

Lake Charles Harley Owner Group  
Chapter #1686  
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Chapter #1686

# 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Newsletter



## Sponsoring Dealership

Harley Davidson of Lake Charles  
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## **General Membership Meetings**

1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of the Month at 10 a.m.

Clubhouse is located 2120 Broad Street, Lake Charles, LA next to Dealership

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# How to Be a Motorcycle Passenger

When you climb on the back of a motorcycle, you are literally putting your life in the rider's hands. Here's what you should know and consider before taking that step. **By Art Friedman.**

Learning how to ride a motorcycle is tricky, but learning how to ride as a passenger is ever harder. There aren't any schools for it (though some rider-training classes are set up for riders with passengers). In most cases, the only person who you can ask for advice is the rider (i.e., the driver), who may never have done it, and may be the biggest issue you encounter. We decided to run this story on our website instead of in the magazine, because we believed that would make it available to more prospective passengers in time to be of some assistance.

## What to Expect

If you are going to accept a motorcyclist's invitation to ride along behind him or her, you should expect that person to have some experience both riding motorcycles and carrying passengers. You should expect the rider to make sure you have protective gear and are using it properly. The rider should explain how to mount, sit on, and dismount the motorcycle, what to do when you corner, brake and stop, and how to communicate essentials like "stop," "slow down," or "I have a problem." The person you are entrusting your safety to should display a concern for your welfare and enjoyment of the ride.

Let's examine each of those points in detail, so you know what to expect.

## Rider Experience

Riding with a passenger requires a bit more skill than riding solo. The bike is heavier and won't steer as nimbly or brake in as short a distance. It will be more difficult to balance at a stop. A new rider won't have experience, and these issues may present a challenge to him. So your first question, when invited to ride with someone, should be "How long have you been riding?" If it was my daughter, the answer would have to be at least a year.

Other questions I'd follow-up with are:

"How long have you been riding this bike?" I'd like to hear at least three months.

"How did you learn to ride?" If he has been riding for years or graduated from a dirt bike, those are both acceptable answers. But for a recent rider, I'd want to hear that he took a state or Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) rider-training course.

"How much riding have you done with passengers?" If he needs to practice, tell him to practice with his mom.

"Do you have a motorcycle endorsement on your license?" This is a very important. A rider who has not obtained a motorcycle endorsement on his driver's license is either not serious about motorcycling or doesn't believe he's skilled enough to pass the simple rider's test. Riders without motorcycle licenses are way over-represented in the accident statistics. I'd even ask to see it. No endorsement, no go.

"Are you insured?" This is a simple test of responsibility and attitude. If he is serious about it, he'll have insurance, though it probably won't cover you.

"Had any crashes?" Besides the fact that his crash demonstrates a past problem, riders who crash often have crashed in the recent past.

"Do you ever drink and ride?" If he says, "Well. If I've just had one beer..." I'd say "Uh-oh." Next, I'd find out what he proposes for your first ride. If it is a day-long ride somewhere, I'd suggest a one or two shorter rides first on the same motorcycle. You will want a short ride to see if you feel comfortable with his riding and the motorcycle itself.

There should be some conditions established for this first ride or two. The rider should agree to end the ride on your terms--turn around and go back, or wait while you are picked up by a friend or a taxi. If you are frightened by the experience, for whatever reason, this provides you a ready out.

## **Riding Gear**

Ask about what riding gear you'll be provided or have to supply. At the minimum, you will need a helmet that meets the DOT (Department of Transportation) standard, and the rider should automatically expect that you will wear one. No matter whether it's required by law, if something goes wrong, it is all that stands between you and death or life as something akin to a fungus. If the rider tells you that he doesn't wear one, I'd view that as a sign that he has not really considered the risks of motorcycling or simply has not paid attention to the realities and risks of motorcycling. His attitude is either dangerous or unrealistic. I wouldn't ride with him or let my family ride with him. Helmet fit is a tricky issue with a passenger. A rider isn't likely to buy a helmet to fit you on the first ride. However, a helmet that is too small can be uncomfortable or even painful. One that is too big can come off in mid-crash. I'd find it acceptable if the fit is a bit sloppy but it passes the roll-off test. That test goes like this. Fasten the chin strap snugly, then grab the rear of the helmet, pull up and forward forcefully and try to roll it forward and off over your chin. If it comes off, it fails, and you need a different (and probably smaller) helmet. For detailed information on helmet fit and selection, see our [helmet-buying story](#).

