

trustvishwas



Preparation for Ladakh Ride for Bikers

Guys, I have found the gearheads Leh planning thread concentrating more on cars and not on bikers. So putting up this small thread where you get nearly all the info that you may need at one go.

I do not claim to be an expert rider/tourer or one who has made several trips to Leh. In fact, my first ride after a gap of 21 years was in 2010 and that was to Leh. Earlier I had ridden to Goa once in my college days. In fact, I bugged experienced riders like Praful a lot before starting this journey to collect information.

However, I sincerely believe in 5P principle - Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance

Following is only a summary of what I learned from other senior riders, while planning for Leh trip. I will be writing about –

1. Pre Ride Preparation
2. Items to carry with you
3. Required clothing
4. Medicines to Carry
5. Altitude sickness for bikes

1. Travel / Transport Arrangements

If you wish to ride from your home town and your travel arrangements are less hassled. However, if you wish to travel the first leg by train / air, you will need to book tickets well in advance. Ladakh season starts from June i.e. peak holiday season.

I have heard several objections to transporting bike through train. However, I have experienced that bikes get transported without a single scratch. You need to pay 100 bucks more to the guy packing it, 100 bucks to the guy who loads it on the train. The risks of bike getting scratched are more or less equal to the chances of you getting a scratch on your bike while riding from your home town to Delhi / Jammu.

In my opinion, bike should be transported through train and you should travel in the same train. This helps in reducing last minute wear / tear of bike and also provides you with enforced rest for travel duration. You will be riding for next 12-15 days so one day complete rest before you start the ride is good for you.

Also do not skimp on ticket cost. Travelling in 3 tier A/c will still be cheaper than you riding your bike to Delhi / Jammu. (If you add up accommodation cost to your fuel cost)

If you are booking your bike through train, it can be booked as luggage or parcel. Parcel can only be booked between 10 am to 5 pm and similarly you can get delivery of your bike in this time only.

If you are travelling through the same train, you should book it as luggage. The charges are same as parcel. However, in this case, you can get the bike immediately after getting down from train. You just need to collect a gate pass and push bike outside train station. This avoids hotel cost in Delhi / Jammu. You would be rested and raring to start your journey immediately.

2.Bike

Please finalise the bike which you wish to take to Leh. If it is not your own bike, get acquainted with it for at least a week. Also get it prepared at least one week in advance so if any work is not properly carried out, you still have time on your hand. Details of bike preparation mentioned later.

3. Off Roding Experience

As I have mentioned earlier, I absolutely do not have any kind of touring experience on any kind of bike. So I requested couple of senior riders to accompany me for an off-road ride just to have an idea about the kind of biking expected during the ride. This 35 km ride gave me an idea of the kind of roads to expect, how to properly tie a saddle bag and tank bag and bike handling changes due to saddle and tank bag.

4. Endurance

After our off-road ride, a senior rider voiced a question about my endurance in riding. Me being 42 and not very physically fit, agreed whole heartedly to this question. Hence, once I rode from Pune to Shirval (60 km), turned around and went to Lonavala (120km) without stopping or getting down from the bike. When I could complete this ride without suffering too much, I decided that I was fit enough to go on this ride.

You should also try such a ride beforehand.

5. Luggage

You will need one saddle bag, one tank bag and one sack. Sack would be required only if you are travelling by train / flight till delhi / Jammu. You need a sack to keep your helmet and other riding gear in it. After wearing riding gear, you can roll it up and tie it with bungee cords.

Again, I sincerely urge everyone to buy / borrow saddle and tank bags well in advance, fill them up, tie them to your bike and take a off-roading trip. This would give you a feel of how bike operates when loaded.

Saddle bags need to be balanced. Fill them up and see whether they are loaded in a balanced way. If they are not, bike will tend to slightly lean on heavier side and you will need to keep on correcting. Even slight corrections for 6-8 hours a day will surely result in sore limbs.

Tank bag are normally not waterproof. Check whether you have a waterproof cover (it comes with the bag) with you and whether it is fitting properly at speeds of 80+ kmph.

Please check where the straps/saddlebags/tank bag are touching painted surface of your bike. Stick some coloured vinyl on the areas where any of the above touches. This will help you in saving bike paint and finish. I am suggesting vinyl because it is very cheap (App. Rs.20-25/sq.ft.) and vinyl can be easily removed without damaging colour of your bike. Coloured vinyl also helps in blending in so that it is not an eyesore.

6. Clothes

The worst enemy I faced in Ladakh ride was cold. The temperature was not very low but wind chill was the killing factor. You would need to carry at least –

- 2 sets of thermal uppers
- 1 set of thermal lower
- 1 warm track pant

- 1 set of woolen gloves
- 8 pairs of woolen socks (at least)
- Scarf / muffler for covering your neck
- Complete rain suit

My usual every day clothing during the ride would be –

1. Lower – Thermals + track pant + cargo pant + rain suit pant
2. Upper – 2 Thermals + woolen shirt + riding jacket with thermal layer + rainsuit top
3. Feet – Woolen socks 2 pairs + plastic bag + shoes
4. Hands – Woolen gloves + leather riding gloves

I had purchased 2 pc. each of army cargo pants and army woolen shirts. They were sufficient. You don't sweat in Ladakh and will be wearing your riding jacket so they don't get dirty much and no need to carry more. You can get army cargo pants and woolen shirts at dirt cheap rates from army canteen (you would need some contact there) 2 woolen shirts, 2 cargo pants, 1 thermal, 1 woolen gloves and 1 pair of army shoes – all for a princely sum of 1400/- No need to spend more money.

I wore one t shirt for Pune – Srinagar journey, threw it away and then bought another one in Jammu for return journey.

I had purchased army DM shoes for 250 bucks. They are quite good, provide reasonable safety to your toes and ankles, waterproof while riding but the major deficiencies I found were – They get extremely cold and if you walk in streams etc., water gets inside. Better option would be to carry fur lined gum boots of at least mid calf height.

One sandals / slippers required for short walks around hotel, market etc.

I observed that after wearing balaclava, if your speeds fall below 30 kmph and if you are in or near snow line, the helmet fogs up in one breath. So I stopped wearing it.

Kashmir being plastic free zone, you won't find any plastic bags. You need to wear those bags inside your shoes so your feet don't get wet. Buy thick plastic bags and see whether your foot still fits inside your shoe.

Following would be most controversial opinion of all but in my opinion, it is absolutely correct - Your riding gloves are useless for riding in Ladakh. Each would have vents to let in air so your hands get extremely cold. Also in case of rains, water gets inside and being leather, they won't dry

out fast. Better to buy fur lined leather gloves for good cold protection. Buy couple of sets of surgical gloves (Rs.35 each set), fix them on top of your fur lined leather gloves for wet weather protection and you are set for the ride. So in effect, you will be wearing woolen gloves + leather gloves topped with surgical gloves.

Clothes don't dry out in 3-4 days also. One trick my riding partner taught me was to put in damp (not wet) gloves, socks below your bed sheet. Your body heat during night will dry them out completely.

Also keep couple of spare carry bags with you. Comes in handy for putting in wet clothes etc.

7. Maps, Geographical Info etc.

Gather as much information as possible from all the sources. Carry as many maps as you can. Once you are in Ladakh, it is very difficult to get lost as there are no cross roads but you should have at least a basic idea of where you are going and how many km you have to cover.

GPS does not help much in Ladakh. Not many roads exist in that area so chances of you getting lost are slim.