

## Packing Up Your Bike

Here's a great excerpt I found online at [MotorcycleCruiser.com](http://MotorcycleCruiser.com).

It isn't just what you take on that motorcycle road trip, it's how you pack it. From the April 1999 issue of *Motorcycle Cruiser* magazine.

By [Art Friedman](#).

A wise motorcyclist selects his or her significant other by his or her ability to pack lightly, but even that quality won't be enough to solve the packing dilemma if you are camping out for 10 days. And there is no way a set of golf clubs is going to slip gracefully into your luggage.

You will start looking around the bike for places to strap stuff on. I can tell you there are quite a few. I once made a three-week camping trip with a girlfriend during the winter on a smallish bike with no saddlebags or luggage rack. One sleeping bag went in front of the instruments. The other, along with most of our clothes, got strapped on the seat rail behind her. The heavy stuff went on the gas tank, though I didn't have an actual tank bag (which were virtually unheard of in those days). Of course, I was thinner then, and we had to wash clothes frequently. Packing up the [touring cruisers](#) for our trip to Arizona reminded us of some of the challenges of packing a motorcycle. Here are a few points to consider when you are trying to figure out how to take it all with you.



[VIEW LARGER IMAGE](#)

*When a passenger occupies the second seat, saddlebags, a trunk, and pockets in the fairing becomes very useful. If you don't have them, you need to get creative.*

is especially true on bikes with fat front tires and fenders. That sleeping bag may keep your engine even warmer than it keeps you.

**Remember mass-centralization:** Mass centralization simply means that keeping the mass as close to the motorcycle's center of gravity (CG) as possible. The CG is usually somewhere near the top of the transmission case. When you start placing weight far from that point, you will feel repercussions in the handling response of the bike. A heavy tool bag strapped atop a sissy bar will screw things up. A light sleeping bag, though it may be bulkier, will have a lesser effect. The ideal places to put heavy items so that their weight doesn't degrade handling are on top of the fuel tank or in a saddlebag (preferably low and toward the front). The next best location is on the seat close behind you. Racks, trunks and the area up by the headlight are best reserved for lighter items, though a light but bulky object like a sleeping bag can make a good windbreak up front. Tank bags are not really suitable for cruisers with tank-top instruments. Even if you are riding with people you trust and don't need to consult your speedometer, you still need to see the warning lights. Limit your tank-top luggage on such bikes to mini tank bags or a tank-divider strip with a pocket.

**Making room:** When you are traveling two-up, a luggage rack is almost essential. On bikes with hard saddlebags, top racks for the bags may be another option, particularly if—as on the Nomad—the closure is on the side of the bags.

**Don't block airflow to the engine:** I am amazed by people who bungee a sleeping bag to their front fender or hang a large fork bag under the headlight. The engine relies on cooling air that comes across the top of the fender and down past the headlight. This

## OFFICERS' NOTES

Thanks to all for the warm welcome! Sharkie and Buff will be working hard as Flint's new officers to get some great rides planned. If you have any suggestions, see the last page for contact info.

**Observe load limits:** You will find many load limits for your bike and gear. These reflect the concern of motorcycle and luggage makers about the potential dangers of overloading or incorrect load placement. Your owner's manual and the VIN plate both list GVWR (gross vehicle weight rating), the maximum total weight of bike, fluids, riders and luggage that the manufacturer recommends. There is also a GAWR (the A stands for axle) for front and rear wheels. Our spec charts can help you determine if you are close to these. We list total vehicle wet weight and the percent of that figure that rests on the rear wheel. Although anything you add will fall on both axles, more will rest on the axle it is closer to. A passenger sitting well back on the seat will be carried almost entirely by the rear suspension. A tank bag will be split pretty evenly.

Will your bike self-destruct if you overload it? No, but braking distances will increase, handling will become awkward, suspension and wheels will be overworked and may wear, and tires will get hot—which at the least means greater wear and at the worst could cause a blowout.

Tires also have maximum load ratings. Most saddle, tail and tank bags (standard or aftermarket) list a maximum load. Yes, these figures are probably created with a lot of consideration for liability. But if you never exceed them, you'll probably never suffer consequences that will make think about liability.

**Increase tire pressure to compensate:** It's the air in the tire, not the tire itself, that supports the weight of the bike and its cargo. As a result, you need to increase air pressure to the upper limit when you put a lot of load on the bike. Pressures should be checked when the tires are stone cold, even if you have to ride somewhere to add air. Riding with an under-inflated tire causes it to heat up rapidly, which can cause the tire to come apart, especially when it is overloaded.