Some passengers balk when a rider presents them with a full-coverage helmet--one that has a section over the mouth with an eyeport covered by the face shield. They shouldn't; the rider has spent more money to get them superior protection. In most cases, this sort of helmet also includes good eye-protection, but if there is no faceshield, you should wear glasses or goggles.

A helmet really is essential. It will protect you from a real life-destroying event. Someone who tells you otherwise is either misinformed or being dishonest. The rest of the recommended riding gear will most likely just prevent pain and suffering. You should wear long pants. Even a minor tip-over can leave uncovered legs scarred for life. Jeans do an acceptable job of protection, though heavier clothing is better. Don't ride in shorts or accept a ride from a rider who does (who once again has failed the test about whether he has realistically assessed the risks).

If you don't have gloves, the rider should supply some. Even a pair of heavy leather work gloves will suffice if they fit properly. A snug fit is important, so they don't come off if things go wrong. Fingerless gloves are another sign of thoughtlessness. Gloves should cover your entire hand.

Motorcycle jackets offer features designed to make them more comfortable while riding and to provide better protection in a fall, but if one isn't available, a jacket made of solid textile is better than nothing. A denim jacket is better than a garment made of lightweight fabric.

Real motorcycle boots are nice, but any solid shoe that covers your foot and ankle will give useful protection. If you don't have shoes that come over your ankle, then choose solid shoes that completely cover your feet. Make sure any laces won't get blown loose and flap where they could get caught in the rear wheel or drive belt or chain, which could injure you or cause a crash.

## **Before You Ride**

If you have never or rarely ridden before, the rider should go through a number of details with you. He should show you how to get on and off the motorcycle. This should include whether he wants you to get on first (usually not, but more common on big bikes with passenger backrests), whether he expects you use the passenger peg as a step or simply throw your leg over the seat (let him know if you can't do this), which side you will approach from, whether you can use his shoulders or arm to steady yourself, and most importantly, how to confirm that he is ready for you to mount. If you catch him by surprise, you could cause the bike to fall over. When the ride is over, will you get off first or will he? Which side and will you use the footrest as a step? He should warn you about any hot parts, normally the exhaust system, to avoid touching.

He should show you where to put your feet while riding, which should be on your own footrests. If they can fold up, he should demonstrate this and make sure they are folded down. He should warn you to keep your feet clear of the wheel and drive system, even though problems are rare. At a stop, he should be able to support the bike without your help, so he should tell you to keep your feet on the pegs when stopped. If he can't do this, I'd be reluctant to ride with him. You should warn him if you want to put your foot down at a stop.

You should establish what you will hold on to. This will not be much of an issue on a motorcycle with a large passenger backrest, but on other bikes you should hold on to the rider at the waist with at least one hand. If there is a large grab rail around your seat, you can hold onto this with your second hand if it's comfortable to do. Otherwise hold onto the rider's waist with both hands. There are belts available with handholds to make this easier, though they are rare. Do not hold on to his shoulders or arms, which can interfere with control, and do not bother trying to use any strap attached to the seat, which provides an unsteady anchor and will affect the motorcycle's stability.

