The Brompton Folding Bike Guide

From FoldingBikeGuide.co.uk

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The Brompton folding bicycle given as a gift by Prime Minister David Cameron to Prime Minister Noda of Japan
(Photo by The Prime Minister’s Office April 23rd 2012)
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Introduction

My intention with this free download is that it will become a chapter in a larger publication called ‘The Folding Bike Guide’ which will complement my website FoldingBikeGuide.co.uk. I have owned many different types of bicycle since I was a lad and was overjoyed to finally acquire a Brompton in 2012.

If you have knowledge of a particular make or model of bike and fancy writing a chapter about it, I’d love to hear from you. There are a few bikes that people seem fanatical about, such as the Strida and the Montague SwissBike, that I haven’t had the chance to ride yet. Similarly if you have one of the cheaper bikes from Halfords or Argos, I think they deserve a chapter of their own too. I aim to expand into providing information about the various models made by Tern and Dahon as well as exploring some of the lesser known makes such as Kansi, a new UK brand that has been thoroughly embraced by Evans Cycles.

For the moment I hope that you will enjoy this initial download, which I have called ‘The Brompton Folding Bike Guide’. Nothing is set in stone here. If you can think of any additions, changes or contributions, just let me know. I would love ‘The Folding Bike Guide’ to be a collaboration by a few people, rather than just myself.

Brompton Bikes

This is going to be the easiest chapter of ‘The Folding Bike Guide’ to write because I love Brompton bikes. As the proud owner of a Brompton M6R my thoughts and feelings are from my experience. In my mind the Brompton is the best folding bike available; the fold is very compact, they are easy and fun to ride and I think they look fantastic. As is always the case with folding bikes there has to be a compromise between weights and features. The lightest Brompton bike at the moment is the single speed S1E-X (9 kg), which has just one gear and lots of titanium parts, such as the rear triangular frame and the seat post. The handlebars of the S1E-X are the straight S Type and it has no mudguards, lights or anything like that. Personally I find this too minimalist and probably only a purist would be willing to spend a lot of money on a bike like this. If your daily journey on your Brompton Bicycle included quite a bit of carrying your bike by hand then weight is going to be very important, but for myself I’d always opt for some gears and maybe mudguards as a minimum requirement.
Why choose a Brompton bicycle?
If you are reading this then you probably know the answer already. If you like the idea of a folding bike, then the Brompton is one of the best makes out there. It is true that they are certainly not the cheapest, lightest or fastest, but for quality and design they are streets above the rest.

This becomes evident when you look at the second hand prices of Brompton Bikes, they really do keep their value. If you don’t believe me have a look at Ebay.co.uk and search for ‘Brompton Folding Bike’, then go over to the advanced section and click the box that says ‘show completed listings only’. The results now shown are all the bikes that have finished auctions. The ones that sold have their prices in green and the ones that didn’t sell have their prices in red. At the time of writing (April 2013) the cheapest Brompton I could find sold for £396; this was an 8-year old six speed model in reasonable condition. The second cheapest one was a rather rare five speed model from 1993, which has just sold for £435. Not a bad price for a 20-year old bike is it?

My reason for choosing a Brompton is purely the fact that I love the design of them and I love riding them. The fact that a Brompton can fold into such a small space means that it is easy to get the bike to where you want to ride it. In the first two weeks of owning my Brompton I rode it in five different counties in England and, within the following two months, used it in France and Spain too.

The history of the Brompton is a story in itself. It begins with Andrew Ritchie designing and constructing the first prototypes in his flat in South Kensington, which overlooks the Brompton Oratory, to Brompton’s current position as the UK’s largest bicycle manufacturer. Brompton have won many industry awards along the way. In 2009 Andrew Ritchie received the Prince Phillip Designer’s Prize. The Prince then visited the Brompton factory in 2010. Clearly Brompton is a great example of British Industry. Brompton are constantly improving their models, components and manufacturing processes, but all the time the basic design remains unchanged. To me this is a sign of a good design, one that was basically correct to begin with. Brompton products are expensive, but the quality is superb. To maintain quality Brompton have not opted for saving money by outsourcing any work overseas, but have kept almost everything in the West London factory. By having the majority of the components made in their own factory, stringent quality control can be maintained. I believe one job that is not done in the factory now is the painting of the bicycle frames, which is done in Wales.

