

## Touring Tips- Be Comfortable and Other Stuff-



**Steve Warmath**

I was on a five hour round trip lunch ride last year and experienced some serious butt burn on the way home. My lower back hurt, my legs were getting cramped and I had to stop to stretch and take a break. What I noticed was this discomfort was affecting my ability to focus and concentrate on the task at hand- riding with awareness and anticipation. I also realized that if I were to take on a much longer ride, I would need some serious “toosh” relief. At the recommendation of some fellow HOG members (Bob & Ginny Hair), I bought two “Air Hawk” seat cushions for me and Linda. What a difference! We made a nine hour trip to Helen, GA in the fall and had no rear end issues. We still had to take the usual breaks, but the bottom line, it was a comfortable ride.

There are other things that can affect your comfort level and distract you from a safe and comfortable ride. If you are aware of these things, which many seasoned riders are, and apply them on every ride, particularly the long ones, you will not only be more comfortable, you are “Managing Risk”. More about that will be addressed in a future Safety article.

[Jim Parks](#) is an editor for “Road Runner” magazine and has some great advice on “Touring Tips” to ride comfortably. He wrote in a recent article:

“Motorcycle touring usually involves spending many hours on your bike out in the elements. This is what makes riding exhilarating, but it’s also more tiring than covering the same number of miles driving in a car. To fully enjoy your multi-day motorcycle adventure, you probably want to make the experience as comfortable as possible. Here are our top 10 things to consider:

1. **Install Appropriate Wind Protection:** Constant wind buffeting on the body is especially tiring for long distance riders. In cold weather, wind chill makes it that much harder for motorcyclists to maintain enough body heat. While a certain amount of air circulation is desirable in hot weather for evaporative cooling, too much can rapidly deplete body fluids. Windshields and other similar “wind management” devices should be a must have for all serious touring riders.
2. **Use A Comfortable Seat:** To keep the price of new motorcycles low, seats are an area where manufacturers often cut corners. Properly supporting a rider’s derriere is probably one of the most important factors for achieving a comfortable day in the saddle. If your OEM seat leaves you wanting something better, there are many excellent products available in the after-market. Because all of our bodies are not built the same, finding the best fit is likely to vary by individual. If possible, find a seat maker that can offer or build a seat to fit your particular ... ahem ... requirements.
3. **Maintain A Relaxed Leg Position:** Rear pegs may look cool on café racers and sportbikes, but for most of us long distance riders a cramped leg position can range from uncomfortable to downright painful. I lowered the foot pegs on my sport-touring bike, which made a world of difference in leg comfort.
4. **Assume A Proper Riding Posture:** I think the best analogy for describing the most comfortable motorcycle riding position is that of an equestrian: sit upright with a slight forward lean, thighs pressed snugly against the tank, back straight and hands resting lightly on the

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handlebars. A semi-reclined position, with feet in the air on highway pegs, may look comfortable, but your tailbone will soon inform you otherwise. One of my bikes has a wide tank, which has often irritated my hamstrings and inner thighs during a long day in the saddle. By moving the handlebars up and back, with an aftermarket adapter, my comfort improved dramatically and, as a bonus, I also experienced greater control over the bike. I also used an aftermarket adapter to lower my foot pegs about an inch. Although I sacrificed a little lean angle, it was well worth it.

**5. Wear Appropriate Riding Gear:** While we all know the importance of wearing proper protective gear in the event of a crash, wearing appropriate riding gear is also important for our riding comfort. In hot weather it's often advisable to wear mesh gear with armor that both protects and lets air circulate inside it to promote evaporative body cooling. When the weather turns cold, it's vitally important to keep the body—particularly the upper body—warm to ward off discomfort and potential hyperthermia. I've ridden when it was too hot and when it was too cold and nothing is worse than being cold on a motorcycle. Well, except for being both wet and cold—always pack rain gear.

**6. Keep Hydrated:** Letting yourself become dehydrated while riding is both uncomfortable and dangerous. It's particularly important in hot weather, when bodily fluids are being lost through evaporative cooling (i.e. sweating), to drink lots of water and replace electrolytes by eating fruit and/or consuming sports drinks.

**7. Reduce Wind Noise:** Even with a full-face helmet, a rider traveling at highway speeds encounters a substantial level of wind noise. In addition to hearing loss, all of that noise is very tiring and distracts your riding focus. So, always wear earplugs! Properly designed windscreens and fairings can also reduce wind noise.

**8. Use Effective Eye Protection:** Face shields and other eye protection help safeguard a rider's eyes both from flying debris and from drying out. Sun glare can also be quite tiring and uncomfortable, especially in the colder months when the sun is closer to the horizon. Sunglasses, retractable sunshades inside helmets, and darkened face shields can provide relief. However, if you use a darkened shield in the daytime, be sure to pack a clear one for low light conditions.

**9. Be Well-Rested and Stress-Free before Riding:** Motorcycle riding is a very physical activity. Starting the day tired or emotionally upset isn't likely to improve your riding enjoyment as the day unfolds. It's also obviously important, from a safety standpoint, to be fully alert and on top of your riding game.

**10. Take Riding Breaks to Stay Fresh:** I personally prefer taking a break every one to two hours to stretch, relax, talk to strangers, re-hydrate, tour roadside attractions, and discuss the day's highlights with my riding partners. Above all, motorcycle touring is supposed to be fun, and being comfortable is a big part of keeping it fun.

Achieving the desired level of comfort from your touring experience is likely to involve some trial and error and fine tuning of your strategy. For most touring motorcycles it's not terribly difficult to find appropriate OEM and aftermarket accessories to improve any shortcomings of your mount. The important thing to remember is that riding comfort has a very high correlation with your motorcycle touring pleasure.”

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