

Packing it up for the long haul

So you plan to go to Sturgis, Biketoberfest or pound up the Pacific Coast Highway but can't ride all the way there too?

By Bob Weber | Special to the Tribune
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Don't sweat it. If there were anything unhardy about that, there wouldn't be cycle shippers.

There are, and here's how to choose one and preparing once you do:

The basics

--Choose a shipper: Do an online search or look in the Yellow Pages. Ask friends or the folks at the bike shop for suggestions. Organizations such as the American Motorcyclist Association may have discounts, handy because prices are one way.

--Plan ahead: Most shippers need only a couple days notice to pick up. Allow about two weeks for shipment. Ask about the shipper's schedule.

--Crated or uncrated: Uncrated bikes are strapped to a pallet. Though that may seem to offer less protection, an uncrated bike will be ready to ride at the destination.

--Delivery location. Choose one that's accessible to a tractor-trailer. Provide the cell phone number of the person meeting the bike.

--Review the shippers' contracts before signing. Doing your homework upfront prevents problems on the other end.

Bike prep

--Gas tank: You may have to drain it totally or to the reserve level. Ask. If the bike is being shipped to Canada, the tank must be empty. If it's cold, make sure the cooling system is protected or drained.

--Unlock the steering but do not leave the keys with the bike. Keep a set of keys with you and send another set to the person who will be meeting your bike. If that's you, send the keys to your hotel or a trusted person.

--Take pictures of the bike. Though the shipper will probably make note of any damage at pickup, pictures provide extra proof. Shippers generally have insurance but ask about their limit. Buy more, if necessary.

--Packed or unpacked. Some shippers will take the saddlebags on the bike, while others insist that all luggage and racks be removed. Some shippers that carry the bags will take them filled; others only empty. Take your helmet and riding gear with you or send it ahead with your keys.

--Clean your motorcycle. It need not be showroom shiny, but clear off dirt to prevent scratches in transit. Though a drop or two of oil won't be a deal breaker, fix larger leaks. Remove or fold the mirrors.

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<http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/autocorner/chi-rides-cycle-shipping-0621jun21,0,5229371.story>