

Taking Care of your Trailer

We park our Gold Wing with TLC for storage, how did you park the cargo/camper trailer? Washed and covered it. Well that's the way most do. Trailer tires are not the same as cars or motorcycles? Many have the statement on them for trailers only. It would help the tires from getting flat spots if you block the trailer up with the wheels off the ground. The flat spots will run off after some miles down the road, but it would be better to start with nice round tire. To get the tires round again it takes heat and centrifugal force. So keeping them off the ground it could add life to the tire. While the trailer wheels are up; you could check the wheel bearings or repack them if necessary. While the tires are off look over the body bolts as well as the suspension linkage and bolts. Also check your trailer tongue bolts and hitch shoe for wear and lube all bearings and linkages.

Loads and tongue weight.

Tongue weight is very important when pulling a trailer. What is tongue weight? It is the weight of the tongue that the trailer puts on the ball/link of the hitch. How much should it be? All the experts say 7% to 12% of the total weight of the trailer. Well, how do I know what my trailer weights? The manufacture supplies that information with the bill of sale. You can take it to a truck scale but some will not read under 1,000 lbs.

When you load the trailer, weigh each bag or item you place into you trailer and add it to the empty weight of your trailer. If the tongue weight is too light, it can push up when stopping. If your shoe on a ball coupler is not adjusted correctly and is too loose, it is possible to decouple from the hitch. If the tongue weight is too much the trailer will add weight to your rear suspension of your motorcycle with a down force and thereby unloading weight from the front wheel, causing longer stopping distances. As we know, 70% of our stopping power is the front brake.

Where you place items in the trailer is also important. The heavy seldom used items put to the bottom and over the axle and wheels. The items used more frequently put in the front of the trailer and behind the low heavy items to the rear. Some trailers have a cooler rack in front, load it so when you weight the tongue weight you get a true weight.

To measure your tongue weight you can use a bathroom scale or fish scale. Whichever method set on your bike, side stand up, measure the tongue at the hitch in inches off the ground with the trailer connected. Then unhitch the trailer and cut a piece of PVC pipe to fill in between your bathroom scale and your tongue to get the height you measured while setting on the bike, place the trailer tongue on the bathroom scale.. With the fish scale pick up the tongue with the scale till you get to the same height you measured while setting on your bike. Add your weights up, the trailer empty and the items you added and hope you are in the 7% to 12% range with your tongue weight. If you are not in that range, re-adjust your items.

If you are going to pull a trailer, you need a hitch of some kind. There are many on the market, and if you read the message boards, you can really get confused as to who makes the best. I will not make a recommendation to any of them. As far as I am concerned, each of the reputable vendors has a viable product and they are usually covered for liability. However, when you do install a hitch on your motorcycle, purchase a trailer and start to travel with a trailer, you probably won't leave home with out it again.

Now that you have that baby loaded and put the tongue on the ball, and the trailer axis is level with the bike axles, you have to hook up the safety chains. Yes, most states require safety chains on ALL trailers. These chains must be strong enough to hold the weight of anyone stepping on them when connected to the bike and trailer. They should be long enough to allow the trailer to turn without binding and short enough so they do not drag on the ground. They must be crossed under the tongue in the event the trailer becomes uncoupled from the ball. The chains will catch the tongue and keep it from gouging into the pavement as well as keep it connected the bike. A simple way to shorten a chain that may be too long is to twist it a few turns.

Remember most insurance companies include the trailer under the bike's liability coverage. If they become separated, the trailer may no longer be covered and the damage it does while it is coming to rest is your responsibility, not the insurance company.

When pulling a trailer, you will find you acceleration and stopping are effected. The more the trailer weighs, the more noticeable it becomes. You will have to learn just how much this affects your riding style. The old do-it-yourself models bounced a lot on bumps. The lighter the trailer, the more it will move around on the ruts from the big trucks. You will have to make wider turns and take a longer distance to pass other slower road users.

Without going into the specific dynamics of a trailer, you will have to select slower speeds when negotiating curves. Most trailers do not have brakes, so if the trailer and bike get out of alignment when stopping, the trailer will push the back of the bike even more.