

## Use Straps the Right Way to Secure Your Boat on a Roof Rack

While driving on the Interstate near Portland, Maine, a few weeks ago, we watched two full-length sea kayaks fly off the roof of a car traveling in the opposite direction. It appeared that they didn't hit any other vehicles, but the car that was carrying them probably got a little banged up -- to say nothing of the boats themselves.

There's no reason for this to ever happen. Canoes and kayaks can be reliably secured to a roof rack with rope or canoe straps, also known as cam-buckle straps or [NRS straps](#). Both have pros and cons, but straps are easier to learn than knot tying, so we'll focus on them here. A pair of straps costs about \$12 -- a small price to protect your car, your boat, and the drivers behind you on the highway.

A minimum of two straps is required -- one around each of the roof rack's cross bars (or around the side rails right next to the cross bars).



Step 1. The boat is on the roof rack. Hold the buckle in one hand and throw the rest of the strap over the boat to the opposite side. Do NOT throw the buckle over the car.



Step 1 completed. The buckle hangs down; the rest of the strap is on the opposite side.



Step 2. On the opposite side of the car, pass the loose end of the strap under the rack's cross bar or side rail. Gather it up and throw it back over the boat to the first side.



Step 2 completed. When you throw the strap over the second time, make sure it doesn't cross over the first section.



Step 3. Back on the first side, pass the strap under the cross bar or side rail. If the strap went from back to front under the cross bar on side 2, pass it from front to back on side 1 (or vice versa). You want to end up with the tail end of the strap heading up toward the buckle with the strap not crossing over itself at any point.



Step 4. With one hand, open the buckle by pressing the lever on the locking cam. With the other hand, pass the end of the strap *from back to front*.



Step 5. Pull all the slack through the buckle and tighten. With most canoes, you can haul down really hard and not damage anything. If you're strapping a polyethylene kayak onto straight cross bars without kayak saddles, you'll want to use padding the cross bars and tighten with some discretion, because you can easily deform the boat (especially if the day is hot and sunny).



Step 6 (optional but recommended). Tie a simple overhand knot with the end of the strap around the part of the strap leading up to the buckle. Should the buckle slip (unlikely, if you've done it right), this will give the buckle a chance to regrab the strap before things get too loose.

There are probably a dozen ways to deal with the excess length of strap, including wrapping it around the cross bar, tying a series of knots, and simply closing it in the door of the car. We'll look at some of these in a future post.

In addition to strapping the canoe, kayak, raft or stand up paddleboard to the roof rack, it is often advisable to attach a line from the bow of the boat to a point forward on the vehicle, and possibly another from the stern to a point at the back of the vehicle. We'll address this too in another post. But the two straps around the cross bars are by far the most important. Do this right, and you're 97.5% of the way toward ensuring that your boat will stay safely on your vehicle.

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