

Grand Touring on a GT

Dear Joel,

This spring, as every year, I get the urge to hit the road. I am an enthusiast of motorcycles, especially Ducatis but until last fall I had never made any long trips on them. Every year I would pack up my pickup and wave farewell to my bikes for a while. Gasoline is expensive. Now I find I can wave goodbye to the pickup as I ride off on the Duc. My basic style of travel is simple and unchanged. I decide on an area that seems to hold interest, then go there with an open mind. I seldom stay in one location more than a few days. People are as interesting as locale and talking to folks usually sends me to a new place where fish are biting or the water is warm or maybe there is still snow on the peaks.

I camp out almost all of the time. I cannot afford to travel any other way. The old pickup had enough room for all of my gear and part of the rest of the world. The bike is different. I bought an 860 Ducati last fall, used but sound. I repaired the instrument panel, painted it up and added a luggage rack. No one should dispute me when I say the bike is basically ugly. However living with it brings out a pure inner beauty. The electrics have never given any trouble. In a Ducati that says it all. Handling and all other phases of the design are perfect.

There is no reason to suffer from undue discomfort while camping from the back of a bike. There is a movement afoot called backpacking, and by shamelessly stealing their ideas, a biker can carry all of the comforts. I have already been hiking for several years and once had the dubious honor of carrying 60 lbs. of junk up a mountain on my back. Never again. There is no place for excess weight if you're carrying it. The same holds true if you are tying it to the back of a motorcycle. More gear can be carried on a bike but not much more. Motorcycles respond in funny ways to weight, not many of the responses are good. Weight tied to the bike doesn't lean or help in the least. Keeping the weight down is of great importance even in the planning stages. I may sound indefinite when I describe the stuff, but this is to a purpose. I don't want anyone to think my ideas are all of the right ones, there are different priorities for anyone who travels. I have an aversion to excess gear, I sometimes regret not bringing some marvelous ditty I read about, but I usually get over it.

First, do not go out and buy a trunk and saddle bags as they are too expensive and really are too rigid for camping gear. Instead, do as I did and build a rigid box for your luggage rack to hold your gear. My own is in the picture, ugly and grey but it fits and holds everything it needs to. The best way to build a box of this kind is to wait until all of the gear is assembled. Deciding what goes into the box is then easy. Don't build it too big for there is a temptation to fill it if you do. Second, get a bagful of bags. Rucksacs, old combat packs, stuff bags, plastic bags, virtually any bag that can be folded up when not in use can be considered. They can hold all of the soft goods.

Basic gear is the same for any activity. First a stove: fires are messy and depend on wood which is often scarce in heavily used areas. My choice is the Seva 123, light, convenient, and has been reliable as a rock. There are others just as good. It burns unleaded gas, but there are kerosene stoves on the market too. These are especially good for groups as they put out more heat. Their only drawback in the kerosene smell. Kerosene is easier to get in rural areas than in cities. #1 diesel fuel is kerosene too. Utensils for one person are a pot and a pan. Teh pot is for boiling water for tea or soups. The pan should be one of the teflon lined omlet pans, very light and cleans easily. If there is a group, you'll need more, but that is something you'll have to hash out among yourselves. Stoves

and pots and pans call to mind other things such as matches, silverware, fuel bottle and funnel, tea, coffee, sugar, and of course steel wool pads for cleaning and paper towels for drying. Paper towels are very handy: they are a clean surface to use for making sandwiches, napkins, or even grease rags. This stuff should fill the box. Storgae of small amounts of staples like tea is often easiest in plastic boxes like some foods come in.

The bags are for soft goods. Sleeping bag, ground cloth, tarp, small air mattress. All can into one medium rucksack. Another bag can carry spare clothing. Jackets can be stuffed into a bag when not in use. A tank bag is a good investment and a small one has served well for me. I carry glasses, camera, flashlight, and various other things I think will be handy.

Your bike has a tool kit, check it carefully for items you can actually use. Carry some extra oil, even a pint in an old fork oil can will be a help. Chain tension should be checked with all the gear aboard and the chain should be lubed before the trip.

Your own emergency first aid kit should be a consideration too. Most of the commercial ones are overpriced and contain items that may never be needed. I carry bandaids, adhesive tape, aspirin, antibiotic ointment, and a simple snakebite kit. I feel that I cannot treat major wounds myself so I confine my efforts to cuts and burns. Lest we forget, get some lip balm. It can be misery to wake up and find cracking a smile is not a figure of speech.

For water I use an old Clorox bottle. It holds 2 quarts and has a handle--important on a bike. My bottle rests on the front fender and is wrapped in a towel and then put in a small stuff bag. The towel can be wet for evaporative cooling if necessary.

Food is tricky. My own appetites often wane during an interesting trip. Buy food as you go. Tastes vary and can change on a trip. I usually have cheese, as well as peanut butter and jelly.