### **Leaning for Corners**

The rider should explain what he wants you to do when leaning into corners. Your body position will influence steering and lean angle, so what you do will affect the rider's control of the bike. I normally tell the passenger to stay neutral--that is, to lean neither with or against the motorcycle--and to look over my inside shoulder. It is important to not shift your weight suddenly in the corner. You should also know that if you are uncomfortable about how far the bike is leaning, that leaning out of the corner and trying to straighten the motorcycle up will probably have just the opposite effect. The rider will have to lean the motorcycle even deeper into the corner to maintain his arc. On some bikes, such as the big wide cruisers, some parts will drag rather easily in corners. The rider should inform you of this and perhaps even demonstrate in a parking lot. He should also be sufficiently familiar with his bike that he can warn you when it's about to happen for the first time. Though it may make an alarming noise, particularly if you aren't ready for it, but it doesn't actually signal anything dangerous.

### **Braking and Acceleration**

During heavy braking, you may be pressed against the rider. If you have a grab rail and can take up some of the pressure, that's fine, but the rider, who has an easier time of supporting himself, should be able to support your weight against him, even under very heavy braking. You may want to hold yourself off the rider's back with your hands or simply lean into his back. Some riders (usually male) with passengers (usually female) who are trying for cheap intimacy may brake harder or more frequently than they need to. This practice is known as the "boob jam," and if you feel you are being subjected to it, feel free to confront him.

Motorcycles can accelerate more forcefully than cars, which may cause problems if there is no passenger backrest. It may not be possible to get a firm handhold on the rider for a variety of reasons, and you can hold on only so tight by gripping with your legs. If this is a concern, be sure you tell the rider about it so he accelerates more gently or provides a secure hold point. He should also transition from steady speed or slowing to acceleration somewhat gradually, so you have time to react. However, you should pay attention to the traffic situation too, so you can anticipate what might happen.

It's not uncommon for your helmets to bump when accelerating or decelerating. Don't apologize. This is not causing a problem, and it's normally the rider's fault because he isn't riding as smoothly as he should.

### **Communication and the First Ride**

Before you leave on a ride that's longer than around the block, you should set a few basic signals to communicate your needs. One tap on the right shoulder, for example, might mean "I want to stop when it's convenient." Two might mean, "It's kind of urgent." And three means, "Stop right now!" A tap on the left shoulder might mean "Look at this" or what you are pointing at. Tapping both might mean "I have a problem." A thumbs-up means "I'm having fun," thumbs down the opposite, and sideways means the jury is out. You may be able to communicate vocally at low speeds or when stopped but the wind will probably prevent it at speed. A patting motion in front of the rider might mean "Please slow down."

You should plan to stop a few minutes into that first ride to discuss things and every 20 or 30 minutes thereafter. You should also have established how long and far the ride is going to be. As I mentioned before, the first ride should be short with a provision to opt out of any further riding if you don't like it. It should also be just your motorcycle, since riding in a group of motorcycles puts pressure on rider to do what the rest are. Other riders and bikes also create distractions. Ideally it should be where there isn't much traffic, though a stint at highway speeds is probably a good idea if you are contemplating longer rides in the future.

You should assert yourself any time you aren't comfortable or enjoying the experience, even before you get on. If the rider or the bike make you feel uncomfortable, it's best to stop things before they get worse.

### **The Motorcycle**

A woman recently told me about being invited to ride on a motorcycle for the first time and being surprised that there was no backrest for the passenger "or anything to keep you from sliding off the back." I suspect it was more of an issue because she didn't want to hold onto the person who invited her to ride.

Certainly there are aspects of a motorcycle that can make it more suitable or pleasant for a passenger or make it unpleasant or even unsafe. Backrests are the most desired feature for a passenger, and the bigger the better. However, only a minority of motorcycles come with any passenger backrest at all, so don't expect one. Normally the biggest passenger backrests are those that are part of a trunk assembly, which may include armrests and speakers (with controls for the stereo). However, there are setups, like those from Custom World International ([www.cw-intl.com](http://www.cw-intl.com)), for cruisers that offer the same large backrest and arm supports. These permit the passenger to relax and feel secure without holding onto the rider. Smaller backrest may simply provide a barrier to sliding off the seat and not actually be a place to rest your back.

