

# 5 of the best... Camera supports

This month **Judy Armstrong** tries out some compact and versatile alternatives to a trusted tripod

**W**hen the weight and bulk of a tripod is inconvenient, outdoor photographers are obliged to think laterally. We need to find lightweight, compact methods of stabilising a camera – whether for slow shutter speeds, night

photography or remote release. A bean bag is the conventional option and certainly the best bet for heavier equipment, but for fast-and-light workers they can still be overly weighty.

As non-pro cameras become smaller and lighter in the form of DSLR, bridge or compact, so alternatives to tripods are increasing.

## TOP TIPS

- » Check your equipment does not exceed the support's stated maximum load. A support that wobbles or collapses is useless.
- » On many supports, the placement for the tripod screw is adjustable. If not, identify the location of your camera's tripod thread and ensure it matches the mount.
- » Supports are useful to stabilise cameras for night shots, panning, or slow-release images. If you want to use remote release, be sure your tripod-replacement can be self-supporting.



## 1 MANFROTTO Pocket Support

£29.95

This is a neat device, sturdily made and suitable for lightweight cameras with short lenses, such as compact and bridge systems. It is, in effect, a miniature tripod that can be left connected to the camera. A standard 1/4in screw locates in one of three slots, secured in the correct position by a tiny, detachable screwdriver head.

Three rubberised legs (35mm long) fold in or out on semi-stiff springs but don't lock into place. While they can balance on uneven surfaces, they can't resist much load or pressure, and can't be adjusted for length. I'm unconvinced by the maximum load claim: with a DSLR with lens (weight 1.15kg) the support legs folded as soon as they went off vertical. With my Olympus XZ-1 (300g), however, it was solid. The slim-line support can be left attached to the camera. A little red bag is supplied for storage, so it can be easily found in a dark camera bag.

### THE LOWDOWN

**Materials** Zamak (zinc-based alloy)  
**Weight** 75g  
**Maximum load** 1.5kg  
**Best for** Fast and light trips with small cameras

### RATINGS

Ease of use	100%
Stability	90%
Versatility	80%
Portability	100%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>92.5%</b>



The compact Pocket Support can be left attached to the camera



**Contact** Manfrotto, [www.manfrotto.co.uk](http://www.manfrotto.co.uk), 01293 583300

## 2 HANDLEPOD

\$39.95

A three-axis rotating camera mount for horizontal or vertical composure, the HandlePod comprises a handle with four rubber-tipped feet, attached to three adjustable friction joints. These are attached to a slotted camera platform with a moveable tripod screw. The platform is like a ball-joint: it can swivel to any angle. The HandlePod can rest on its feet (legs 20mm long), be handheld or lashed to another support using shockcord, which cinches into a slot on the handle. The option of hands-free, handheld or remote image

capture provide versatility. Stability is impressive, although the short legs teamed with the narrow handle platform were less adaptable than a three-legged set-up on uneven ground. HandlePod coped well with the DSLR and small lens but won't support a pro SLR with power pack and long lens. With the compact system it was rock-solid. There's no UK importer but the American supplier is efficient.

**Contact** HandlePod, www.handlepod.com



The HandlePod's design enables hands-free, handheld and remote image capture



### THE LOWDOWN

**Materials** Polycarbonate plastic (fibreglass reinforced), cast aluminium  
**Weight** 135g  
**Maximum load** 1.2kg  
**Best for** Stabilisation for stills or video, for long exposure or self-timer

### RATINGS

Ease of use	95%
Stability	95%
Versatility	95%
Portability	95%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>95%</b>

## 3 WILDLIFE WATCHING SUPPLIES Doorstop Bean Bag

£69.64

This is one mega bean bag: a long sausage of plastic pellets in two 1.5kg sections and encased in Advantage Timber camouflage. The fabric is water resistant (proofed polycotton) and fairly grippy, so a camera resting on it won't slide off. It can be used with any size of camera, as a doughnut, a horse shoe, or doorstep style. It can also be slung over a long, tripod-supported lens to dampen any shake from the breeze or camera mechanism. Its shape can be adapted to the surroundings, camera and lens. It can be carried on your shoulder or in your hand, using its webbing strap with padding and chunky quick release buckle. Should it need lightening or re-stuffing, the internal casing is easily accessed via Velcro-secured slots. It's simple but well considered. It is also available unfilled (£36.67). Try using wild bird seed as a filler; you can also use it to tempt the wildlife closer.

