

Loading your cargo trailer for motorcycle use: A Question of Balance

A small cargo trailer behind a motorcycle can improve the riding so much it is hard to imagine. Riders always have had to make do with what they could strap to the bike and their bodies as they traveled in their motorcycles. With the right cargo trailer, however, all that changes while the feel of riding the motorcycle remains, essentially, stays the same. There are just a few considerations when packing up your trailer.

When loading your trailer for a long trip, or the trip home from the grocery store, remember to keep enough of the weight forward of the axle center point to maintain a positive hitch load. If you put too much in the rear of the trailer, the coupler will be pulling up on the hitch point all the time. That is not a good thing. Most hitches for motorcycles I've seen have a state a hitch load of about 20 to 30 pounds. Try to balance the load so you've got a 5 to 10 pound hitch load at the coupler. Try to pack so the load will not all shift to the rear under acceleration and back to the front during braking.

Packing items like blankets and sleeping bags at the back of the trailer to help support the front to rear stability is a good idea. If you use the trailer for around town errands, you may want to keep a few blankets in it all times to help you position the load as needed. You never know when the quick stop at the supermarket or hardware store will come up.

If you are carrying a heavy item like a large ice chest, be sure to position it in the center of the trailer just forward of the wheels or the center balance point so it helps maintain the positive hitch load without overloading the hitch plate. Be sure to pack around it to keep it from moving side to side or front to rear.

The one of the worst things you can do is to overload a trailer for the motorcycle. In my experience a load limit of 300 pounds gross including the trailer is the outside weight a rider should consider for even a large touring bike. I met riders who have had large trailers with loads of 800 pounds behind their bikes before. I believe those riders are asking for trouble. The more weight, the more control you surrender in critical maneuvering and panic braking situations.

Another worst case motorcycle cargo trailer scenario is to forget the trailer is behind the bike. This is easy to do with some small trailers as they handle so well and are small enough to be out of sight of the motorcycle rear view mirrors. If the trailer is hard to see in your mirrors, mounting a small flag or SOMETHING on the trailer that you can see in either mirror is a good idea. This will give you a gauge for moving into traffic lines, as well as being a reminder that the trailer is back there. Finally my last warning on loading a cargo trailer behind your motorcycle is to ALWAYS DOUBLE CHECK to be sure the coupler is LATCHED and LOCKED! Safety chains properly attached to the motorcycle should ALWAYS be used too. If you ride in a group, no one will take kindly to your trailer coming loose in front of THEM, believe me. And if you have a receiver type hitch on your motorcycle, be sure the lock pin is in place THROUGH THE HOLE IN and not BEHIND the draw bar. Been there, done that, felt real stupid. Fortunately I personally never had a BAD PROBLEM with the trailer not being solidly attached to the bike because of my use of safety chains.

Well, I hope you all find some wisdom in this little piece. Enjoy your motorcycles, your trailers and.... Ride Safe - Larry Alger - www.motorcycletrailer.com