The seat itself is the next most important item. The ideal saddle is deep and comfortable, wide enough to support you and roomy enough front to rear to give you room to adjust your position without crowding against the rider. A narrow seat is not only uncomfortable, but it makes you feel less secure. It should not slope rearward (as a few, such as that on the Harley V-Rod, do), and any slope to the front should be very small so that you don't tend to slide into the rider. Many cruisers and touring bikes provide a raised passenger saddle, which permits the passenger to easily see over the rider. The passenger's section of the saddle is something you should consider on any preliminary check-out ride. If you are developing a long-term riding relationship with somebody with an uncomfortable passenger seat, ask if it might be changed. Virtually any motorcycle can be equipped with a more comfortable accessory saddle or just a nicer passenger section.

Footrest position can be an issue, if it bends your legs in an uncomfortable way or doesn't allow you to support yourself on your legs (which can be important over bumps). Floorboards, wide flat plates that provide a roomier perch for your feet, offer more flexibility and are available for many cruisers and touring bikes.

Normally the rider will adjust the suspension to accommodate the added weight of a passenger, but even this will do little to improve a poorly calibrated suspension or one with limited travel.

Motorcycles don't ride as smoothly as cars, for a variety of reasons, but some are plain bad. In some cases, the suspension can be improved with aftermarket parts. Vibration, on the other hand, is forever. If it buzzes uncomfortably, there is nothing to be done except get off, though the rider might be able to avoid operating the engine uncomfortable rpm if you mention it.

Any of these aspects of the motorcycle that concern you should be mentioned to the rider, who might be able to make an adjustment or at least change it before his next outing with a passenger.

Child passengers require special considerations addressed in [another article](#) in the [Street Survival](#) section of [MotorcycleCruiser.com](#)

## **Further Adventures**

If your early experiences as a motorcycle passenger make you want to do more, there are number of avenues you can pursue. If you'd like to learn to become a motorcycle rider yourself, the Motorcycle Safety Foundation can hook you up with one of the courses that have trained millions of riders in safe locations, with motorcycles supplied and professional, trained instructors. This is a *much* safer and easier way to learn to ride than from a friend. You can get info and find a facility in your area in [MSF's rider-training section](#) or by calling the MSF at (800) 446-9227. The MSF also offers an [off-road rider training course](#).

If you are planning on remaining a passenger, you and your rider may be able to find one of the courses that address this partnership.

If you plan to ride regularly, either as a rider or passenger, you will want to acquire your own gear. A comfortable helmet is the biggest item, in terms of cost, safety and comfort. You can find [advice on buying one](#) in the "[Accessories and Gear](#)" section of [MotorcycleCruiser.com](#). A jacket or full suit is the other major purchase, but gloves should be one of your first purchases too. If you ride frequently or travel on a motorcycle, you will also want a [rainsuit](#). One that is built for motorcycling will work better on a motorcycle and hold up longer than a generic style. If you ride frequently, you will want additional gear that lets you adapt to weather changes.

The biggest step to enjoying the back seat of a motorcycle is finding an experienced and thoughtful rider. With his or her help, you can address the safety and ergonomic issues and open up a new world that you never would have known in a car.

# Before You Go On A Long Distance Motorcycle Ride... Things You Must Consider



If you're planning a long-distance motorcycle ride in the near future, then you'll appreciate these tips which we compiled after taking [multi-day trips on our Harley](#).

