

# “Rookie Mistakes” for Touring Riders

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## Confessions of a Veteran Rookie

In the March 2009 issue of *Motorcycle Consumer News*, Fred Rau wrote an insightful article on “Rookie Mistakes,” that outlines some fundamental points about **long-distance riding**.

I found this article compelling because I not only have a lot of miles under my belt as a result of multiple coast-to-coast tours, up and down, and all over North America, but also because I find that as I’ve gotten a bit older, I’ve become more interested in the fundamentals of riding and touring, since they form the bedrock upon which this whole passion of my motorbike enjoyment rests.

So, while I intended to enjoy Mr. Rau’s words with the self-satisfaction of knowing that I’ve got all the bases covered, I found that his article **pointed out some of my own rookie errors!** And worse than that, I agree with everything he brought up. Anyway, I’m sure you have so mastered these fundamentals that they cease to register in your consciousness as a matter worthy of attention. Hence, I present them as a confession of my sins and to remind you of the simplicities that continue to benefit you. I’ll highlight his rookie mistakes here:

### 1: Touring With Brand-New Gear

ROOKIE MISTAKE #1: *Heading out on a tour with **brand new gear***. The point is that any new gear should be tried out locally to ensure proper road fit, rather than spending all day in the saddle with a helmet or boots that are too tight after a hundred miles or so, resulting in an uncomfortable ride for most of the day, and every day afterwards, for the rest of the tour. Although, over the decades I’ve managed to maintain this first point, this next one is a feat I’m still tuning:

#### 2a: Overpacking

ROOKIE MISTAKE #2a: *Overpacking*. This may be a relative point for different riders, but for me, I find I’m still in pursuit of some personal ideal of elegant simplicity that poses a balance between bringing as little as possible, vs. ensuring I have the majority of what I actually *need*. Even on multi-week, cross-country adventures, I have found that I could have enjoyed the experience a little bit more, had I brought a little less.

You will need to establish your own happy medium between what you need and what you don’t, but, just like Fred, I have never encountered a rider who didn’t want to bring more than what would actually be necessary. This item is the hardest on this list to remedy without gaining real-world touring experience and learning that you don’t actually have to bring 24 pair of socks. Whether you stay in motels, hotels, the homes of friends and family, or camp along the road, the truth is that washing machines exist in more places than your own home.

#### 2b: Poor Packing

ROOKIE MISTAKE #2b: *Poor Packing*. In addition to ensuring you have underwear and socks in sealed bags (and as much else as possible), *where* you pack them, or the *order* in which they are packed, become more important the longer you ride. How quickly can you get your rain gear? How accessible is that warmer pair of gloves? Do you need to rummage around for a snack? The good news here is that *how* you pack your gear can be improved day by day while you are on the road.

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### 3: Riding Without Alternative Funding

ROOKIE MISTAKE #3: *Riding without alternative funding.* Dang! The idea of sealing and hiding extra cash and another credit card somewhere on the bike as a precaution against a lost or stolen wallet is not new. In fact, I've done that in the past past (long past). But since I've never had occasion to take advantage of such a precaution, I've let that slide out of my basic actions, a few bikes back in history. That will now be re-implemented as part of my touring "basics."

### 4: Riding Without a Spare Key

ROOKIE MISTAKE #4: *Riding without a spare key.* Eghad! **I'm not only guilty as charged! It's worse than that.** I've considered the same point over the years, and never rectified it. That's double guilty! Losing a key to your bike could turn a glorious day of a vacation into an ignoble day of infamy. Conversely, for a prepared rider, it could be no more than a moment of inconvenience to pull out a replacement for a key that got dropped on a trail, or fell over a lookout, or as Fred notes, a key that "disappeared into the swirling water" of a flushing toilet.

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