**Add-on saddlebags might require bag guards:** I have seen plenty of saddlebags that arrived at their destinations with tire burns even though they seemed to hang well clear of the tire. Wind pressure, forces applied by the rider or passenger, or shifting during the ride can move bags against or into the wheel. The latter can be disastrous.

Almost every cruiser on the market can be fitted with accessory bag guards—thin loops of (usually chromed) tubing that drop down below the rear fender to keep the bags from swinging into the tire. These also provide additional mounting points to help anchor your



[VIEW LARGER IMAGE](#)

*If you had a passenger, the luggage rack would get that tailbag. However, since the second seat wasn't occupied, putting the tailbag on the back seat kept its mass closer to the center of the bike and kept it from degrading handling.*

## SOUTHERN CRUISERS RIDING CLUB – FLINT/SAGINAW

---

bags. Unless your bags ride high right next to the saddle, these guards are a good investment.

**Avoid exhaust pipes and chains:** During one comparison test I was involved in a number of years ago, a manufacturer-installed accessory hard saddlebag on one of the bikes caught fire because it was installed too close to the muffler. One rider lost all his clean clothing and some other possessions as well. This is more likely to be a problem with soft saddlebags. Soft bags often shift or sag and touch the pipe even though they seem to be safely above the pipe when they are originally installed. Besides the fire danger, it will destroy the bag and—if you are using synthetic bags—leave an almost impervious blob of melted plastic on the pipe. Even with leather bags, you might set the contents on fire. On cruisers with the exhaust system on one side, you may have to hang the bags unevenly to keep the right one out of harm's way.

Drive chains are another possible danger point. Remember that the bag comes closer to a chain or belt as the suspension compresses. Be sure there's still some space between the bag and the chain, even with the rear suspension fully compressed. If there are straps or fringe on your bags, make sure they can't possibly get into the chain or belt, which could cause a very sudden and unexpected stop when the bag gets pulled into the works.

**Use extra straps:** Speaking as someone who has crashed when a tail bag slipped into his rear wheel, I can assure you that an extra bit of security is worth the small inconvenience. In my case, a built-in bungee cord pulled free from the tail bag, causing the bungees on the other side to pull it toward them, off the seat and into the tire. The bike stopped like someone had put a tire iron in the rear wheel. Now my entire luggage gets more straps than it seems to require. This includes soft saddlebags, which I will secure with a bungee around them or between the tops. And, after losing a bag on each of our last two test bikes, nobody here would think of riding a Harley Convertible without an extra strap or bungee anchoring the saddlebags. For extra security, run the bungee through the handle or other loop on a bag you are tying down. This helps to keep the bag from sliding around or even out from under the bungee. It also provides extra retention if the other cord(s) holding the bag down go AWOL.

I learned to avoid tired or cheap bungee cords long ago (I buy them in the economy pack at Costco now), and I always bring a few extras for unexpected acquisitions or problems. Bungee nets are also extremely versatile and offer excellent security.

**Ready for rain:** If your luggage isn't waterproof, lining it with a large trash bag will keep everything dry. This is even useful on some over-packed hard bags where the top bulges enough to admit water. Keep rain gear where you can get to it quickly if there is any chance of precipitation.

**The right saddlebag is more accessible:** Getting into your left saddlebag on the roadside may put you too close to passing traffic. Put your nighttime needs in the left bag and put the things (especially emergency items) you could need while riding in the right bag or an equally accessible bag on the seat or tank. Since it's on the high side when the bike is on the sidestand, the right bag is usually easier to reach.

**Protect paint:** Any point where the luggage or its straps touches a painted surface should be protected. You can use duct tape, masking tape or clear contact paper to prevent scuffing the paint or other coated surface. If you wax the area before applying the protective layer, the tape or contact paper will peel off easily later. Since so few cruisers have bungee-cord anchor points, you may find that you have to hook them around the rear fender. Even

though they are plastic coated, bungee hooks can still scratch the paint. Some riders take a section of small plastic or rubber tubing, slit it along its length and slip it over the edge of the rear fender to buffer the hooks that hold the bungee cord in place.

**Backpacks and waistpacks:** If you have some lightweight items that you want with you when you get off the bike, this is a good way to tote them. On rides where we are swapping bikes, we also like to carry on our persons any necessities like cell phones, maps, rain gear, and anything we might need if we get separated from the group. Soft items might also function as padding in a fall, but something big and hard could be an injury mechanism. Of course, carrying something heavy in a backpack can fatigue you, unless it rests on the seat or luggage behind you while riding.

**Trailers:** I have never experienced a bike-trailer combination that I enjoyed. If you need to tote that much, it may be time to consider a car. Although trailer enthusiasts say you never know they are there, I certainly do and I don't like it. Attempting a hard stop with a trailer, particularly in a turn or the rain, would give new meaning to the term "panic stop."