The Brompton Fold
By far the single best feature about the Brompton bicycle is the fold itself. I have looked at the way other bikes fold and I really do think that Brompton got it right first time. This is probably the case because every Brompton bike folds the same and the design has changed very little since the early prototypes.
When I first looked at videos of how a Brompton bicycle folds it seemed quite complicated, but in practice it becomes very simple. There are hundreds of videos on YouTube of people folding their Brompton bicycles, so if you ever get stuck or not quite sure, just have a look there.

The only slight design change that has happened over the recent years is that a rear frame clip was introduced. The rear frame clip was introduced not out of necessity but in response to user’s feedback. In the older Brompton the rear triangle of the frame is not clicked into place when the bike is unfolded. For most people this is not a problem, but some riders have reported feeling uneasy about the bike not being a rigid structure. My bike is from 2009 so I don’t have the rear frame clip fitted and I must admit it was a surprise at first. In reality the bike never folds while you’re riding it and I can’t imagine how it ever would.

However there was one situation in which I can sympathise. If you regularly carry your Brompton up on the steps of a railway platform or something like that you might not want to fully fold it every time you do this. You can carry it with just the back end dangling, but it does look a bit weird. Also if you have luggage on the rear rack then you would want the bike to remain rigid while you carry it up and down steps. For this reason Brompton introduced the rear frame clip so that when the bike is put into the unfolded position the bike stays in that position. When you want to fold the bike it is just a matter of pushing the release lever on the clip and then you are done.

If you have an older Brompton bike and would like to have the rear frame clip you can buy it quite cheaply from suppliers such as SJS Cycles and retrofit it to any Brompton. There is a good video on YouTube by Brompton’s ‘bloke with a beard’, which shows you step-by-step how to retrofit the rear frame clip.

**Which Brompton Bicycle is best for you?**

**How did I choose my Brompton?**

I bought my Brompton from Ebay in 2012. I had done a fair amount of research on the Internet, but I had not ridden a Brompton bike at all. This meant I was pretty much in the dark about what I was getting into so hopefully by reading this document you will be able to make some shortcuts in your own research.

The most important thing for me was the number of gears; I wanted as many as possible on my bike so I started looking out for six speed models. Beyond the amount of gears nothing else much mattered, I don’t ride much at night so lights were fairly unimportant. I don’t usually have to carry much luggage either so I wasn’t too worried about any luggage options the bike came with either.

Handlebar style was one thing I became obsessed with for a while; I’ll explain all the different handlebar styles later, when the differences will become apparent. For the moment I will just mention the classic M style ones and the newer P style ones that were introduced around 2009. When I started looking into buying a Brompton bicycle the newer P style handlebars that look a bit like a figure of 8 had just come out so they were the ones I wanted, but really the standard M style ones were all I needed for a normal height bloke like me.
As far as weight was concerned, I would have loved to buy a Brompton with the titanium parts, but with a budget of £650 maximum that just wasn’t going to happen. I figured that the difference between the lightest and the heaviest non-titanium Brompton bicycles is only down to the amount of extras, so I would just take whatever I got. So beyond wanting a six speed bike, I let my Brompton bicycle choose me rather than the other way round.

I had a few searches set up in Ebay, the main one being ‘Brompton 6’ so that I could catch almost any six speed Brompton auction going on. I also used a few misspellings like ‘Bromton 6’ and ‘Brampton 6’. I didn’t use any software sniping tools to win the auction, I just bid in the last 30 seconds for £5.01 more than the current price. That got me a 2009 Brompton M6R for something like £615.01, I can’t remember the exact figure.

My Brompton M6R is not particularly light, but it does have mudguards, lights and a rack. It also has six gears, which to be honest I probably do not need. Although I live in an extremely mountainous place, the French Alps to be precise, I quickly discovered after buying my Brompton bike that six gears don’t give you a much larger range than a Brompton with three gears. In fact what I should have opted for was a three speed Brompton, but with a smaller chainwheel, to give an overall lower gear range. Having said that I find that I use all six gears much of the time, but do I use them just because they are there?

