

# Pointers for Planning Your Next Motorcycle Trip, Part 1: Before You Hit the Road

By Robert Laford, GWRRA #126196, Petersham, Massachusetts

*Bob Laford belongs to both GWRRA and the Red Knights International Firefighters Motorcycle Club. He has presented a seminar on this topic at Americade and other rallies. What follows is Part One of his insightful views on how to plan a long-distance motorcycle tour. Enjoy!*

**T**he motorcycling community is full of seasoned riders with miles and miles of travel under their belts. As you gather your riding friends together, remember these many years of riding experience and valuable opinions are available to draw from in order to improve everyone's collective motorcycling knowledge. The points listed throughout this article are from that collective knowledge.

If you're thinking about going on a trip on your bike, ask your riding friends for stories, anecdotes, pointers, and lessons learned. Yes, there are some people who make the decisions of where to ride and how to get there over a morning cup of coffee and simply throw clothes in a duffel and a map on the tank bag and they're off. But that's probably not the safest, most well-thought-out execution for planning a trip. Instead, ask a lot of questions—questions of yourself, your plans and expectations, and questions of your co-riders. Specific questions about the trip and its details need to be asked long before you pack your bags and fill your tank for that journey on two wheels. The more questions, possibilities, and scenarios you can think of that may arise during your trip, the more answers you have already planned for before the wheel has turned.

This article is an attempt to get you thinking about what types of questions to ask, but hopefully there will also be some options, opinions, and answers here that will be useful for you. So here are some points to think about to make planning your trip a bit more thoughtful and beneficial.

## Before you hit the road

### Planning for planning's sake.

(1.) General Dwight Eisenhower said, "I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable." Ten miles down the road, the bike breaks down, the bridge is out with a 50-mile detour, and your riding partner meets up with you on a bicycle. The plan itself may be out the window, but the time you've spent planning has been very important to the overall goal because of the information you have gathered through the planning process. This information will help you adapt when your plan needs to be modified for what reality brings into the picture.

(2.) To reinforce the General's thoughts: "Do not write your travel plan in fountain pen." This statement can be taken literally—because fountain pen ink will run in the rain and become illegible—but think about it also in figurative terms. Plans are what keep you going in the right direction with some semblance of a time line, but if you become too rigid in following your plan, you do not allow yourself, or your riding companions, the opportunity to explore something that appears off the specific intended route. So if you come across a sign that intrigues you to venture off the route you have planned, take it. If you are traveling by Darwin, Minnesota, for example, it may be the only time you get to see the largest ball of twine in the world. And the off-route stops you make and the characters you meet at them may also be some of the best memories on your journey.

**Your riding companions.** Before you even begin to think about routes, length of time on the road, and all the essential details of your planning, one primary decision must be made. With whom will you ride on the trip? Riding companions can make or break a trip—whether it is a 200- or a 2,000-mile adventure—and will affect each piece of the tour's puzzle. Riding companions may have been chosen because they are friends, but if they are not compatible, they may not be friends by trip's end. Simple lifestyle benchmarks can



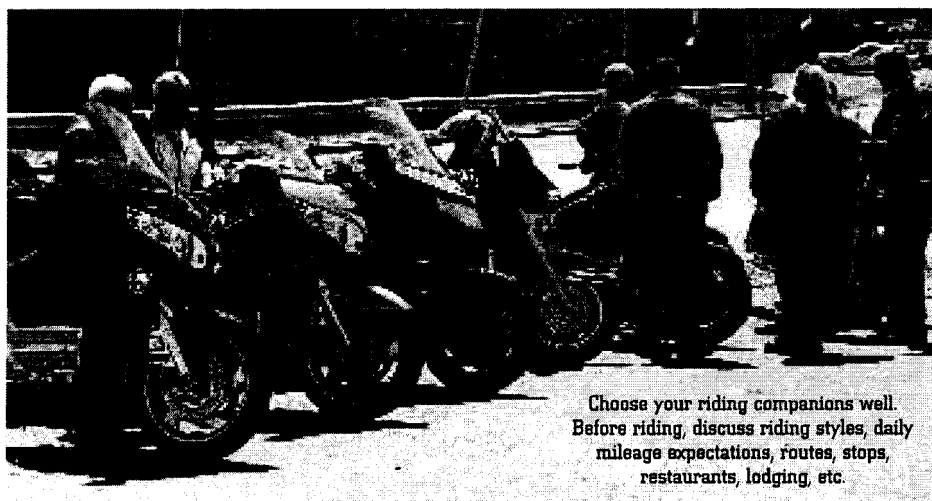
become very magnified on the road.