In addition to packing [the bare necessities listed on our motorcycle checklist](#), these things are worth considering as well:

- Whenever possible, try to find a hotel that's in walking distance to a restaurant/bar so you don't have to get back on the bike before you turn in for the night.
- Eat *very* light for breakfast, then eat an early lunch before the lunch crowd arrives. If you're going to eat a heavy meal or a lot of food, save it for the last meal of the day when you're done riding — because big meals take a lot of energy to digest and will make you drowsy.
- Don't eat at chain restaurants. Instead, stop at mom & pop restaurants and local pubs whenever possible. (The hole-in-the-wall dives have much more character, and you learn a lot more about the people and things to do in the area.) For example, we stopped at a small pub in Crossville, TN called [Cowgirls Sports Bar & Grille](#) for a burger. We met the bar's owner and learned about an unadvertised show featuring a very famous Country Music star who is going to unveil a new band he's promoting there in a few weeks.
- Pack snacks if you have the space. We like snack-size peanut M&Ms, hard candies (like [Sweet Tarts](#), [Gobstoppers](#), [Jolly Ranchers](#)), and [mixed nuts](#) in snack-size ziploc bags.
- Carry water and make a point to drink some every time you stop (even if you don't feel thirsty). It's important to your alertness and your overall comfort level to stay hydrated. We like to start the trip with a frozen bottle of water. It lasts a long time. Some like to use a [Camelbak Hydration Pack](#) instead, so you don't have to stop in order to get a drink.
- [We had a cigarette lighter accessory installed](#) in one of our saddlebags. That's how we charge the battery in our mobile phone while we're riding. We also carry a [travel power adaptor](#) so we can use the same phone charger in hotels using an electrical outlet.
- Even if you only *remotely* want to see something, then STOP! Enjoy the ride and everything there is to see and do along the way. Otherwise, you'll be wishing you had if you didn't. It helps to find places ahead of time by searching online or viewing other motorcyclists' itineraries (on the [map sites](#) mentioned earlier).
- To avoid having to keep unfolding then refolding the map while on the bike, I sometimes use an app called [CamScanner](#) to take a photo of the exact portion of the map we are most interested in for that particular leg of the trip. That way, we can just zoom in to the "photo" of the map that is stored on our phone in order to see things on the map even closer while we are on the bike. The app produces higher quality and more detailed images than a typical camera app. It turns your phone into a photocopy scanner and stores images as PDF's which you can then save, share, or upload to the cloud.

- Take a photo at each and every stop — including state lines, historic roadways, and noteworthy locations. Try to take a group photo at the start of each day.
- We keep a small pair of binoculars in the front pocket of the luggage. They could come in handy to see what's up ahead of you on the road or to view wildlife in the distance.
- If you wear glasses (like I do), take a cheap spare pair along with you rather than your everyday pair — in case you lose them, misplace them, sit on them, squish them while packing, etc. I have [sunglasses that go over eyeglasses](#) — so I can wear both at the same time. (This comes in handy if I need to read the map while we're riding.)
- We haven't invested in [motorcycle glasses for riding at night](#) yet. Instead, we each wear a cheap pair of [clear lens safety glasses](#) during our nighttime rides.
- On chilly or windy days, I wear clear [silicone earplugs](#) to keep the wind from entering my ears since I'm prone to ear aches.
- If you have long hair, then you know that tiny flyaway hairs are constantly slipping out from under the helmet and slapping you in the face. (When you're going fast, they feel like sharp little knives.) I spent weeks trying to figure out how to keep flyaways from slipping out of my (very tight, elastic) ponytail holder, by experimenting with hair combs and barrettes of all shapes and sizes. Finally, I tried wearing a simple [wide, stretchy headband](#) underneath my helmet... and it worked! No more flyaways. Not one. (During the winter I plan to use my [thin fleece pullover headband](#) that is a little warmer and covers my ears as well — to cut down on the wind. For the summer, I may upgrade to one that has wicking properties like this [Under Armour headband](#).)