My personal opinion is that if you live in a hilly place and you can afford to buy a six speed Brompton then go ahead and do so. If you can only stretch to a three speed, choose a three speed but have the overall ratio lowered. To understand my reasoning we need to have a look at the Brompton gearing system.

**The Brompton Gearing System**

Brompton bicycles are available in 1, 2, 3 and 6 speed models. As with all bikes there is a trade off between weight and features, so the choice of gearing is an important one.

**Single Speed Brompton Bicycles**

All Brompton bikes have just a single chainwheel at the front. The rather rare single speed Brompton has just one sprocket on the rear wheel, any choice of gear ratio will need to be done before the purchase of the bike, by selecting the appropriate chain wheel and rear sprocket. You can always distinguish the single speed Bromptons by the number 1 in their model number, for example the Brompton S1E-X.

Because of the lack of extra mechanical gear parts, the lightest S Type handlebars and the titanium parts, the single speed Brompton S1E-X is the lightest Brompton available today.

**Two Speed Brompton Bicycles**

Next up are the two speed Brompton bicycles, which are the most common of the lightweight and ultralight models. In this case there are two sprockets on the rear wheel with a small derailleur gear system. For most people living in towns and cities where the terrain is quite flat the two speed Brompton is perfectly adequate. Models available as two speed bicycles include the most popular lightweight Brompton, the S2L-X, with its titanium parts.
Three Speed Brompton Bikes
For everyday use the favoured Brompton is the one with three speeds. The classic Brompton bike is the M3L, which has been in production for a long time. I believe it is still the U.K.’s bestselling Brompton.

The M3L’s three gears are provided by a Sturmey Archer hub gear. This is the same product that was used on the Moulton bikes back in the 70s. I remember my brother having a Moulton Maxi that actually had a rather advanced four-speed Sturmey Archer type of gear, whereas most other bikes at the time only had the three speed hub. I’m guessing that the more popular three speed hub was a more reliable unit and this is indeed the one that Brompton chose to use.

Amongst road bike enthusiasts the derailleur gear is almost always preferred over any type of hub or internal gear, so why did Brompton choose to do this? The answer to that I believe is mainly down to the compact size of the Sturmey Archer hub gear and also because this helps to make the design of the Brompton folding mechanism simpler. Brompton actually use an updated version of the classic Sturmey Archer hub gear which is contained in an alloy shell. The result of this is a reliable gear mechanism with three evenly spaced gears. The spacing between gears is actually quite wide, more than I have encountered with any kind of derailleur gear. Changing gear is simple and smooth and the three speed Bromptons are a popular choice for most cyclists.

Six Speed Brompton Bikes
Six speed Brompton bikes are made by combining the two systems mentioned above. There are two sprockets at the rear with the derailleur gear system in addition to the three speed Sturmey Archer hub gear. I had initially thought that the derailleur gear would give a very high and very low overall range to the three speed hub gear, but in actual fact this is not the case. The three speed hub gear provides the wide range of gears and the double sprocket derailleur gear provides a half step in between them, so in actual fact you only get one more gear outside the range of the normal three speed Brompton. Depending on the ratios you have chosen initially this can either be a higher gear or a lower gear.

The Brompton Handlebars
There are four different kinds of Brompton handlebars. Each set of handlebars is characterised by its model number S, M, H or P and indeed this letter sets the first letter of the model of the bike, for example my M6R has the M type handlebars. So let’s have a look at the four different kinds of handlebars.

