

BMMC Rider Training

Trailer Behind Your Motorcycle



This?



Or This?

I. Trailers

Saddlebags are big enough for everything that you *need* to take...not everything that you *want* to take. Same with any sized trunk space you may have. So, if your *wants* outnumber your *needs* you're really left with only two options; overload your motorcycle or load your *wants* in another vehicle, like a small trailer.

Riders have been pulling trailers behind their motorcycles for decades. Everything from utility trailers to small pop-up campers are available. And the numbers of trailers on the road today has been increasing by over 20% per year for the last several years. Group motorcycle camping has become very popular.

Most trailers have two wheels but there are a few popular brands that use a single wheel. The advantage of the single wheeled trailers is that the trailer leans with the motorcycle and tracks in the same wheel path.



Two Wheeled Trailer



Single Wheeled Trailer

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If pulling a trailer is something you might be interested in, here are a few items the experts say you should keep in mind: The trailer...

- should be designed to carry the things needed for making touring a more pleasurable experience (e.g. camping gear, golf clubs, cold and warm weather clothing, cosmetic survival kit, etc.).
- should be easy to retrieve anything inside.
- floor needs to be flat, the sides need to be straight and lid opening should permit the easiest loading and unloading.
- should be light weight.
- should handle so well that you can't even tell you are pulling it.

A. Things to look for when shopping for a trailer:

1. You want the trailer to be as light as you can get it and still have the structural quality needed to be a safe product. A solid frame is a must (preferably tubular steel as opposed to angle iron or flat stock).
2. Strive for 140 to 200 pounds maximum empty weight. The more the empty trailer weighs, the less cargo you can carry before the trailer changes from being your friend to becoming your enemy. If you are required to make an emergency stop, you don't want the trailer to prevent you from completing the maneuver safely.



3. The trailer should not be much wider than a dressed out touring bike with saddlebags because if the bike clears an object while passing, you want the trailer to clear it also. Besides, a trailer that is much wider than the motorcycle will require you to ride in the center of the lane where oil and dirt build up.

4. The height of the trailer should be less than the bottom of your tour trunk and the front should not be totally flat. Why? Because the low pressure area behind your windscreen can draw the exhaust up and forward to contaminate the rider's space if the trailer doesn't produce an adequate channel for the exhaust to flow *under* the trailer. It can be like having the rear window of a station wagon or van open with an exhaust leak.



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5. Make sure the tires and bearings are of a type that are readily available should you ever have to replace one while on the road. Both the 4.80 X 8" and 4.80 X 12" tires are common to most utility trailers. Timken style tapered roller bearings are much preferred over sealed bearings.
6. The trailer should be designed so you can use the space effectively. Odd shapes, wheel wells and shock cavities that intrude excessively into the storage are to be avoided. These designs prevent some pieces of luggage, lawn chairs and all but the smallest of ice chests from being packed into the trailer without having to be placed at very awkward angles.



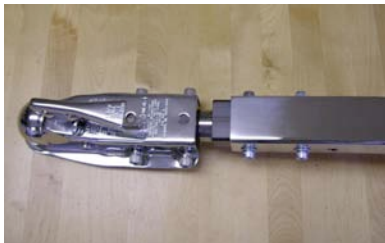
gauge, lawn chairs and all but the smallest of ice chests from being packed into the trailer without having to be placed at very awkward angles.

B. What About Handling?

A well-designed motorcycle trailer can also improve the handling of your bike. Remember that overloading the motorcycle with gear strapped on the gas tank, tour trunk or sissy bar, raises the center of gravity and makes for poor handling. With a trailer, all unnecessary weight is off the bike and inside the trailer, which in turn lowers the center of gravity and allows your suspension to function properly.

The rear wheel of the motorcycle produces a gyroscopic effect that makes any well designed cargo trailer almost transparent to the rider, and in some cases a trailer behind your bike can actually help with stability, especially on slippery surfaces or when encountering gusting cross winds or the air currents generated by large semi-trucks.

II. Trailer Hitches



Once you have decided on your new trailer it is time to make sure that the trailer hitch you get is compatible with the coupler at the end of the trailer tongue. Most motorcycles can be equipped with a ball hitch mounted on the back of the bike, similar to the ones found on pickup trucks. Although the ball hitch is the most popular, there are three other types of hitches

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in widespread use: a receiver hitch where an attachment is slipped in and held in place, a pin hitch used primarily with custom-style trailers, and a knuckle hitch-used primarily with single wheeled trailers.



Receiver Hitch



Knuckle Hitch

Normally, you don't need to alter your bike as there are factory hitches available for most bikes, but make sure you get one that is designed for your make and model motorcycle and that it will accommodate a safety chain.



Having a motorcycle hitch on your bike not only allows you to tow a trailer but also gives you the freedom to tow other accessories that will help you do more things with your bike. This can include accessories such as a:

- a. Bike rack: Yep, you can now carry your bike behind your motorcycle.
- b. Luggage rack: You can buy luggage racks and attach them to the hitch.
- c. Cooler Carrier: Now you can haul your cooler on the back of your bike.
- d. Golf Club rack: Easily holds the largest of golf bags.



a.



b.



c.



d.

CAUTION – Some motorcycle manufacturers do not recommend pulling a trailer with their motorcycles.

Hope this helps.