4 mapboards for MTBO

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A mapboard is pretty much an essential item for MTBO. I have seen a few people compete without one, but to be able to read the map and plan your course as you ride is crucial for a clean ride.

When I first started MTBO, like many others, I used a homemade board as investing good money on a plastic rotating thingy seemed a bit over the top. I didn't mind carting along heavy clamps and bits of plywood but eventually, after a few failures, I was swayed by lighter and better made mapboard alternatives.

The first Silva mapboards that you could buy clipped on to your handle bars in seconds, which was great, but they wobbled a bit and with time the plastic clips or board broke.

Later, some of our Australian team reps brought home the Miry mapboard which is made in the Czech Republic, and this seemed like a big advance in design. The Miry featured a large support ring which gave the board a much more stable platform to read your map from.

In this article, we look at four boards that are in the market place now. Three of them are manufactured in Europe and one is made here in Australia. They are all of a similar basic design in that they offer 360 degree rotation via a large ring turntable, have a clear plastic cover, and clamps to the handle bars. They all achieve their primary function in offering a waterproof, stable platform and give you an equal chance of reading your map successfully. As such, I am not going to rate them all and tell you which board I think you should buy, as any of them will do the job well. Where they differ is in the finer details which I will try to point out and let you decide which you may prefer.

Fitting your mapboard

One of my pet hates at MTBO events is fitting the mapboard to my bike. The earlier boards featured clamps with two allen head bolts on each side – four bolts to attach – and these you had to do from underneath! Hence you were always dropping bolts or the top of the clamp, usually in rough grass, as you rush to get ready at events. Added to my dislike was the fact I used to have a number of family bikes to mount boards to, but thankfully, I only have to look after my own these days – they're old enough to do their own!

The next development in boards was the hinged clamp so that there is now only one bolt on each side to do up and most manufacturers have redesigned their clamp so that the bolt goes in from the top. Ahhh... no more scrabbling under the bars and through the brake cables to tighten it up.

So you can see that the ease of attaching the board is of great interest to me and hence I have timed myself attaching each of these boards just to let you know. Surprisingly, the longest took me only 75 seconds, so I don't know what I was complaining about, or perhaps this is an indication of how map board design has improved.

Board position

Another point of difference is the position of the board relative to your handle bars. This seems to be a personal preference. Some are closer than others, and some are higher or lower than others. I like to still be able to see the front tyre over the front edge of my board so I can see what I'm doing on more technical riding and so prefer a board not set forward very much like the PilotOne and Miry. I have measured "set forward" distance for each board. This was done by measuring a horizontal line from the centre of the bars to the centre rotating point of the board. There is also the option of mounting the board backwards which would place the board closer to the rider, although with some boards, so close you may start clipping the board with your knees. You can also just tilt the board more towards you if you don't mind a bit of extra wind resistance.

The height of the board is pretty well set with each board's design, although the Orifix board is available with two heights and also an extension to lift the board higher and closer to your face, if desired.

Handle bar size

Bicycle handle bars come in two different diameters where they attach to the stem: 25.4mm or 31.8mm. The thin 25.4mm size used to be the norm, but it is gradually being replaced by the thicker 31.8mm bars that then taper to the thinner size. The Miry board is available in both sizes, so you need to order the correct size for your bars. The other three boards come in the 31.8mm size but a plastic adapter is either included or available as an option. The AutoPilot adapter is even advertised as fitting Miry boards.

The current Miry design is the result of a number improvements made over the years.

A sturdy powder coated aluminium construction. Two separate models for each handlebar size, so if you change bars size, you'll need to replace the main support part.

The board is attached via two hinged clamps that are a snug fit on the bars and are tightened by two allen head bolts. There is an option to purchase two thumbscrews and thereby have "tool free" fitting.

Plastic map cover is retained by metal press studs. There are reinforced plastic tabs to assist in undoing the press studs.

Mapboard rotating tension can be adjusted via the central allen bolt and lock nut.

The Miry is available in Australia with either an 275 x 275 mm (11 inch), or a 300 x 300 mm (12 inch) board.

One option that Miry offers that is popular with many elites (including multiple World Champ, Adrian Jackson) is their Quick Load (QL) board. The plastic cover on this board is trimmed flush with three sides of the board and does not wrap around the edges. The cover is press studded from the top. This means you don't have to fold your map to fit – you put the map on the board, put the cover down and press stud through the map. This can often leave some parts of the map hanging over the edges. This allows for very fast map loading at the start. Not so good on wet days though as you can actually lose parts of a sodden map.

Miry Mapboard

Weight (gm)..... 340
Fitting time (sec)..... 50
Dist forward# (mm)..... 20
Height* (mm)..... 102
Price AUD $145
Manufactured in Czech Republic
Contact: Orienteering Services of Australia – www.osoa.com.au

Dist forward – horizontal distance from centre of bars to the centre of the board.
* Height from top of bars to top of board

The Windchill mapboard is manufactured by regular Victorian MTBOer Ralph Koch. You will see lots of these boards in use at local events, particularly in Victoria.

Ralph has recently released an improved version of his board where the main support arms have been simplified with just a single arm on each side. The Windchill is still the heaviest of these four boards weighing in at 490 grams.

The clamps are machined slightly oversize to allow for a length of rubber strip wrapped around the bars to protect them from scratching. I attached the strips with a lap of electrical tape and one should leave these on all of the time for faster board fitting.

The clamps have a double jointed hinge which can be a little fiddly when mounting. They are tightened via allen head bolts from the top – very handy.

The board is supplied with plastic adapters for narrow handle bars and also 2 allen keys for assembly.

The 270 x 270 mm board is made from an almost indestructible plastic and tightened underneath by a large knurled knob. Quite a simple way to get just the right tension on the rotating board.