M type handlebars
The M type handlebars are the classic gull-wing shaped handlebars that have been seen on Brompton bikes right from the very start of their production. They give a fairly upright riding position, which I personally like. After riding motorbikes and mountain bikes for many years I find it quite refreshing to be a bit more upright and have a look at the countryside as I go along. It’s fair to say that they are probably not the ideal handlebar for getting down really low when you are descending a mountain pass, but that’s not really what the Brompton is all about. To me this is the classic Brompton handlebar that gives the bicycle its stylish looks.
S type handlebars

The S type handlebars are not the most common handlebars seen on the Brompton bike, but they are the lightest ones and are consequently used on all the Brompton superlight bikes. Brompton seem to think that the S type handlebars make the prettiest Brompton bike but I’m not quite sure, for me the M type handlebar gives the Brompton bike its classic looks. The S type handlebars are quite a bit lower than the M type handlebars and they are slightly further forward too. For the smaller rider or someone who prefers a sporty stance the S type handlebars might be the ones to go for. Because of the lower profile of bikes with the S type handlebars it is worth noting that it does limit the options for carrying luggage on the front. Brompton's own C Bag, T Bag and Folding Basket cannot be used on bikes with this type of handlebar.

H type handlebars

The H type handlebars were introduced by Brompton in 2012 and are designed for people who prefer a very upright riding position or for tall people. There is no height adjustment for the handlebars on the Brompton bike, so handlebar choice is always very important. For tall people the H type handlebars combined with a telescopic seat post is the best combination.

P type handlebars

The P type handlebars were introduced a few years ago and were obviously influenced by handlebars seen on many touring bikes. The idea is that you have both a high and a low position so that you can choose a low riding position for going very fast or a more upright position for around town. These types of handlebars are most popular with people using Bromptons for touring as it is always good to change position every now and again to avoid getting a stiff back, arms and wrists. The P type handlebars are the heaviest ones in the range but will definitely appeal to some people as the preferable handlebar.

Mudguards and racks

The combination of mudguards and racks determines the letter in the Brompton bikes name that comes after the number (which is the number of gears) and the versions are E, L and R. Which very simply just mean E for no mudguards or rack, L for mudguards and no rack and R for mudguards and a rack. Once again this is a decision you need to make carefully as there is a trade-off between weight and features. Having no mudguards makes the bike look pretty good, but it wouldn't be so good if you live somewhere like England; if you live in California this might be a different matter. If you intend to use your Brompton in bad weather I would definitely suggest getting one with mudguards. Having a rack on the rear of the bike is useful and I do have one on mine, but so far I've never used it, I tend to prefer to have a small bag on my back although this is not always a good idea if you are covering long distances. I do like how when the bike is folded the rack becomes the base of the folded bike.
**The Brompton frame**

Some people are surprised that steel is used for the Brompton frame. The trend in most other bikes these days is to use lightweight alloys and aluminium, but Brompton prefer to use steel. So why is this? Brompton choose to make their frames out of steel because it is very strong and give superior handling. Because the actual Brompton frame is quite small, the extra weight of the steel frame is not that much. For the superlight range of Brompton bicycles only the extremities of the frame are made from a high strength titanium alloy. The titanium parts are the seat post, front forks and the rear triangle.

**All Steel Brompton Bike Frames**

For Brompton steel frame bikes you can choose the standard colours of black, white, cobalt blue and orange for the standard price. There is an extra surcharge of £30 if you want to choose any other colours and there are some beautiful ones for the more image conscious cyclist.

There is also an extraordinary raw lacquer colour, which Brompton charge a whopping £110 for. I can’t really see much point in the raw lacquer especially when the standard colours look so good. However if you were really into metalwork at school (or whatever they call it these days) you might remember the skill you needed to have to make a beautiful smooth brazed joint. Do you remember that lovely feeling when you got your steel joint prepared with wire wool and emery cloth, brushed the Borax flux into the joint, found the hottest part of the gas air flame (the top of the blue cone), heated the joint to the perfect temperature and then ran the brazing rod into the joint? Hopefully you would create the perfect brazed joint, something to look at and admire. Well I guess this was the aim of Brompton with the raw lacquer finish as you can see all the gorgeous brazed joints, not for everyone I guess, but I can see the appeal.

Here’s what Brompton have to say about brazing from their website:

“*The Brompton is brazed rather than the more common practice of welding. Brazing is a highly-skilled and labour-intensive method which introduces less heat to the metal than welding: this maintains a stronger frame with less distortion. This enables Brompton to continue to use high tensile steel alloys which deliver the rigid frame that is at the heart of Brompton’s quality ride and longevity.*

*The Brazing department typifies Brompton’s hand-built approach: although a machine brazes the joints around the hinges, most of the joins on the bikes are brazed by hand, and each Brompton frame part can be traced to the brazer who made it.*”

My Brompton is black, but I would be just as happy if it was white and I do think there is something rather special about the orange ones.