**Contact** Wildlife Watching Supplies, www.wildlifewatchingsupplies.com, 01884 254191



### THE LOWDOWN

**Materials** Polycotton fabric, inert plastic pellets  
**Weight** 3kg  
**Maximum load** 25kg  
**Best for** Support for camera, lens or scope, or to weigh down a flash or reflector stand

### RATINGS

Ease of use	100%
Stability	100%
Versatility	95%
Portability	70%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>91.25%</b>

The Doorstop Bean Bag's shape can be adapted to suit its surroundings



## 4 JOBY Gorillapod SLR

£34.95

Since its launch in 2006, Gorillapod has spawned many copies but hasn't been bettered, except by itself. Since 2010, this prehensile creature has also sported a bubble level, integrated into the slim-line

camera plate. Three legs with multiple ball joints, twist to attach to virtually anything, or self-support like a tripod. The shutter is best released with a remote cable, to avoid shaking the Gorillapod. This lightweight version claims SLR in its name but can only support 800g. It couldn't cope with a Canon 450D with 28-135mm lens, although it was fine with a 'bridge' camera. It is only truly stable if the screw recess on the camera is completely flush or inset: the threaded insert on my Olympus XZ-1 protrudes from the camera base, making it unstable on the Gorillapod. To genuinely use an SLR, trade up to SLR-Zoom (up to 3kg load), or add Ballhead X (aluminium housing and all-metal ball to the Focus model (5kg load).

**Contact** Intro2020, www.intro2020.co.uk, 01628 674411



Flexible and versatile; the Gorillapod comes out on top



### TEST NOTES

- » **Weight:** from my digital scales
- » **Ratings:** based on the intended use/maximum load for each support
- » **Maximum load:** stated by manufacturer

### THE LOWDOWN

**Materials** High-grade ABS plastic, TPE grip rings, stainless steel camera screw  
**Weight** 165g  
**Maximum load** 800g  
**Best for:** Versatile support for compact or bridge; next model up required for SLR

### RATINGS

Ease of use	100%
Stability	90%
Versatility	100%
Portability	95%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>96.25 %</b>



£24.99

## 5 STEADEPOD

The pocket-friendly SteadePod is a steadying device rather than a free-standing support, and it efficiently eliminates camera shake. The palm-sized device contains a cable (1.8m long) and a plastic pad, which can be anchored by your foot or attached to a belt or even a post. It connects to the camera using a standard tripod screw, with the cable released, adjusted and locked via a small lever. With the cable at the right length the lever is firmly clicked into the 'lock' position, then a small amount of tension applied. You can pull the camera against the cable, upward or sideways,

depending on the anchor point to stabilise. I found it effective in low light and for panning moving objects. The tripod screw retracts into a casing when not attached to the camera, so it won't damage other items that you may be carrying.

SteadePod can't support the camera remotely so you can't set it up for taking long exposures or use with a remote release.

**Contact** 7Day Shop, www.7dayshop.com

### THE LOWDOWN

**Materials** Polycarbonate case, stainless steel spring and cable  
**Weight** 95g  
**Maximum load** Unlimited  
**Best for** Handheld stabilising for stills and video

### RATINGS

Ease of use	100%
Stability	95%
Versatility	70%
Portability	100%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>91.25%</b>



The SteadePod helps to eliminate camera shake

BEST IN TEST