

Riders: Time to get packing

GEARING UP



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This past summer, my friend in Florida shied away from taking part in a ride in another state because she didn't want to make the 20-hour drive.

She had a brand new bike and was afraid to ship it, or fly with it, for fear of losing it or ending up with an unrecognizable pile of gears and tubes.

I had to empathize. I'd driven 10 hours to ride in Iowa, for somewhat the same reasons.

But what if I wanted to ride from Seattle to Portland amid the towering firs and grassy ferns? Or tackle the Ride the Rockies? Or even go so far as to cycle around Ireland's Ring of Kerry?

There is, I discovered, a better way.

Have bike, will travel

Many cyclists who go on adventure rides or compete all over the world ship their bikes or travel with them on airplanes. Sure, sometimes things get squished or scrunched, but there are ways to prevent the worst.

"It seems daunting until you look at what's required," says Aaron Teasdale, spokesman for the Adventure Cycling Association. The nonprofit organization advocates bicycle travel and provides worldwide touring routes and guided trips.

"It's just like establishing any new routine in your life. Once you get used to it, it's a piece of cake."

Options vary, depending on how much time you have and how much you want to spend.

The right case

First, consider the case. If you're going to travel often, or if you're traveling a long distance with many connections, you



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Kyle Carlson of Plano Cycling & Fitness packs a bike for travel.

might want to consider a hard-shell case.

While it will provide the best protection, it can cost more than \$300 and can add several pounds to the weight, which matters if you're paying by the pound, Mr. Teasdale says.

At Plano Cycling & Fitness, Kyle Carlson displayed two hard-shell bike cases, a Serfas Bike Armor for \$350 and a Serfas Sidewinder for \$450. The Sidewinder has reinforced corners, dual handles and wheels on two sides.

The shop also rents the Bike Armor for \$30 a week, he says, which is popular for people who aren't frequent bike travelers.

How to pack it

Ty Stephens, a cyclist from Sulphur Springs, travels with two bikes: a Trek 5200 road bike and a 2006 Cervelo P2C triathlon bike. He flies to about three races a year, and transports them in a Trico Sports Iron Case, for which he paid at least \$250.

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To pack his bike, he removes wheels, pedals, the seatpost and handlebars. He lays the bike frame flat and pads it with towels, bubble wrap and the occasional dirty laundry (on the return trip, of course). Tools necessary to reassemble the bike go into the case as well.

He also suggests letting the air out of the tires because they will blow out in cargo compartments that aren't pressurized. Overall, Mr. Stephens has had few problems.

"With [airline] security the way things are today, nothing is an assurance. I have had my bike case searched before and after I checked it in, but I have not had anything lost or broken," he says.

Yet there are many cardboard cases, including the ones in which bike shops receive bikes from manufacturers, that will work in a pinch, Mr. Teasdale says. He suggested boxes from CrateWorks.com, which includes straps to secure the bike and come in waterproof plastic.

Plano Cycling & Fitness has a wedge-shaped box from aircaddy.com for \$100, and you only have to remove the front wheel.

The disposable route

If you're flying into one city near the start of the ride and flying out of another near the end, you might benefit from using disposable cardboard boxes, Mr. Teasdale says. That way, you don't have to worry about getting your case from start to finish.

Mr. Carlson says most of the customers he works with fly with their bikes. But Mr. Teasdale says he doesn't recommend checking bikes into passenger cargo. Tighter security has made it more of a

hassle to check bikes as baggage, and it's more expensive, he says.

"It used to be \$50 each way that you would pay extra for a bicycle," he says. "Now it's much more common to pay \$100 each way."

Overland shipping

Unless you absolutely can't bear to be without your bike for a few days, Mr. Teasdale recommends shipping by FedEx or UPS. It costs less and it's easy to arrange, he says.

Prices vary based on weight, destination and time. For example, a bike, accessories and case weighing 65 pounds from Dallas to Seattle would cost \$48 with UPS ground shipping.

(Mr. Teasdale recommends using FedEx Ground, because insurance covers both the bike and the case, and it's less expensive.)

If neither you nor a friend can be at the other end to receive your bike, Mr. Teasdale recommends having it shipped to a local bike shop. Bike stores across the nation are used to this, and they offer unpacking and assembly and repacking and disassembly services for a fee.

Bike in a bag

There are a few more options if you're going to get really serious about bike travel. They include collapsible bicycles and bicycles with couplers that allow you to pop your frame in half, take the wheels off and pack the bike in a suitcase, Mr. Teasdale says.

Couplers work best with steel and titanium bikes because they involve cutting the frame on the top and bottom tube and fitting them with metal couplings that lock together, he says. Fitting a bike with couplings can cost more than \$300, he says.

Plano Cycling & Fitness sells a \$3,500 Co-Motion Espresso Co-Pilot bicycle that comes with S and S Couplings; it fits into a case the size of a large suitcase. Reassembly takes 45 minutes to an hour.

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