**Brompton Titanium Bike Frames**

The titanium bikes always have the suffix on their model number of -X. You can tell at a glance if a bike is -X bike as the Brompton logo on the frame is oval shaped. The ultra light Brompton bicycles are significantly more expensive than the standard steel ones, so it is entirely up to you to decide if you think the extra money is worth it. It is worth noting that the titanium Bromptons do still have a steel frame, it is just the rear triangle, forks and seat post that are titanium.
I read recently in a Brompton Forum where someone was saying they were happy to pay an extra £600 to save 1kg of weight, another rather cheeky commenter said that it would be much cheaper just to eat less and make yourself 1kg lighter - I am inclined to agree with that. The titanium parts of a superlight Brompton are not painted and so there are no colour options for these parts.

**Brompton Seat Posts**

There are three different kinds of seat posts available on the Brompton bikes, the standard seat pillar, the extended seat pillar and the telescopic steel pillar. For the taller rider the extended seat pillar gives them an extra 6 cm height and Brompton are quite happy to provide this seat post in place of the standard seat pillar at no extra cost. For the very tall rider there is the telescopic seat pillar which can give 17.5 cm of extra height. In addition to these three different kinds of seat post there is also a lightweight titanium option for the Brompton ultra light bikes.

**Brompton saddles**

The standard Brompton saddle is a unisex design specifically made for Brompton bikes. There is a moulded grip underneath the nose of the saddle to make carrying the bike easier. However I always carry my bike by holding the frame. For those who want to splash out on a more expensive saddle the Brooks B17 saddle is available in both men's and lady's versions. This is a traditional leather saddle that will give years of comfortable riding and over time will mould itself to the shape of the rider.

I have a Brompton Vitesse Fi'z:k saddle on mine that I am perfectly happy with. It has got a little scuffed where the bike was carried in the back of a box trailer, but I can live with that. It is worth noting that any saddle can be fitted to a Brompton providing it has rails (most saddles do). However to fit a rail saddle to the Brompton seat post you will need the Penta-Clip. At the time of writing the Penta-Clip can be bought separately for £22 from SJS cycles or they sometimes include it with other saddles for about an extra £15. There is a tiny, but sometimes significant, bonus with the Penta clip in that if you need some extra height by turning the Penta clip upside down you can get an extra couple of centimetres saddle height.

If you find the position of the saddle too far back you can buy an optional saddle adapter pin that allows you to move the saddle four centimetres further forward. There are actually two different ways to mount the saddle adapter pin, I have just described the pointing down position but you can also mount it in the pointing up position which makes a saddle 30 mm higher and slightly more forward.

**Brompton tyres**

The Brompton standard tyres are made with Kevlar under the tread, which almost eliminates punctures. These are the tyres that I use and I've never had a puncture so far. For a little bit more money you can have the Schwalbe Marathon tyres that are a bit heavier than Brompton tyres and a bit slower too. The plus side is that they are more durable and more solid than the standard Brompton tyres.

The Schwalbe Kojak tyres are the most expensive ones and these are the fastest tyres one can fit to a Brompton. Thanks to the RaceGuard strip they are very puncture resistant. The interesting feature of these tyres is that the bead of the tyre (that’s the part of the tyre that sits in the rim of the wheel)
is made from a Kevlar hoop rather than steel wire, which means the tyre can be folded, should you need to carry a spare. It also saves something like 50g in weight over a normal tyre.

**Brompton lighting**

The cheapest way of fitting lights on to your bike is to buy a set of LED lights that clip onto the frame. I don’t really see much point, but if you like you can buy the Brompton ones that are about £30. When I bought my Brompton second-hand it came with some Smart LED lights that seemed to do the job as well as anything else. You can now buy LED bike lights from shops like Wilkinson’s for about £10. With modern LED technology the battery life is pretty good and I’m quite happy with my lights.

