







Six of the best Folding bikes

Matt Seaton goes for a spin with Andrea Casalotti and Therese Bjorn of Velorution bicycle shop

	What the makers say	Good points	Bad points	Marks out of 10	Verdict
Dahon Mu XL £800 dahon.com	"The Mu XL has just about everything you would want on a city bike, including plush suspension, lighting, luggage capacity, and style to spare. If you're looking for the ultimate luxury city bike, the Mu XL is your bike."	The Mu folds down to a size that nearly matches the Brompton (see below), while offering a much nipper ride. "The Mu," says Therese, "is much sportier." Shimano's 8-speed Nexus hub gear is a superb piece of kit, giving beautifully crisp, smooth changes.	Apart from the cost (and the rack and mudguards etc come as extras), there really isn't a downside. Fans of origami might cavil that the Mu falls short of the Brompton's folding genius, but only just – and the ride is vastly superior.	9 	If you like the way-out design of the Strida (below), you should appreciate the single arc of aluminium that forms the Mu's spine. And it rides as well as it looks: handling is quick but stable. It feels a lot lighter to pick up than the advertised 12kg (26.5lb).
Airnimal Joey £700 airnimal.com	"A versatile bike that has sporty performance, but is also easy to fit into a modern lifestyle where space and time are often at a premium. Three minutes and it is in a suitcase ready to be checked in for airline travel."	With narrow tyres on 24-inch wheels, the Joey gives the closest thing to a racing-bike performance in the folding-bike fraternity. The ride is superb and the straight aluminium-tube frame gives the bike good rigidity. Quality components give crisp, positive control for braking and gear-shifting.	The advertised three minutes to break it down is about right. The high-performance ride therefore comes at the cost of convenience and practicality. The 16-gear derailleur system will need more TLC than the hub gears found on some of the high-end competition.	8 	The Joey is fast and fun – and corners better than any of the rest. But laborious folding makes it more suitable for the frequent flier than the daily commuter. Last word to Therese: "Maybe if you rode it, you would just forget about the train and ride all the way."
Birdy £1,000 birdybike.com	"The Birdy bike, designed in Germany by two young engineers, Markus Riese and Heiko Müller, is a revolutionary fully suspended folding bicycle. Furthermore, the Birdy folds in 15 seconds. And it's lightweight – from 23.4lb (10.6kg) – making the Birdy easy to carry and stow."	Front and rear suspension gives a comfortable, sophisticated ride. The model tested came fitted with the excellent Shimano Nexus hub (see also the Dahon Mu). With three hinges, folding was reasonably straightforward and resulted in a pretty compact package.	Though the build quality is excellent, it feels heavy to carry and ride. The riding position is close to the Brompton's, which may be too upright for some (but a plus for others). Folding takes 20-30 seconds even when practised – some way off the Brompton's speed. Then there's the price...	7 	"It feels more expensive when you're on it," says Andrea. It gives a smooth ride, but it lacks zip. Almost over-engineered, it is heavy to carry. It feels worthy, and the top-notch German design comes at a premium.
Dahon Jack £350 dahon.com	"We designed the Jack around a beefy 7005 aluminium frame and fat Schwalbe Big Apple tyres. The custom SRAM drivetrain has only seven speeds to keep things simple, but enough gears for almost anything you're likely to encounter in the city."	Styled like a mountain bike, with 26-inch wheels, it has just one hinge, and basically folds in half. Thus very quick to disassemble and reassemble: certainly the quickest tested, at 5-10 seconds. Looks and feels close to a normal bike.	There are no frills on the Jack: mudguards, lights and rack would all be after-sale extras. If you like the concept, it may be worth paying £80 more for the higher-spec Cadenza. The big wheels and single hinge leave you with a pretty bulky item.	6 	A decent bike at a good price. Folding bikes can make you look like a nutty professor, but on the Jack you look as though you're riding a normal bike. As a consequence, the big question is whether it folds enough. "But if you just want to put it in the boot of a car," says Therese, "then it works well."
Brompton, M-type £706 as tested (basic model from £500) bromptonbicycle.co.uk	"The Brompton is an elegantly designed machine, with a full-size frame. There are various models, but all share the ingenious Brompton frame geometry, and fold into the same small package, little larger than its wheels. Folding is simple: it takes just 10 or 20 seconds."	"It is the most intuitive to fold," says Andrea. It takes seconds, which means it is very convenient for the train commuter. Overall, a solid, well put-together feel. "Bromptons really hold their value," says Therese. "You see them on eBay for £400 secondhand."	Brompton is London's only surviving bike-manufacturer – but being relatively small-scale, there can be an eight-week delay in supply. The very upright stance may not suit everyone and, at 13kg (28.6lb) it's heavy. Steering is slow and wobbly and the brakes are low-spec for the price.	5 	The Brompton has long been the benchmark folding bike, turning quickly and easily into a package small enough, says Therese, "to fit under your desk". That said, it is showing its age: it's heavy, and ride quality is well behind the competition.
The Strida £330 strida.co.uk	"Leading edge design, ultra-portable fold-up bike, rustproof, only 22lb (10kg), folds in seconds to fit in small places."	It folds as fast as it says on the packet. The belt drive means you will never get black grease marks on your trousers. The A-frame design is innovative and eye-catching. It feels relatively light and wieldy. Mudguards and a small luggage rack are standard, and the hub brakes are effective. Strida offers a 60-day trial on its website.	The wheels are even smaller than the Brompton's, which doesn't help stability. Saddle height adjustment is limited, which may put off taller riders. It has one gear, which limits top speed to about 10mph. It is not a bike you would choose to ride for journeys of more than 15-20 minutes.	4 	The surprise is that it rides nicely for such a weird-looking machine. It is slow, but pleasant, and the price is competitive. Not everyone will be won over by the design but the biggest minus is that it doesn't fold very small – the long package is meant to be wheeled like a trolley.