The Cons: The Windchill is the heaviest and took me the longest to mount, but is not far off the other boards in these figures.

The Pros: The Windchill is the cheapest, is locally made and can be supplied at most Victorian and major Australian events. Parts and repairs easily supplied too.

Windchill Map Holder

Weight (gm)..... 490
Fitting time (sec)..... 75
Dist forward# (mm)..... 50
Height* (mm)..... 84
Price AUD $99
Manufactured in Australia
Enquiries: Windchill Sports
Ph 03 9714 8540
www.windchill.com.au

Mapboard covers

All four boards should keep your map dry in wet weather each using a similar clear plastic that wraps around each side of the board and is attached underneath. The Miry and Windchill boards use metal press studs fitted with reinforced tabs for easier undoing. The Orifix board uses velcro tabs and the PilotOne uses elastic loops over hooks. I have mostly used boards with the press studs but I can see some advantages with the other two methods. The metal press studs require regular cleaning and lubricating to keep them working well. At the start of most events, riders get 1 minute to position their map in their board. Often this involves folding several sides of the map so that it will fit under the cover, making the map somewhat thicker. I think we've all experienced a tight plastic cover and trying to get the press studs to still click in. Both the elastic loops and velcro tabs give a bit allowance in this situation and attach quickly leaving you more time to planning your the first part of your course.

How heavy and how much?

If you are a bit of a weight weeny, I have weighed each of the boards so you can see how they compare. And the final thing that helps people make up their mind, is the price. The Miry and Orifix boards can be purchased from Australian agents, while the Windchill is Australian made. The PilotOne can be ordered from Europe via their website, although at this stage, payment being via bank transfer, is not so user friendly.

The Portuguese made Orifix mapboard has recently been added to the product list of aussieogear.com, who are also the Australian agents for SportIdent.

The Orifix is a well made board that ticks most of the boxes. It is light, easy to fit, comes in your choice of four colours (with more to be added soon) so that you can colour match your board and bike. The two attachment clamps are hinged, finely machined and tightened by thumbscrews, so tool free fitting. The really good thing with these Orifix thumbscrews is that after undoing they are retained in the top part of the clamp so you can't drop or lose them.

Board size is 275 x 275 mm.

The clear plastic map cover is retained by 4 velcro pads under each side which gives a bit of room for thicker maps and shuffling your map mid event.

The Orifix is supplied with plastic adapters to fit the board to narrow handle bars. As an option, you can also purchase height extensions if you prefer the board even closer to you. The board rotating tension is adjust by 2 wingnuts, and so is tool free again.

Apparently a revised model will soon be available as well, so this should be most impressive.

Orifix Mapboard

Weight (gm)	340
Fitting time (sec)	45
Dist forward# (mm)	43
Height* (mm)	92
Price AUD	$119

Manufactured in Portugal

Australian agent:
aussieogear.com
Ph 02 4384 5003

The AutoPilot PilotOne board took my attention with its tool-free fitting that doesn't even include any screws to do up. The two hinged clamps have a long arm that with the use of two adjustable plastic hose clamps tighten on to one of the main uprights. It's hard to explain so I'll include a diagram.

Undoing the board was just as fast too. Just slip the hose clamps up and the main clamps open up and its off.

Initially it was difficult to get the clamps really tight and there was some movement of the board on the bars, but by first adding some electrical tape there was less chance of the board slipping.

The main structure is made from nicely machined alloy, painted black.

The board we tested was 280 x 280 mm, but is available in some other sizes too. It is made from a yellow, almost clear, plastic core flute material (ie it has hollow tubes). I suspect this is where the PilotOne gets its weight advantage over the other boards, but the board seemed very firm and stable on test. I imagine it could suffer some damage in the case of a stack though.

The plastic cover is retained by loops of clothing type elastic and metal hooks. Looked kind of clunky when I first saw them, but they work really well. Very fast and easy to fit a map with room to move in the case of thicker folded maps.

AutoPilot PilotOne

Weight (gm)	280
Fitting time (sec)	30
Dist forward# (mm)	0
Height* (mm)	98
Price Euro (plus postage)	€60

Manufactured in Czech Republic

Contact: AutoPilot
www.autopilot.makeit.cz/index_en.htm

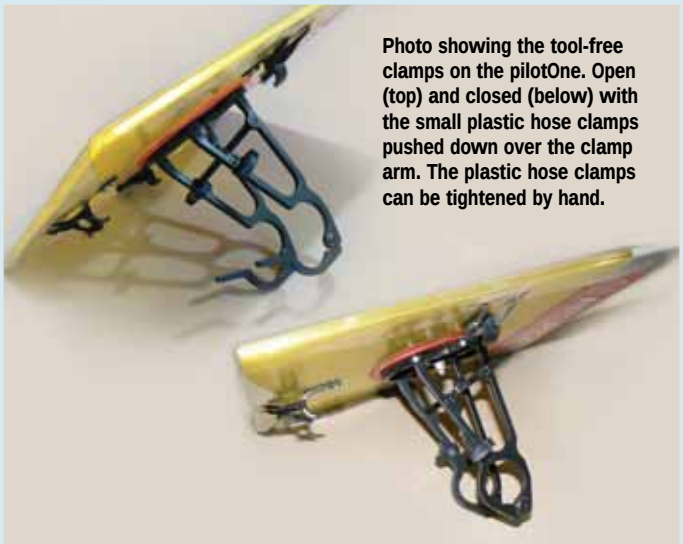

Photo showing the tool-free clamps on the pilotOne. Open (top) and closed (below) with the small plastic hose clamps pushed down over the clamp arm. The plastic hose clamps can be tightened by hand.