Sliders



Any bag that is used on a daily basis, the zippers and sliders are typically the first features to break over time. In fact, the number one reason for zipper failure in any type of bag, from any manufacturer, is a poor quality zipper or slider. In all Think Tank products, especially our rollers, we only use YKK RC-Fuse zippers which are the highest quality zippers and sliders available to

date. YKK's RC-Fuse zipper is made by taking the sewing thread and melting or "fusing" it with the plastic coil, producing superior abrasion resistance. We also only use nickel-plated zipper sliders because they are far more durable and will not chip like black painted sliders.

5 SECURITY AND PEACE OF MIND

At Think Tank, we are obsessed with doing all we can to help photographers keep their gear safe from theft or other losses. Think Tank Photo rollers come with the following security features to suit that need:

TSA combination lock to secure the zippers



There are many instances when photographers must leave some or all of their gear behind and walk away. It is absolutely vital that your gear is secured from theft. This is why the zippers have special built-in combination locks.

Back Security Cable & Lock



The back security cable and its combination lock can be used to lock the roller to immovable objects. This security cable is very effective when you have to leave your gear for a period of time in a media room, wedding hall, hotel room, or other open area.

Front Security Cable & Lock



The front security cable and combination lock allows you to lock a laptop in the front pocket of your roller. This allows the laptop to be secure but accessible when needed.

Security ID Plate



Each roller has a built-in security ID plate which assigns a unique serial number to your roller. The serial number can be registered on our website at www.thinktankphoto.com/lostandfound. If your roller is lost or stolen, the serial number can be used to reunite you with your bag.

6 SOLUTIONS FOR CARRYING A LAPTOP COMPUTER



Think Tank's Low Divider Sets (available for all three roller models) create a recessed space for a laptop at the top of each bag. This is an alternative to carrying your laptop in the front stretchable pocket or on the extended handle of the roller. Placing your laptop inside the roller keeps the bag size within carry-on size requirements and does not flag the laptop

as a separate carry-on item. You can carry your gear and your laptop on board the plane with confidence.

CONCLUSION

Think Tank rolling camera bags were designed with input from working professional photographers. They are meant to solve specific travel problems unique to photography. The rollers are rectangular to hold the most gear and sized for carry-on size requirements. They are all black in color and appear more like professional luggage so they do not scream, "I'm filled with thousands of dollars of photo gear!"

Think Tank Photo offers three rollers to meet your airline and other travel needs. Each is designed to comply with and/or exceed the six qualities earlier listed:

Airport Airstream



*Traveling internationally or on a small commuter aircraft? This small roller complies with their size guidelines for **sliding under the seat**. It accommodates up to a 400mm lens, holds multiple DSLRs and various lenses and accessories.*

Airport International V2.0



*This new version of the popular mid-sized roller was named a winner of the "Hot One Award." When assigning this award, Professional Photographer Magazine judges noted that the Airport International was "**the first large rolling camera bag to meet all international carry-on size requirements.**" It accommodates up to a 500mm lens and holds multiple DSLRs and various lenses and accessories.*

Airport Security V2.0



*This large roller is renowned for its ability to hold a large amount of gear while **complying with most USA domestic airline size requirements**. It accommodates up to a 600mm lens and holds multiple DSLRs and various lenses and accessories.*