

Rider Education Report

As I sat down to write this, I had just ridden home in high wind. This is a good example of a training opportunity that can offer valuable experience before heading West to the Rally this year. But more on that subject at another time.

Last month I broached the subject of packing your gear and properly loading your motorcycle. Especially for longer trips, the weight of the required gear can be more than your motorcycle gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) allows. As promised, here is part 2; ways to carry the “stuff” you need or want to take with you and staying safe while doing so.

The first option is to purchase what you need when you need it and then dispose of it when you are finished using it. While I admit this is not very cost-effective nor environmentally friendly, the one credit card that you use to purchase everything will not overload your motorcycle. This method does have the drawback that you must find or plan the locations of all your purchases and take the time to make them. And there is also the chance that your size is not in stock.

A second and less expensive option is to organize your clothing and other equipment into convenient packages and ship it to your destination(s). Having a freight service deliver the items you need to use while at your destination will also not overwhelm your motorcycle's GVWR. This method tends to be more reliable than the “buy it now” option above but can be somewhat of a burden to your wallet and has the drawback that you will also need to find a way to ship the items (if they are not disposable) back home.

The third option, and the one I have almost always chosen, is to use what the former GWRRA described as “alternative loading” of the items you need or want to take with you while touring. The most common form of alternative loading is using a trailer. The advantage of a trailer is the weight that adds to your motorcycle's GVWR is only the weight of the load measured where the trailer connects to your tow vehicle, called tongue weight. To illustrate this, let me use my circumstance as an example. I have a Bushtec Turbo+2 which weighs about 125 pounds empty. Industry standard for trailer tongue weight is about 10% to 15% of the gross weight of the trailer and its contents. When I pull my empty trailer, the weight on the motorcycle at the connection point of the trailer hitch (the ball or pin) should be between 12 and 19 pounds. As discussed last month, this is well within the capacity of my 2004 Gold Wing, especially if the trunk and saddle bags remain empty. The GVWR of my Bushtec is 350 pounds, which means I can add to the trailer up to 225 pounds of “stuff” before I overload the trailer. When fully loaded, the tongue weight should be between 35 and 53 pounds. Again, this load is still within the capacity of my bike under the same circumstances. Of course, this option, like the others, also has drawbacks.

The first drawback is that the trailer, hitch, and supporting harnesses and gear must be purchased and installed on your towing vehicle. While this cost can be substantial in the short term, when properly maintained trailers can last the life of your bike, and often longer, depending on frequency of use. Second, shifting cargo can change the balance of everything and cause unsafe and uncomfortable experiences. Third, while we are using the trailer as an alternative way for the motorcycle to carry the load, our bikes still must start, stop, and steer the complete rig on the road. In my case, at its maximum, an additional 350 pounds is now being controlled by the same brakes that were installed on my motorcycle which were not designed to manage this much mass. And finally, all this weight is at the end of a lever (the tongue of the trailer) that now has a mechanical advantage to force the rear wheel of your motorcycle in the direction of the trailer's momentum if it chooses.

Next month we will consider ways to mitigate the drawbacks of pulling a trailer.

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