**Adjust to the handling of the changed bike:** Your motorcycle's handling and braking will be changed for the worse with the extra weight aboard. Be sure to stiffen suspension settings to accommodate it. Before you head out, take a few minutes, preferably in a vacant parking lot, to get a feel for the changes. Low-speed handling may be the most noticeable difference, but your braking distance will increase and you will lose a measure of your maximum acceleration. If you are using a tank bag, it may interfere with the handlebar at full-lock. Find out what has changed before you have to respond to it in traffic.

---

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Statewide Events

August 4-5 ..... Helms/Beels Run (Ohio)  
August 18-20 ..... Virginia State Rally  
August 30- Sept 3..... SCRC National Rally

#### Saginaw/Flint Local Events

*Let's put our thinking caps on....Any ideas for local rides?*

*Generally there's a monthly lunch "meeting" in Flint and/or Saginaw; plans are posted as they're made on <http://forums.delphiforums.com/Officers>.*

*For more information about any events listed, check the forum or contact your officers! See page 2 for contact info and links...*

---

## SOUTHERN CRUISERS RIDING CLUB - FLINT/SAGINAW

---

### Flint Contacts

First Officer: Betsy "Sharkie" Litwin  
(810) 240-0995  
[sharkie@priestess.us](mailto:sharkie@priestess.us)

Second Officer: Steve "Buff" Walters  
(810) 695-6710  
[swalters68@comcast.net](mailto:swalters68@comcast.net)

### Michigan Web Links

National Website: [www.southerncruisers.net](http://www.southerncruisers.net)  
Michigan SCRC Forum: [www.delphiforums.com/Officers](http://www.delphiforums.com/Officers)

### Saginaw Contacts

First Officer: Wayne "Ridge Runner" Hatfield  
(989) 823-3975  
[hatkw@yahoo.com](mailto:hatkw@yahoo.com)

Second Officer: Mark "Odin" Dixon  
(248) 762-0220  
[southerncruiser@gmail.com](mailto:southerncruiser@gmail.com)

Third Officer: Virgil "Post Toasties" Cline  
(989) 770-4042  
[vrwc1957@msn.com](mailto:vrwc1957@msn.com)

---

## Road Funnies

---

When I went to get my driver's license renewed, our local motor vehicle bureau was packed. The line inched along for almost an hour until the man ahead of me finally got his license. He inspected his photo for a moment and commented to the clerk, "I was standing in line so long, I ended up looking pretty grouchy in this picture."

The woman beside him peered over his shoulder, then reassured him, "It's okay. That's how you're going to look when the cops pull you over anyway."

---

Got a letter from Grandma the other day. She writes:

The other day I went up to a local Christian bookstore and saw a "Honk if you love Jesus" bumper sticker. I was feeling particularly sassy that day because I had just come from a thrilling choir performance, followed by a thunderous prayer meeting, so I bought the sticker and put it on my bumper.

Boy, I'm glad I did! What an uplifting experience that followed!

I was stopped at a red light at a busy intersection, just lost in thought about the Lord and how good He is, and I didn't notice that the light had changed. It is a good thing someone else loves Jesus because if he hadn't honked, I'd never have noticed. I found that LOTS of people love Jesus!

Why, while I was sitting there, the guy behind started honking like crazy, and then he leaned out of his window and screamed, "For the love of GOD! GO! GO! Jesus Christ, GO!" What an exuberant cheerleader he was for Jesus!

Everyone started honking! I just leaned out of my window and started waving and smiling at all these loving people. I even honked my horn few times to share in the love! There must have been a man from Florida back there because I heard him yelling something about a "sunny beach."

I saw another guy waving in a funny way with only his middle finger stuck up in the air. Then I asked my teenage grandson in the back seat what that meant. He said that it was probably a Hawaiian good luck sign or something. Well, I've never met anyone from Hawaii, so I leaned out the window and gave him the good luck sign back. My grandson burst out laughing; why, even he was enjoying this religious experience!

A couple of the people were so caught up in the joy of the moment that they got out of their cars and started walking towards me. I bet they wanted to pray or ask what church I attended, but this is when I noticed the light had changed. So, I waved to all my sisters and brothers grinning, and drove on through the intersection.

I noticed I was the only car that got through the intersection before the light changed again and I felt kind of sad that I had to leave them after all the love we had shared, so I slowed the car down, leaned out of the window and gave them all the Hawaiian good luck sign one last time as I drove away.

Praise the Lord for such wonderful folks!

Love,  
Grandma