Are you an early riser or do you sleep in? Do you plan to eat breakfast and hit the road, or ride for a while and then find breakfast? Where, how often, and what kind of lunch and/or snack time do you need on the road? How about your choice of lodging—is it camping, hotels, under the stars, or B&Bs? If you bring your tent, and your riding partner's idea of roughing it is a hotel without a Jacuzzi, then you're in trouble!

What about riding styles? How many miles will you travel in a day and how fast? Will you travel highways or secondary roads? How many hours should you plan to be on the road for the day? Do you work to stay together as a group, or plan to depart together but then ride your own style and rate and meet up at the end of the day at a predetermined stopping point? These basic questions should be asked long before the tires start to roll so that each participant knows ahead of time the expected activities, tasks, and requirements of the trip. These discussion points and trip characteristics not only contribute to how enjoyable the trip is for everyone, but also are important factors for the comfort, health, and safety of all the participants.

**Trip Goal: Comfort, Health, and Safety.**

No matter the distance, destination, or duration of the trip, the ultimate goal is for you to return safely with your bike and your riding



Choose your riding companions well.  
Before riding, discuss riding styles, daily  
mileage expectations, routes, stops,  
restaurants, lodging, etc.

companions still intact. As you begin to plan your adventure, reasonable goals for distance of daily travel and safe riding practices should be among the foremost thoughts as the route is planned.

Safety begins with a pre-trip maintenance checkup for both you and your ride. Riders often think just of the motorcycle and its condition—tires, engine, running condition, etc.—before venturing on the roads, but you should also ensure that you are traveling with the proper paperwork and contact information for your motorcycle. Registration, insurance,

and rider services information should be kept with you at all times. If traveling outside of the country, there may be special paperwork that is needed, like the Canadian Insurance card. All of that is important and should be taken care of before you hit the road. But equally, if not more importantly, is to establish if you, and each rider, are in shape to make the ride. Are there any medical conditions that would be aggravated while on the road? Is there enough prescription medicine to take along? How is each rider's general physical and mental health?

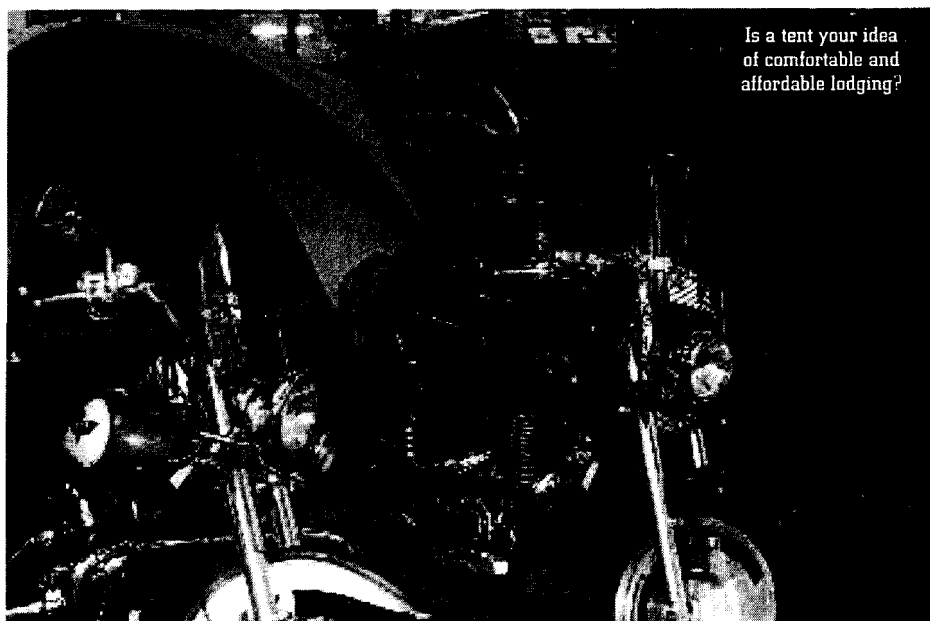


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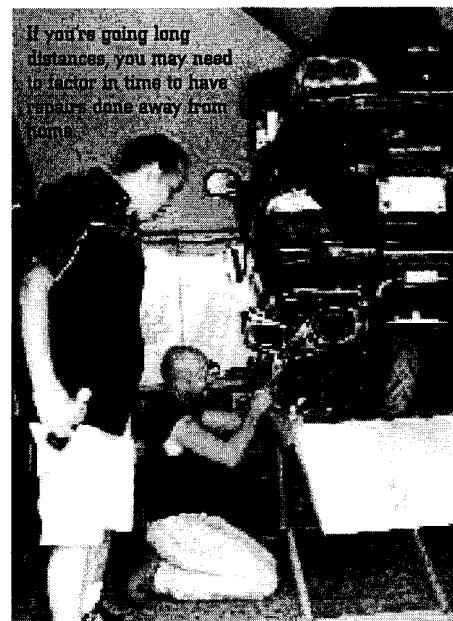
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If you're going long distances, you may need to factor in time to have repairs done away from home.

