

## Sidetracked

# KICKSTANDS UP at Eight!

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It has been said that collecting a group of motorcycle riders to leave on time is like herding cats.

Four motorcycles and a dozen ATVs are packed into the corral in Salinas de Garci Mendoza, Bolivia. The village is a half-day ride from the world's largest salt plains known as the Salar de Uyuni, where the Dakar Rally will pass tomorrow. We are scouting the best place to watch. Dawn breaks as I step outside to inspect the bikes and discover a flat tire on Mauricio's F 800 GS. I know who will be changing it, so I dive in, hoping to have us rolling before the others finish breakfast. Following a covey of quads over dusty terrain is not my idea of fun. I finish just as the first four-wheel machines are firing up. Our last rider straggles out to join us and starts rooting through his tailbag. He isn't ready. Do we wait, or do we go on and let him try to catch up ... in a foreign country ... on confusing and unknown roads?

I often ride alone, enjoying my own pace and savoring certain aspects of the experience. When I'm alone I can be lackadaisical. Yet still, group riding has its benefits, especially to new riders who haven't learned the ropes. And we've all been there. We wake up early, get half packed, and are hit with last night's enchiladas. Maybe we forgot to get gas or can't find our key. Stuff happens, but when riding with a group, we assume an obligation to be part of the solution, not the problem. Punctuality necessitates a deliberate strategy.

### Are You Ready?

Being on time for a ride calls for more than just setting the alarm clock and being first to

the coffee pot. It requires us to think backward from the posted departure time. Did you succumb to that "one more beer" last night? Did you get to bed in time to get a good night's sleep? Starting a ride fatigued is a recipe for disaster. Make a plan early and stick to it.

### Is Your Bike Ready?

I have a habit of gassing up at the end of each day, even before getting food or heading for the motel or campsite. Just before departure, not much frustrates a ride leader more than the rider who says, "I just need to get gas." Really? Did he just figure out we need gas for this ride? Yet we see it all the time. Don't be "that guy."

Checking oil, spokes, tire pressure and wear, chain adjustments, and other adjustments that can be made ahead of time should be completed before bedtime. Tired as you may be, these things always seem to take longer than we anticipate and should be started early. Do them on your schedule, not that of the group. And more importantly, don't assume all is OK with the bike because it still ran when you parked it. Preflight your machine at least daily. Many riders have burned the midnight oil to repair a radiator leak or fix a slow leak in a tire because they performed the proper checks and were prepared the night before. As difficult as it may be, it beats holding up the ride or being left to fend for yourself.

### Is Your Gear Ready?

Think "lean" when packing. What is the most efficient way to organize your departure? When staying in a motel, pack all you

can the night before and dress in your riding gear, including boots, before breakfast. This practice will save time spent changing and repacking street clothes. If it's cold, dig out your electric liner or layers and have them ready. Wear your rain gear if rain is expected soon. You may roll out warm, but wind chill works quickly.

If you are camping, know your equipment. Bring stuff sacks into the tent. Start deflating, stuffing, and organizing as soon as you are moving. When pulling tent stakes, unclip your rainfly as you pull each one. It will save you a lap around the tent. Think in these terms and you can be packed before your pals stop snoring.

By adopting these techniques you can be a boost, not a burden. Your experience can be helpful to others who may be frantically trying to get ready on time. Keep a tire gauge handy for those who would otherwise go digging. Have a pump within easy reach. Watch others' bikes for dangling straps, an open latch, or unzipped backpack or tailbag. By being observant, you might prevent a long wait later, and you could thwart an accident or loss of important gear.

... I watch the last quad roll out as our friend closes up his tailbag. To avoid the dust, we choose a different route around Mt. Tunupa and beat them to the lunch stop, a mile out on the salt plains. Storm clouds roll over the mountain as we finish up a boiling pot of gumbo. Everyone grabs his gear and heads for cover just as the wind whips up. Our late friend is the first one ready. Lesson learned. **RR**