- Like many people, I photograph everything we do in life and I document those things [in scrapbooks](#) and [online](#). I never thought I'd be able to take my Nikon D80 digital camera with me on the bike, but I just couldn't head out on our first long-distance motorcycle trip without it. Most of the time, I draped the thick camera strap around my neck and loosely held the camera near my body while it rested on my leg. Other times, I simply used my mobile phone's camera to point & shoot things we saw whenever we stopped. **UPDATE:** I've since found the best motorcycle camera ever! Here's [my review of the Canon Powershot Elph](#).
- We learned the hard way that many places — especially little towns — don't take American Express. So plan ahead. Have plenty of cash (or a debit card) available instead.
- We've found that we can comfortably ride about 100 miles before our butts need a break and our legs need a stretch. We ride about 300 miles each day max. Truth be told, by the 4th day of our most recent motorcycle trip, we had to stop and stretch (and take pressure off of those key "pressure points") more and more frequently — as often as every 30 minutes. Since we don't have that much saddle time in yet, I expect our need for butt breaks to decrease the more we ride. But I'm seriously considering an [AirHawk Motorcycle Seat Cushion](#)! (See reviews [here](#) and [here](#).)
- Other things that could come in handy and might be worth making room for: 2 bungee cords, a roll of duct tape, [kickstand pad](#) (for parking on grass/sand/gravel/asphalt), fanny pack or waist bag (I got one of [these](#); I like how it hooks right on my belt loops), non-cycling shoes & clothing (if your trip requires it), shampoo, and soap (if not staying at a hotel).
- For keeping the motorcycle clean, we borrowed an amazing product from a friend called [Fastwax FW1 Wash & Wax](#). It's a waterless car wash that is an aerosol foam. It works great, but it's *expensive*! We searched all over for another aerosol foam waterless car wash & wax product, but they are next to impossible to find in stores. Finally, we found [Foamtek waterless car wash](#). It works just as well as the FW1, but costs much less. We highly recommend it!

# The Magic Bag: Roadside Necessities for Motorcyclists

Also known as "the breakdown bag," this is what goes along on our motorcycle rides to deal with routine events and major problems. From the December 1998 issue of *Motorcycle Cruisemagazine*.

After a recent multi-motorcycle comparison road test, a rider who had never gone along with us before commented, "You should tell people about your Magic Bag." The Magic Bag is a tailbag which accompanies me on every ride that will last longer than a jaunt around town. It's actually one of two bags of supplies I have available.

I also have a fanny pack that comes along on every ride. These two bags contain tools and supplies which will allow me and my cohorts to keep going in the face of many incidents that could end or significantly delay a ride.

## Fanny Pack

The items we drag along on rides are those we have discovered (usually the hard way) are more than nice to have. I bought the fanny pack from a vendor at Daytona a few years ago. Its largish size is divided into four compartments with two small pockets along the belt. The prime necessity is a cellular phone, which can summon help when a bike has a problem -- a flat tire being the most likely. An electronic organizer keeps track of the phone numbers of people I will call and plead with to come rescue me.

Since these kinds of annoying things frequently happen at night, a flashlight is essential. The little LED built into my Swisslite pocketknife provides enough illumination for a cursory inspection. But if I need a brighter or longer-lasting light, the Mitylite in my fanny pack fills the bill. It also clips to my sleeve or visor to provide hands-free illumination. Like the organizer, it uses AA batteries, so I keep four of them in the bag too. I prefer Kirkland from Costco because they come packaged in convenient four-packs.

The multitool provides a few basic tools -- file, knife, pliers, screwdrivers -- and is backed up by the tiny Sears Craftsman fold-up screwdriver set shown. The cable ties can fix a variety of minor problems.

Since I wear contact lenses, I carry saline solution and a lens case, along with glasses. Saline solution can also clean debris out of an eye. Wipes to clean my hands before handling my contacts, or after doing repairs, are in there too. The bandanna can serve as neck protection, face shield cleaner or bandage.

Most of the remaining contents are self-explanatory, except for the whistle. I have heard tales of riders who fell out of view of passers-by and were unable to move. The whistle might summon help in such a situation (try blowing an SOS). The camera, like the other items listed in parentheses on the next page, may not be useful to all riders. On days when rain is looming, the fanny pack goes into a saddlebag or backpack with rain gear.