However if you do a lot of riding at night, you might want to consider one of the dynamo options. For an extra £85 you can have Shimano hub dynamo lighting with a halogen lamp at the front. For an unbelievable extra £320 you can have SON hub dynamo lighting with an LED front lamp and an automatic light sensing function. Both of these dynamo options have the dynamo hub in the front wheel and they both have a stand light function which means that your lights won’t go off when you’re waiting at a junction. For the amount of money I spend on batteries I could never justify the price of dynamo lighting, but as I don’t do much night riding that’s not really an issue for me.

When you attach your own lights to a Brompton the clever thing is that when the bike is folded there are no lights sticking out to get damaged.

**Brompton Accessories**

**Brompton luggage**

If your Brompton bicycle has a rack on the rear there are various bags that you can buy to fit on the rack. If you would rather mount your luggage on the front of the bike there is a wide range of luggage options ranging from a simple folding basket to high quality designer leather luggage systems. As with most Brompton accessories you could either buy your luggage items directly from Brompton themselves, in which case you can be sure of high quality and high price to match, or you could have a look on eBay and see what else is available. The descriptions below are taken from the Brompton instruction manual.

**The Cloth Pannier**

This is a handy and practical holdall made from tough waterproof polyester fabric. The main compartment has a divider for keeping papers separated from other articles. At the back there are two pockets for items such as tools, maps etc. Total capacity is 22 litres. All the compartments have zip fasteners.

**Touring pannier**

With considerably more capacity than the cloth pannier, this has a roll-top system with nylon clips for closing. Like the cloth pannier, there are two pockets at the back, and a divider inside. In addition there are three elasticated net pockets around the outside, where you can put things that you may need during your ride. Total internal capacity approx 28 litres.
**Folding basket**
Using the same material as the panniers, this provides a large, open-top container, ideal for shopping. Mounted on the bike, the shape is maintained by virtue of a simple bracing frame, which folds flat for storage. Drainage holes are provided in case of rain. When used separately from the bike, it has the characteristics of being part bag/part basket and you have to take a little care when stowing goods if you want it to stand up properly. Capacity is 24 litres.

**Rainproof cover**
Though the material on the Brompton luggage items are PVC coated, leakage is possible during prolonged rain through zips or seams. The Brompton rainproof cover gives complete protection against rain, with an elasticated hem to keep it in place. Its colour is a highly visible, bright yellow.

When not in use, it takes up next to no space.

When luggage is mounted on the front of the bike you will need a front carrier block and clip to attach it properly. If your Brompton bicycle doesn't have one of these you can get one quite cheaply from Evans Cycles or SJS Cycles. At the time of writing the Brompton front carrier block and clip is £15 from Evans cycles. This is actually a really good system because with the luggage items attached to the bike frame, not the handlebars or forks, there is no adverse effect on the handling of the bike. Also, like most Brompton accessories, the carrier block does not project from the bike when it is folded.

Although I don't have the front carrier block on my bike at the moment, I'm quite tempted by a rack bag that always seems to be available on eBay. It comes from Turkey and there is no delivery charge to Europe. The name of the seller is dieselheaters4u.

**Transporting your Brompton**
For most people the whole reason they bought the Brompton bike is so that they can fold it and take it with them either on public transport or in the back of their car. If you are just jumping on a train or bus you can easily fold your bike and take it on as it is. Apparently some train operators in the UK prefer that the bike has a cover, but I'm not sure how much they enforce this.

**Soft Bags for Brompton Bikes**
I tend to carry my Brompton around in the back of my car so that I can use free out-of-town car parks and then cycle into town to do whatever I have to do. Also if you drive somewhere nice and just fancy a ride, then your bike is right there ready for you to use. I have however found that a loose Brompton in the back of a car does tend to slide around about a bit. This could damage the bike, or your car, or both.