Some thought must also be given to the possibility that you or another rider may need medical attention while on the road. Will your health insurance be accepted everywhere you are traveling? Where will you keep contact information for your health insurance? What if you need a prescription while on the road? These are all points to look into long before leaving.

Also, do you know the personal and medical information of your riding companions? Develop a master list of emergency contact information and other important data for everyone on the trip before leaving, then have each person carry a copy of their own contacts and medical information with him or her. This should include home contacts, medical conditions and medication needs. Does anyone have specific allergies to things like bee stings or seafood? The emergency information docu-

mentation should contain medical and bike insurance information as well as any rider's personal insurance in case a medical emergency, towing, or on-road service is needed.

Carry first aid equipment with you. You need not be prepared to do elective surgery on the road, but some basic first aid supplies like adhesive bandages, gauze, cold-packs, etc., are valuable to tend to cuts, aches and pains, insect bites, and scrapes and bruises along the way. If there are multiple people on the trip, discuss an emergency action plan, just in case. You may find you have one person that has more emergency background. That person may be the best choice for your primary first aid person.

Also, who has cell phones? Who would be the best person to stay with the bike(s) while another goes to the next town or rides until there is cell service? How best and who best to

handle warning oncoming traffic? These are all simple thoughts that, under the stress of an emergency, might tax your senses; they are better discussed beforehand.

**What about your bike?** When was the last time it had a complete and thorough checkup? At a minimum, each rider should do a routine pre-ride T-CLOCK inspection, including checking tire pressure and condition frequently, but take time for a more detailed examination of each bike before heading out on a trip. One sure way to interrupt a trip is to have a motorcycle failure that grinds progress to a halt. Although you can't account for every mechanical breakdown via a pre-ride evaluation, a mechanical and physical review of your bike may pinpoint a potential problem that otherwise might go unnoticed.

If your trip is of a duration that is marked in

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### 2007 RALLY SCHEDULE

Daytona Bike Week - March 2 - 11, 2007

GWRRR Florida District Rally - March 15-17, 2007

GWRRR Alabama District Rally - March 29-31, 2007

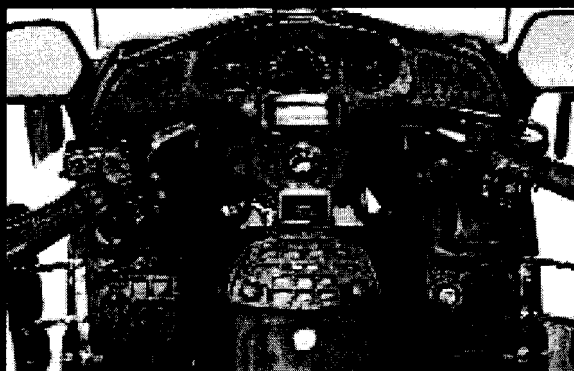
GWRRR Louisiana District Rally - April 12-14, 2007

GWRRR Tennessee District Rally - April 26-28, 2007

Nichlaus Open House - May 18-20, 2007

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thousands of miles, on-the-road maintenance may be necessary as well. If you will need to change the oil during the trip, should you work that into your itinerary and plan a stop at a dealer's service center? Do you plan to pick up the oil and filter on the road to do your own routine maintenance and service yourself, plus dispose of the used product through acceptable means?

These are all issues that should be thought of in advance of leaving for that long-distance, multi-week excursion. If your evaluation of your ride determines that your tires are beyond their 50-percent life, consider replacing them before you leave so you don't need to worry about finding a replacement mid-trip. The peace of mind that you have taken extra precautions to ensure that your motorcycle is in tip-top shape will also help with the emotional element of your ride.

And what if you do need maintenance assistance while on the road? One of the great advantages of being a Member of GWRRA is its *Gold Book* and the willing assistance that GWRRA Members share with others on the road. This database provides local contacts through Chapter memberships so that a rider,

while on the road, can contact a fellow Member to inquire about information or assistance.

**Where are we headed?** What is your destination? What do you consider a "long trip"? Some riders consider 200 or 300 miles over the course of a weekend a long trip. Others consider their ideal long trip to be thousands of miles over the course of several weeks. There is no right or wrong answer—what's best for you?

Is your destination the goal, or is your adventure really the journey to and from the final destination? There are many destinations in and around the United States and beyond, and your trip can become part of your adventure to reach those specific points of interest. How much time you have to travel will be a deciding factor on how much time is available to spend on the actual journey and the sights and stops along the way.

