

The Long Haul

I'M WRITING THIS COLUMN WHILE PREPARING for my trip to Sturgis, South Dakota, for the 75th Sturgis Rally. The road will take me through Wyoming and Montana, so I thought this would

be a good time to discuss things to consider when planning for traveling long-haul journeys on a bike.

Let's first discuss packing. Knowing what to bring (and not to bring) is important. Just about everybody has a tendency to overpack, which directly affects the bike's gross vehicle weight, which includes occupants, gear, and fuel. That weight will impact the bike's handling, so the gross vehicle weight limit shouldn't be exceeded. One solution is to ship extra items that aren't needed for daily road travel to your destination.

But for this trip, I'll be staying at a different location each night, so I need to reconfigure my approach to packing. Since there are tons of web pages and blogs that cover information on this topic, I won't spend time on it, but knowing how to pack and what to bring is a crucial part of the trip.

Some final words, though, about packing: do a dry run with your bike loaded to make sure everything remains in place and secure, plus perform final checks for tire pressure, suspension, and lubricant levels. If you're strapping down luggage or other items, make sure your securing devices are firmly attached and aren't touching hot parts.

Next, make sure your bike is ready for the ride. Ironically, try not to have your bike serviced just before you roll out. Sometimes the service shop will spot a mechanical problem that you weren't aware of, and having it fixed could delay your trip. Also, it's wise to ride your bike a little after the service to make sure everything is up to snuff before heading to faraway places. Being stuck in the middle of nowhere with no cellphone reception can be extremely frustrating, not to mention placing a real damper on your trip. Perhaps as part of your travel itinerary, you can review dealer locations on your route. Besides knowing where to buy another T-shirt that you probably don't need, it could help save a little time in case that "what if" happens.

So now your bike is securely packed and ready to go, but what about you? Traveling long distances to new and distant places can be an enjoyable adventure, but consider, too, what you're capable of in terms of riding and seat time. For some folks, banging out a lot of miles during the first day is fairly easy, but fatigue will eventually set in. One way

to fight fatigue is to opt for regular rest stops so you can stretch, relax, and wind down before continuing. Always keep yourself hydrated, too, and pack some snacks in your gear — just in case. Digesting a heavy meal while traveling can have a tiring effect that you don't need, or want, to deal with.

What about the trip itself? You'll probably be taking interstate highways or back roads or a combination of both, so make note of any landmarks and sights you'd like to see. That will have an impact on how many miles you can cover in a day. For the most part, fuel and rest stops are readily available on interstates, but those options become fewer when riding off the beaten path. Knowing what your bike gets for gas mileage also is a factor for selecting the roads you travel.

There's one thing, though, that you can't control, and that's weather. Having an idea of what temperatures to expect on your route lets you adjust accordingly for the type of gear you'll need and how often you may want to stop for a break. If you share my lack of

faith in the weathermen's long-range forecasts, you might want to check The Weather Channel or refer to your favorite weather app on your smart phone before hitting the road. Heading into stormy weather isn't fun, and sometimes can be avoided either by waiting it out or rerouting your trip.

Finally, if you're riding with a group of friends, hopefully everybody is at the same experience level in terms of seat time, need of rest stops, etc. Riding with folks who stop more frequently than you prefer to do, or not enough for you, can take the joy out of the journey.

Traveling to distant destinations on your Harley is fun, but preride planning can make all the difference between a dream ride and one that turns into a nightmare. So always consider the unexpected, which can add to your delight or not. Most certainly, long-haul riding can be an adventure; it just depends on how you plan for it. And that's something you can plan on. **AIM**



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