So I decided to buy a bag to keep my Brompton in. I went to my favourite eBay seller who are dieselheaters4u and bought their handmade Brompton bag. Once again it came from Turkey, so it took a few weeks to get here, but the postage was free. The price of the bag was £69.99. The Brompton equivalent is the Brompton B Bag, which looks pretty similar, except it has wheels. I believe the current price of this bag is about £135. Both the Brompton B Bag and my own handmade Brompton bag can be used to transport your bike on aeroplanes too.
**Brompton Solid Cases**

If you are really worried about your bike getting bashed about by the luggage handlers you could opt for one of the solid flight cases that are available, but the problem there is that once you get to the airport you will have to carry that flight case around on your bike - not easy. With my soft bag I can take hand luggage plus my Brompton in its bag on a plane. Once I have reached my destination I can take the bike out of the bag, unfold it and put my hand luggage into the Brompton bag. It's not perfect but I can at least ride to my hotel on my bike. Providing my hand luggage isn't too large I can always bungee all that to the rear rack too.

There are some pretty good videos on YouTube by NYCe Wheels that demonstrate the bags that are available from Brompton. One particularly good tip is from Peter (also with a beard) from NYCe Wheels who suggests that if you're travelling by air with a soft Brompton case it is worth removing the hinge clamps and storing them separately for the journey. Apparently some clients have reported the clamps becoming bent or even broken after air travel. Removing the clamps will take you an extra 30 seconds or so, but I reckon it's well worth doing to keep the bike working properly.

**Chubby Trailers**

If you haven't heard of Chubby trailers then go and take a look at some videos on YouTube by Radical Designs, they really are brilliant. The important point about the Chubby Trailer is that the wheels can be attached in two different positions either at the end of the trailer or in the centre of the trailer. The Chubby trailer can be used as a trailer for your Brompton bicycle or as an item of luggage with wheels.

The wheels on the Chubby trailer detach very simply and are stored inside the trailer bag. So the idea is that when you arrive at an airport you check-in the Chubby trailer with your Brompton inside it and also the wheels of the Chubby trailer. At the other end you can take out the wheels from the Chubby trailer and attach them onto the rear end of the trailer so that you can use it as wheeled luggage. This is brilliant if you have a long way to go from the aircraft to the exterior of the airport.

Once outside the airport you simply move the wheels to their second position, which is a more central balanced position on the Chubby bag, take your Brompton out of the bag and attach the trailer. At this point you can put your hand luggage inside the Chubby trailer and you have a complete transport system for going wherever you want.

Furthermore if you are picking somebody up from the airport you can cycle over there with a spare Brompton in the Chubby trailer, which they can then use to ride back with you, whilst putting their hand luggage into the Chubby trailer bag. This all may sound quite bizarre, but go check out the videos on YouTube ... you will love them!
The Chubby trailers are designed specifically for carrying folding bikes, in particular the Brompton and the Airnimal. In the case of the Brompton there is a tiny little tow hitch that needs to be attached to one end of the bike’s rear wheel axle. This is very neat and seems to be secure, yet easily detachable.

**The Burley Travoy Trailer**

Burley is the company that make those trailers you see people towing their children around in. I used one once when I hired a bike plus trailer to ride the most excellent Camel Trail in North Cornwall. They tow very well and the extra effort needed isn’t that noticeable. My youngest daughter was about 1 year old at the time and she even managed to merrily fall asleep on the journey back from Wadebridge to Padstow, despite the trail being quite bumpy in places.

Burley now make a trailer called the Burley Travoy that is becoming quite popular with Brompton riders. It looks a bit like a golf caddy and attaches via its special hinge to your Brompton’s seat post. The Travoy trailer is not specifically made for Brompton bicycles, but it does seem to work very well as a trailer. I haven’t quite worked out why the Brompton crowd like the Burley Travoy so much, as it is not designed to transport a Brompton like the Chubby Trailer is.

**Customizing your Brompton**

**Changing the gearing of your Brompton**

In my experience I have never had a bike without a high enough gear but I have had plenty where the lowest gear is not low enough. This is probably because I have either lived in rural Wales or the French Alps where the terrain can get a bit hilly. For this reason I am interested in lowering the overall ratio of my gears. As I said before I could probably get away with three gears but I do need a lower first gear. There aren’t many situations where I find myself in top gear, having to pedal hard down the mountain; this happens with my mountain bike and my road bike but not the Brompton.

