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Product Review: Axio Fuse Hardpack Laptop Backpack -- \$99.95, [Axio](#)

27 June 2005
 by [Noah Kravitz](#)
 Reviews Editor

A Hard Shell For Your Gear



[Axio by Harodesign](#) was founded by a guy who knows a thing or two about taking bumps - BMX superstar Bob Haro - and the "Hardpack" backpacks the company produces are designed to keep your gear safe from the bumps you're bound to take while navigating the urban jungle on your motorcycle, bicycle, or feet. Axio offers a line of Hardpacks to suit different sizes, needs, and styles, and they sent us the black Fuse Hardpack, which is designed to hold laptop computers as big as Apple's 15" PowerBook.

Fuse differs from Axio's other hardpacks in that its hard polyethylene shell is covered by an exterior fabric, giving it something of an urban style different from the company's other shiny plastic packs. At over 1300 cubic inches on the inside, Fuse is sized to hold a good amount of gear but still wear comfortably during long commutes. That large interior is divided into two

main sections - a top compartment featuring an integrated laptop sleeve with velcro securing "belt" and several small pockets and zippered pouches, and an open bottom compartment that's user configured via a clever velcro divider system. The two compartments are separated by a zippered, semi-rigid plastic panel covered with nylon on one side and fleece on the other.

The pack's shell is aerodynamically curved, and the back of Fuse is covered in contoured padded mesh with venting channels to help keep the wearer cool and dry during use. The backpack harness is also well padded and finished with more mesh on the inside and black nylon with reflective silver piping on the outside. The straps are fully adjustable and feature six metal D-rings for attaching accessories including the padded cell phone holster Axio sent with the pack. A reinforced rubber handle attached to the top of the bag allows for briefcase style carrying, and a rubber-reinforced hole allows a headphone cable to run into the pack so your iPod can stay safely tucked inside the pack while you listen to music. A nylon rain cover was also included.



Fuse is done up entirely in black, save for the contrasting orange of the padded mesh that lines the back of the pack and shoulder

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straps. A small black badge on the shell and larger two-tone grey on black badge on the right strap identify the pack as an Axio, but that's about it for logos and adornments. The Fuse is clean, curved, and sharp-looking, like something a fashion model would wear while riding a motorcycle or Vespa. I prefer the fabric-covered look of the Fuse to the more blatantly hi-tech design of Axio's other packs, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder. All of the Axio's I've seen -- including their new Hello Kitty design -- are very well executed.

Plenty of Room and Lots of Comfort, Too

I tested Fuse out the best way I knew how - by overloading it with gear and hauling it off to work for a DVD burning project. Overloading Fuse was a tough task indeed, as the pack has plenty of space and more nooks, crannies, and pockets than anyone could rightly expect from a backpack. The outer compartment had plenty of room for my 12" iBook (though a 14" or 15" widescreen laptop would also fit) along with some blank DVDs and letter-sized documents. There were pockets for my wallet and blank media, a clip for my keys, and slots for pens and pencils ... with a few more pockets to spare. The interior compartment is lined in soft protective fleece which also keeps velcro-backed dividers firmly in place wherever you like them. I was able to mold the four included dividers neatly around my external DVD drive, power pack, cables, and other goodies. The whole pack then zipped up tight with its sturdy interior and even chunkier exterior zipper pulls, all fashioned from brushed silver metal.

I really got a kick of how much stuff I could so neatly tuck away inside of Fuse. Axio did a great job of designing the pack's interior to secure your laptop along with the kinds of accessories both big and small that people are likely to carry around. While I've read a few other reviews that mentioned problems with the interior compartment's velcro divider system, I experienced no such difficulties. Instead, I found the dividers very clever and functional. A system like this is nice because I could use it as described above to carefully secure blocky but fragile electronics between dividers, or pack away a weekend's worth of clothes packed flat with all of the dividers removed. Fuse's flexibility is on par with its good looks.

 While I wouldn't want to carry a fully-loaded Fuse on my back while cycling to and from work each day, the pack was surprisingly light and comfortable to wear. The ergonomic design and heavily padded shoulder straps are comfortable, and the mesh fabric, while not perfect, is certainly a lot more breathable than your average backpack nylon. The nylon rain fly isn't going to keep your precious PowerBook safe and dry during a downpour, but it does add a measure of extra protection when you need to get somewhere in a drizzle. Fuse also need not be relegated to the realm of backpack wearers; the integrated rubber handle makes for easy one-handed carrying on those days you need to bring a lot of gear with you on the bus or train.

Fuse's design puts your laptop on the outermost part of the pack, where one might think it most susceptible to direct bumps and knocks. However, this placement backs the computer directly with Fuse's polyethylene hardshell, which makes for a pretty solid barrier against impact. I did find one area of concern, though. Due to the way the hard shell is built into the zippered back flap of the pack, the corners of my laptop were somewhat susceptible direct impact, especially if Fuse were to fall squarely on it's top panel near the handle (i.e. if the pack landed upside down). While this is fairly unlikely to happen, motorcycle and bicycle commuters who need serious protection for their laptops on a daily basis should take a careful look at this part of the pack. Don't write Fuse off because of this, but check one out in person before ordering it online.

Save for this one very localized area of possible concern, I highly recommend the Axio Fuse to anyone in need of a big, versatile, and comfortable hardshell backpack made to hold a laptop. Axio's design team really earned their pay conceiving Fuse's interior, and it's modern good looks are only befitting of a pack that offers so much functionality.

The Axio Fuse Hardpack retails for \$99.95 and is available from the [Apple Store online](#) and other Internet and brick-and-mortar retailers (compare prices at [PCPrices](#)).

* * * *

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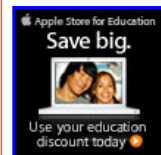
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