

## CATALOG CRITIC

## Snoozing Altitude: 30,000 Feet

SEVERAL HOURS into a long flight to Hong Kong, as passengers struggled to get a few blessed minutes of sleep, they enviously watched one large gentleman dozing so soundly that a string of drool seeped into his sweater.

His apparent secret: massive bodyweight providing ample chin support. The rest of the passengers, however, were left to rely on rolled-up coats, seatmates' shoulders or those mint-thin airline pillows—none of which guaranteed freedom from neck cramps.

There is another solution, of course: travel pillows. These typically U-shaped cushions purport to keep the head from flopping awkwardly to one side, letting you sleep upright. But do they work? Although we've seen multitudes of them in airport gift shops and catalogs, we don't know anyone who owns one. One possible reason: They look pretty ridiculous, and can be counted on to draw sidelong glances from the rest of the vacationing masses packed shoulder to shoulder in coach class this summer. But in the end, who cares? If all goes according to plan, you'll be sleeping, and they won't.

## Economy-Class Workout

The travel pillows we ordered ranged from a simple \$16 inflatable brace to a high-tech foam model that set us back \$75. We had three very-basic criteria: comfort, price and portability. After all, why pamper your neck with a pillow if



*Sleeping on a cloud:* (1) Tempur-Pedic Swedish transit pillow from Brookstone, (2) inflatable neck pillow from TravelSmith, (3) Komfort Kollar from Magellan's, (4) Comfort House's TempUForm neck pillow and (5) Bucky travel pillow from REL.

you pull your shoulder lugging it around? Though we weren't judging on looks, we did manage to avoid being seen with them: We sent our esteemed colleague, travel reporter Jesse Drucker, to give our pillows the economy-class workout.

The first thing he discovered is that the headrests on airplane seats got in the way of the pillow, forcing his head forward at an awkward angle. Granted, it may be partially because six-foot-two Jesse sits higher than many passengers. Still, it made him wonder whether the pillow makers had ever boarded a plane before designing their products.

Or, for that matter, whether they had tried hauling these things around once

the plane had landed. Forget packing light: Two of them were filled with dense, polystyrene foam—not unlike the material you would find in one of those stress-relief balls—and even a beanbag-like pillow containing buckwheat hulls weighed more than a pound. That's a lot of weight and bulk to add to your carry-on.

## Pouring Out Buckwheat

Before we sent our tester on the road, we had high hopes for the model from Brookstone. For \$75, we figured this pillow—made from so-called Tempur-Pedic foam, which molds to the curves of your neck—had to be special. Yet our tester, unaware of its reputation, flatly

## STORE/PRICE/PHONE

**Magellan's**  
Komfort Kollar  
\$24.85  
800-962-4943  
www.magellans.com

## Comfort House

UForm neck pillow  
95  
359-7701  
comforhouse.com

## REL

Bucky travel pillow  
426-4840  
rei.com

## Brookstone

our-Pedic  
dish transit pillow  
468-3580  
brookstone.com

## TravelSmith

Inflatable neck pillow  
\$16  
800-950-1600  
www.travelsmith.com

## QUALITY

**Best Overall, Best Value.** Yes, you will look silly in this inflatable, wrap-around brace, but your neck will thank you. Removable blue felt cover. Weighs a few ounces.

Lightweight and fairly comfortable, but doesn't offer quite enough support—the foam, less dense than the material in the Brookstone pillow, compresses too easily.

Solidly built and comfortable, with removable fleece covering and second inner bag containing buckwheat husks. Comes in burgundy, navy and pewter.

Well-made and classy-looking, but our tester felt the U-shape was more like a V, constricting his neck. (Company says heat-sensitive material molds to your neck.) Plus, at 1 lb., 7 oz., it was our heaviest pillow.

Similar to many of the models sold in airport shops, this one offered decent support at a cheap price. Scores extra points for being lightweight, deflatable and easily crammed into luggage.

## SHIPPING COST/TIME

\$10.95 for two-to-three-day service. Ours arrived on time.

\$5.95 for standard shipping. It arrived on time.

\$14.99 for two-day delivery. It arrived on time.

\$7.95 for two-to-five-day delivery. It arrived on time.

\$9.45 for two-day shipping; ours arrived on time.

## RETURN POLICY

Refund or exchange anytime. Customer pays for shipping unless product is defective.

Refund or exchange within 30 days. Customer pays shipping.

Refund or exchange anytime. Customer pays shipping and requests reimbursement. Or return to any REI store.

Refunds within 60 days. Customer pays shipping unless product is defective.

Refund or exchange anytime. Customer pays shipping unless product is defective.

## SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

Speedy site took us right to what we needed.

Site has scores of wacky-shaped pillows, but it took a while to find the one we wanted.

Easy-to-use site offers plenty of travel-pillow options.

Searching for items displays a list in a small point size—not easy to read.

Friendly operators made placing our phone order quick and pleasant.

## COMMENTS

This is the only pillow we found available in small, medium and large sizes based on neck measurements.

It must be said: This thing is ugly. "Looks like a toilet-training device for a toddler," our tester said. Removable light-colored terry-cloth covering shows dirt quickly.

The Bucky is bulky—it weighs in at 1 lb., 3 oz.—but it scores well on comfort. Price is up from the \$24 we paid. Junior model also available.

We got whiplash doing a double take at the price, then found the product did little for our neckache.

When we blew this one up, we got fuzz on our lips from the cloth cover. Web site just discontinued this one but says it will introduce a redesigned version next month.

flunked it: "Too snug and a little too heavy. It feels like it's filled with clay." The second foam model, the TempUForm neck pillow from Comfort House, provided more comfort at less than half the price, and at a mere nine ounces, it's much easier to haul around. One problem: It felt a bit loose and didn't provide quite the support we were after.

Our tester had the same problem with the model we got from TravelSmith: This inflatable pillow was so loose it kept sliding off his neck—and he got fuzz on his lips when he blew it up. In fact, TravelSmith just stopped selling this pillow. But frequent travelers pointed out that it was

similar to the blow-up cushions available in airport shops, which they liked for their stowability.

The Bucky pillow, which we ordered from REI but is available from plenty of other vendors, scored points for comfort. Our tester liked the way his head nestled into the buckwheat-hull filling. He also said it felt lighter than the foam models he tested. Still, the only way to adjust its fluffiness is to unzip the cover and pour out some of the hulls—not really an operation you want to perform in seat 27B.

**The winner: the Komfort Kollar** from Magellan's. Though easily the most ludicrous in name and design, the company

says this donut-shaped pillow was designed by a spinal surgeon. Unlike other models, this pillow keeps the head snug and upright thanks to a Velcro strap that secures it around the neck. Our tester claimed he could nap fairly well without any added support. Plus, it deflates to save space and costs an affordable \$24.85.

One caveat: Airlines are increasingly adding adjustable headrests with "wings" that fold outward to provide head support. Our tester says such headrests make travel pillows unnecessary—but individuals will have to decide how to save their own necks.

—Rafer Guzman