If you decide to change the gearing on your Brompton do be aware that the chain may have to have some links removed or possibly added. When we refer to the length of the chain we use the number of links followed by the letter L. So for example the shortest chain you will ever use on a Brompton is the 96L chain and the longest you will ever use is the 104L.

**Bromptons without the derailleur gears**

When we talk about the size of a chainwheel or sprocket we refer to the number of teeth, suffixed with the letter T. Your choice of chainwheel is either 50T or 44T and most Brompton bicycles are shipped with the 50T chainwheel. The rear sprocket can either be 13T or 14T.

So your gear possibilities and chain lengths are:

- 50T/13T/98L
- 44T/13T/96L
- 44T/14T/96L

**Bromptons with derailleur gears**

For these Brompton bicycles your choice of chain wheel is 54T, 50T and 44T and your choice of rear sprockets is 13T, 14T, 15T and 16T.
So your gear possibilities and chain lengths are:

54T/16T/104L  
50T/15T/100L  
44T/15T/98L  

(The rear sprocket size given is that of the larger, inner sprocket).

As you can see here, the option I will be going for ultimately will be the latter 44T/15T/98L configuration with a 1ST/14T pair of sprockets on the rear. This will give the lowest gearing that Brompton recommend.

The easiest way of changing your gears quickly is to change the chainwheel. This is what I intend to do with mine. I'm going to swap the 50T chainwheel for the 44T chainwheel. However I'm not going to do this just yet as my chain and sprockets and chainwheel are all in pretty good nick, so it makes sense to get some use out of them first and I'll change the gearing when the chain needs replacing. For anybody with reasonable mechanical knowledge and know-how doing the work yourself shouldn't be too difficult especially if you're just opting to change the front chainwheel.

Replacing the rear sprockets is going to be slightly harder as even removing the back wheel is a bit involved. However once the back wheel is off the sprockets are easy to change as they are just held on with a circlip. So the only special tools you need are a pair of circlip pliers, but even if you haven't got those you can usually open up the circlip with a small screwdriver.

Any Brompton dealer will be happy to do the work for you at a reasonable cost and you could probably include this as part of your next bike service. If you are changing chainwheels and rear sprockets I would always recommend changing the chain at the same time as a worn chain can quickly damage the teeth on the gears. If you have ever seen the teeth on your cogs turn into shark fin shapes this is exactly what has happened.
If you have a look on Flickr.com there is a wonderful group called ‘Pimp My Brompton’ which contains some excellent photos of Brompton Bicycles that have had radical paint jobs, chrome and brass parts and quite advanced mechanical modifications. For example the set of photos that belong to Nwben feature this gorgeous Brompton with many chrome parts and a front derailleur gear with a double chainwheel. ‘Pimp My Brompton’ is a great group of fanatical Brompton owners who strive to make their bikes stand out from the crowd, by combining artistic ability with outstanding mechanical craftsmanship to produce some of the most beautiful bikes on the planet.

Conclusion
If you love the idea of owning a Brompton bicycle but think you may not be able to afford one, do what I did and set up some searches with alerts on Ebay like I described earlier and try and grab yourself a used bargain. Try to think laterally to get access to bikes that no one else will see. Think how some ‘non expert’ sellers might try and advertise used Brompton bikes, quite often they will put their listings together very badly. Remember to always think about spelling mistakes they might make too, this will be their loss and your gain. For example someone advertising a ‘Three Speed Bromton Bike’ may be selling a mint condition M3L, but someone searching for ‘Brompton M3L’ will never find this listing.
If you cannot find a Brompton that is cheap enough have a look at the Tern folding bike range that are quite often available heavily discounted at websites such as Evans Cycles. Quite often if you are prepared to buy last year’s model you can save quite a big chunk of money.

Hopefully by reading this document you have become a bit more enlightened about Brompton bicycles and understand more than I did when I bought my Brompton in 2012. If you can think of anything that I have not covered and you would like me to add it to this document, just let me know and I will see that it is included in the next revision.

Happy riding!

Rick Lomas

FoldingBikeGuide.co.uk