

**Safety Tips #16**  
**Ben Hochberg**  
**ABATE of Colorado**

**Packing Up**

We can't carry a whole lot on our bikes, but we can carry some things. When preparing for a trip, we always have to make some compromises about what goes and what stays. It is definitely possible to take what you need for a long trip, if you are careful and are willing to make some compromises.

I am always amused (not sure if that's the right word) when I see a bike overloaded and on the highway, with stuff strapped to every part of the bike, and stacked up higher than the rider's and passenger's heads!

There are some guidelines we should know about when loading the bike. Our bags, or luggage, need to be secured to the machine properly (safely and securely). This is best done with motorcycle-specific bags, not something we adapt from some other type of activity.

And we should be careful about not overloading each bag. Most bags have a weight limit on them or in them. Bikes which have luggage racks have a weight limit to the rack. Saddlebags should have equal amounts of weight in them, so the bike is not overly heavy on one side. Putting a chain, lock, tools and extra oil in one saddlebag, and a bag of chips in the other is not going to work well...

Motorcycle-specific luggage has certain ways it should be attached to the bike, and the instructions will inform you of this. Use the included hardware in the prescribed manner.

There are times when we have to take things with us on our bikes that don't fit inside our luggage, and that's when we have to be creative as well as take extra care with how we attach it to the bike. Here are some general rules:

- Get the load as close to the center of gravity of the bike as possible. If you are traveling alone on the bike, the passenger seat is better than the luggage rack. A tank bag is better than either.
- Use a luggage rack if you have to, but avoid piling stuff up high on it, and avoid putting very heavy things there, as well.
- Use enough fasteners, bungee cords, straps, whatever, to make the load SECURE, that is, unable to shift around if you hit a large pothole, enter a windstorm, lean way over in a curve, etc. But make sure the fasteners don't come loose and get near moving parts of the bike, where they could become entangled, and stop those parts from moving!

Make adjustments to the bike as necessary for carrying loads. Suspensions can be adjusted, as can the air pressure in the tires.

Make allowances for changes in the way the bike will handle once it has extra weight on it. It won't do anything as quickly as when it is unladen. It will stop in a longer distance, it will accelerate less quickly, and it will be less maneuverable in turns.

Remember that there is a limit to how much weight a bike can safely carry. The owner's manual will tell you what that limit is. When making calculations, we have to include our weight, a passenger's weight, all the gear we are wearing, the empty weight of the luggage, and then add in all the stuff we are putting in the luggage and on the bike. It might be surprising how quickly we can overload the machine.

Enjoy your trip!