## The Tailbag

Once I travel beyond the greater L.A. area, I throw the Magic Bag onto the back of whatever I'm riding. Its contents are intended to help me deal with routine and emergency problems that arise on longer treks. The beauty of having all this stuff in one bag is that I'm always ready for a long ride. If someone calls and suggests a cruise up the coast, I'm already packed. For rides that will last several days, all I need to add is sufficient clothing. The contents are chosen to work with a variety of bikes, with both metric and American tools and fasteners. Although it's tempting to tailor the contents just for the bike(s) I'll be riding, there is always the chance I will come across a broken bike of the other persuasion.

I normally use a Wolfman (303/ 541-9723) tailbag, chosen for its several accessible pockets and convenient size -- big enough for everything but not too bulky. The same stuff will also fit into most saddlebags or tankbags, but a tailbag is the best choice for me because I can quickly mount it on a variety of stock motorcycles. As much as practical, the contents are divided into subcontainers (like the envelope-style bags from Aerostich, 800/222-1994). My loose tools snuggle in a tool roll from RevPack (800/ 766-2461).

Topping my list of contents are spare face shields -- one clear, one tinted. I store them in a pair of heavy socks, one per sock. This protects the shields and provides a source of added warmth for my feet. Protect All or Pledge can clean windshields, face shields or the bike itself. I normally carry a single bottle of water in case I get stranded. But if I venture into the desert I take two or three more, usually freezing them the night before.

My small first-aid kit is equipped to treat abrasions, bleeding and insect stings. It includes more hand-cleaning wipes, rubber gloves (2 sets), a selection of small and large bandages, moist burn pads, tape, and nonaspirin pain reliever. A small bottle of hydrogen peroxide can clean up scrapes with the aid of a surgical scrub sponge, and there are small packets of antibiotic ointment to apply under bandages. My pocketknife also has tweezers. I started carrying a bicycle strobe light after being stranded at night in the rain on an interstate highway divider. This small, flashing red light uses that same AA battery and clips to my helmet, jacket or seat. Its rapid flashing is eye-catching. The possible danger is some drowsy or drunk driver will steer toward it, but I think it serves as a warning signal for the overwhelming majority.

My tool kit must serve a variety of bikes, since what I ride changes from day to day. Yours will probably be more compact if you are building it for a single bike. However, if you frequently ride in a group, having a universal kit can reduce everyone's load. The ratchet and socket seem essential for most bikes, because even if they have a tool kit, many parts are difficult to remove with just a wrench. Include a spark-plug socket as well, I usually carry both U.S. and metric sizes. Make sure you have the tools needed to adjust or remove accessory pieces which may not be compatible with your tool kit.

The crescent wrench should fit the largest hex on your bike (usually an axle nut) and can also serve as a makeshift hammer or lever for bending a fallen-upon piece. The small locking pliers provide an extra hand when removing a fastener, fill-in for a broken shift lever, or clamp something that's trying to escape. Those adjustable box wrenches turn any nut or bolt I don't have a wrench for. A tube of citrus-based hand cleaner from Finish Line (516/666-7300) makes post-fix cleanup easy and quick.

I recommend the tire-repair kits from Stop & Go (800/747-0238). The firm has kits for tubeless and tube-type tires. I carry both, along with tire irons and a container of sealant for tube-type tires. As we have discussed in previous issues, sealants should be avoided (if possible), since they can cause the layers of your tire to separate. Tire companies recommend prompt replacement if you use this

stuff. Finally, have a method of inflating tires. I carry mini CO2 cartridges and a compression-actuated pump that goes into the spark-plug hole -- both from Stop & Go.