**How do you want to travel?** Because of the length of time you have planned for the trip, are the ride out and the ride back specifically planned to be on highways that make the best use of time? Can you spend more time on the road and therefore use secondary roads

more often to enjoy the mom-and-pop atmosphere of small-town America?

What length of travel days should be planned? Some people may consider 300 miles as the longest they may want to travel while others may be physically and mentally prepared to do 500 miles per day or more. Again, forethought and discussion with your riding companions is essential so that you're not disappointed or stressed out because each other's expectations were on opposite ends of the spectrum.

Other points to discuss prior to the trip are sites and stops. What do you want to see? The people you meet and the unplanned occurrences are sometimes the best pieces and most remembered aspects of your journey.

**Trip routing.** The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. If that is the only map that you are taking with you and the rest of the ride is the adventure, that's okay if it's what you planned. There are also other means to map your trip and plan your route that vary between low tech maps and high tech GPS and computer-aided directions.

Even if you rely on the more sophisticated means of mapping through the use of a GPS

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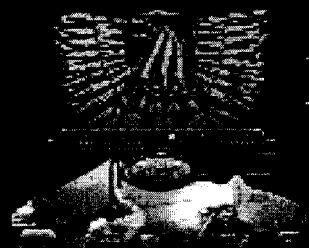
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**GWRRA invites you to the first-ever Wing Ding Europe  
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Similar to our yearly Wing Ding here in the U.S. each July—just on a smaller scale and one month later—it will include such Wing Ding highlights as a Vendor Trade Show, Light Parade, Grand Parade, and Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

Saturday and Sunday's festivities will include one of Denmark's hottest country bands, Desert Track, playing lively dance music.

The weekend event will run from August 2 to August 5, 2007, with most delegates officially arriving at Sakskøbing Sportcenter for dinner and an overnight

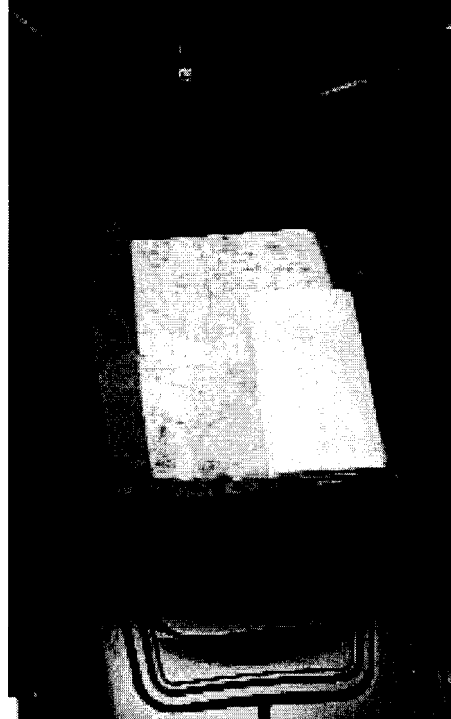
stay—at either Sakskøbing Danhostel or on the camping grounds—on Friday. And a variety of accommodation plans will be offered, including one that includes your meals!

So if you've ever dreamed of going to Europe, why not make it a GWRRA Family affair?

But hurry, don't miss out on the early Member registration option!

For more information, to make reservations, and to learn how to ship your bike abroad, call (800) 843-9460 or (623) 581-2500 (Phoenix) or visit [www.wing-ding.eu](http://www.wing-ding.eu).

Sometimes a "cue card" is easier to follow than a map or even a GPS.



system and your laptop computer, it's always a good idea to take along your hard-copy maps and be familiar with how to use them. Technology does go bad at times, and the low-tech fallback is always a prepared answer.

As you plan your route day-to-day, make up some "cue cards" that you can place on the bike within your field of vision so you don't have to constantly look at the markings on your map. The evening before, browse your maps and your plans and write basic route numbers and directions on an index card. By having that card handy, you can glance at it and realize you are now on Route 202 and that your next turn will be onto Route 2 West. Another idea is to use a grease pencil and write these basic routings on your mirror. A quick glance at your mirror gives you the next benchmark on your day's ride. Then, each night, you can erase that day's ride and begin to prepare the next.

Map routing services are available through your GWRRA Member benefit *Rescue* or *Rescue Plus*. You can utilize this benefit by calling (800) 338-2680, ext. 296 or 309, or by visiting the GWRRA homepage at [www.gwrro.org](http://www.gwrro.org) and clicking on the *Rescue Plus* box in the lower, right-hand corner of the page (which directs you to [www.towbusters.com](http://www.towbusters.com)). Most often, maps are also available through service and motorcycle organizations such as AAA and Honda Rider's Club of America as well. Remember to take along a waterproof map pouch.

**Look for Part 2, entitled "On the Road," next issue.**