

GEARING UP: Packing your Bike

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The long awaited trip is now upon you and its time to pack your belongings in the most efficient way possible on the bike. You've made your choices in terms of panniers (hard or soft) and the type of top box or bag and that you'll have a medium sized tank bag.

The principles that apply to packing the bike are very simple:

- Balance the weight on either side of the bike equally;
- The lower the weight on the bike the better;
- The less weight on top of the bike the better;
- And finally those items needed during the ride should be easily accessible.

Violate any of these basic rules and your ride can become a nightmare as a result of having an uncalled for "incident". You can imagine what a top heavy vehicle in extremely rough conditions will be like to control – much like a drunkard trying to walk home – inefficient and sometimes painful!!

The easiest way to pack the bike is to gather everything and I mean everything you're taking with you on the trip into one area where you can be in peace for an hour or two. Divide your goods into:

- The mechanical aspects and ones clothing.
- And then amongst these two groups into the likely hood of usage and timing. For example your rain suit should be near the top of the bag and very easy to get to.
- And finally split these into weight groups.

The next step is to actually pack the gear into the luggage systems. As far as your clothing is concerned, the preferred method is to 'roll' your clothing and pack it tightly into plastic bags (the good old refuse bag works well). This keeps them dry and relatively dust proof! All mechanical items must be wrapped or packed in such a way that any movement in the luggage is limited. The effects of the vibration that happens in a top box must be seen to be appreciated. Polystyrene just reduces to powder. So, tools packed in such a way end up rubbing against each other and potentially causing damage to the items. Remember heavy items to the bottom of the luggage and as far forward as possible. Keep your valuable items close at hand in your tank bag – remember to take it with you (or the inner bag) if leaving the bike.

If you're using soft luggage make sure that the bags are not resting up against the exhaust leading to melted / burnt items. Also make sure all your luggage is well secured. As tight as one may have secured items such as tents and sleeping bags (usually on the passenger seat), the first couple of kilometers tests whether you have done a good job or not! Perhaps a good suggestion is to stop after 5 k's and check out your packing handiwork.

Some quick pointers about connecting systems:

- Use cam buckle straps rather than 'stretchies'
- Cargo nets work well when kept within their elasticity requirements
- Tank bags must be secure to avoid scratching the paint work (remember to put your bag down upside down to ensure a clean base when mounting it back on the bike.
- Check all pannier and top box connections to make sure they are properly 'clicked in' to avoid boxes falling off in rough conditions or when riding over a bump.

Now its time to ride – at last! If you've never ridden your bike fully loaded before remember momentum will enable you to balance a whole lot easier!!!