I have a set of Road Gear jumper cables or you can make a set of your own with four-gauge (or heavier) wire. A hammer driver is only worthwhile if your bike uses Phillips screws in the cases, and a tow strap is only useful if you are riding in a group. (You should also know how to use it and recognize its use may be illegal on the road.) Some bikes can be propped up on the right side by a length of pipe, which is helpful in some situations. That pipe can also serve as an extension for a wrench or a lever.

The supplies are pretty obvious, though you may have some problem fasteners or other parts that you want to include in addition to a standard selection of nuts, bolts and screws. You should also know what you need to do to reach your fuses in the dark (God help you if you have a Suzuki 1500). I suggest carrying an instrument bulb, a taillight bulb and -- if applicable -- a headlight bulb. A turn signal bulb can be obtained at most gas stations and is less urgent than a taillight bulb. An ideal place to stash bulbs, especially for the headlight, is inside the headlight shell. Extra fuses have also been important in my experience, since the extras supplied with the bike usually just serve to prove you didn't fix the electrical problem on your first attempt.

Carry chain-care equipment if you have a chain. Remember that many bikes have press-in master links, which require an additional tool. Be sure the master link fits your chain.

If you cling to the belief that motorcycle-specific oils are just a conspiracy to separate you from extra money every time you buy oil, there is no sense in carrying a container of oil. But if you are using the right oil and your engine tends to consume a lot, having a bit extra is worthwhile.

Maps of the riding area are always practical, and a compass can help you navigate. I also get a lot of use from the weather-band radio I bought for less than \$20 at Radio Shack (more AA batteries).

Finally, bungee cords and the bungee net I use to provide extra security for the tailbag (I had a different brand tailbag pull loose from its straps several years ago, stick in the rear wheel, and launch me.) are handy for providing a home for clothes I shed, things I acquire along the way, or overflow from other riders' bikes.

Because my bag contains supplies to serve a variety of bikes, it is fairly heavy -- typically more than 20 pounds. But the gear needed for one bike can weigh significantly less if you are selective. Since I often ride with large groups of bikes, the Magic Bag gets called on regularly. A single rider might go all season without ever opening it, even if he rides frequently. But there is peace of mind in knowing that if you have a problem, the solution is probably in the bag.

## **POCKETS AND WALLET**

- Credit cards
- Small pocketknife/flashlight combination

## **TAILBAG**

- Face shields stored in socks
- Small can of Protect All or Pledge
- Clean rags
- Water bottle(s)
- Spare gloves
- Rainsuit

- First-aid kit
- Bicycle strobe light

## **Tools**

- Crescent wrench
- Small locking pliers
- Ratchet and appropriate sockets
- Sears box wrenches
- Allen wrench set
- Tire repair kit(s) with inflator
- Jumper cables
- Waterless hand cleaner
- (Impact driver)
- (Tow strap)
- (Pipe as extension and stand)

## **Parts and Supplies**

- Duct tape
- Nuts and bolts
- Six feet of electrical wire
- Four to six feet of baling wire
- Cotter pins
- Bulbs
- Spare fuses
- Tire sealant
- (Master link)
- (Chain lube)
- (Spark plugs)
- (Small container of oil)

## **Miscellaneous**

- Motorcycle Cruiser cap
- Lighter or heavier gloves
- Weather-band radio
- Local and state maps
- Compass
- Bike lock
- Bungee cords

## **FANNY PACK**

- Cellular phone
- Organizer with phone numbers
- Waterproof Mitylite flashlight
- Spare batteries for all of the above
- Small bottle of solution for face shield cleaning
- Craftsman pocket screwdriver
- Pen and paper
- Sunglasses
- Whistle
- Glasses
- Earplugs
- Multitool
- Tire gauge
- Spare bike key
- Cable ties
- Bandanna
- Lip balm
- Contact lens supplies
- Small bottle of sunscreen
- Hand-cleaner wipes
- (Camera and spare battery)

This list is intended to be tailored to your bike and requirements, but it has been refined by a lot of experience, mostly the kind where you wish you'd brought something.

## Pictures



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