

TWO-UP

Photos: Matt Cook – No Limitz Photography

Riding with a pillion requires a level of skill and one more thing – consideration.

Having the extra weight of a pillion or other load on the back of a bike changes every single dynamic. The front wheel is more likely to lift in the lower gears and as it has less load across the front, the bike is more likely to 'push' on the brakes and run wide into turns. Progressive, smooth use of throttle and brakes, and good control over speed, will mitigate such risks.

Any bike that has a dual seat and rear foot pegs is capable of carrying a passenger, but some machines are set up to take pillions more comfortably than others. Sports bikes, for example, often don't consider the needs of pillions, offering little more than a hard seat pad, and uncomfortable foot positions. Apart from sports models, most bikes will generally have a flexible power delivery, with good mid-range power for carrying extra weight without excessive gear changing. If you plan to take a pillion regularly, you need to give some thought to the most suitable machine to give you and the pillion the kind of riding experience you want, especially if you plan to cover a lot of miles.

COMMUNICATION

Novice pillions are often very nervous so briefing them on what to expect and what is expected of them to calm their nerves. Explain how and when it's ok for them to climb onto the bike and show them how to distribute their weight evenly between the pegs.



Only a few pillions want to do this.
Nick Kroeze at work

Demonstrate what is safe to hold on to and point out where any grab-handles are. Many pillions (and riders) prefer holding onto the rider, as this hold helps and feels secure under brakes and acceleration. There are also grab-belts available that the rider wears and have grab-handles built in.

Explain how to move their bodyweight in response to you manoeuvring. A good tip is to get them to sit still, focus on back of the rider's head and simply relax and move with the bike, so they find themselves moving naturally with it. Pillions will be least intrusive if they keep their back at the same angle as the bike.

Let them know that it's ok to speak up if they're not happy or comfortable, make sure they are adequately dressed for safety, comfort and warmth and stop regularly to check if they are ok, and make any adjustments required to make their trip even more enjoyable.

Pillions who understand what to expect will be a lot more mentally comfortable. Work out a simple communication code between you with hand signals if you don't use an intercom system.

SKILLS

Using the bike's controls smoothly and going through the gears slightly lower down the normal rev-range will make acceleration and deceleration less abrupt. Also, 'blipping' the throttle on the way down through the gears and using clean, rapid changes on the way up will ensure better pillion comfort. Remember a bike will also take longer to stop with the extra weight, so allow enough space and time to stop safely. If you have to stop suddenly, build brake power quickly but steadily. Grip the tank with your thighs and straighten up to give your pillion a cushioned wall to collide with.

LOADS:

Unstable or unbalanced loads on a bike will create instability, especially when cornering, accelerating and slowing down. Many bikes have custom built pack and/or pannier frames incorporated into their design that will optimise balance on a fully loaded bike. Others can be fitted with after-market frames that will allow them to take balanced loads. When packing, ensure weight is evenly distributed. In a single back-bag, pack heavy items centrally



and at the bottom. Ensure your load is fully secured with tie-downs, bungy cords etc and is appropriate for the bike's load capability. Prepare and ride accordingly.

ADVANCE PREPARATION:

When carrying pillions (or loads), prepare by increasing the rear shock spring preload to compensate for the weight increase over the rear wheel. This will maintain the bike's steering capability by stopping the back end from sagging too much, while still keeping adequate ground clearance. If the front suspension is adjustable, extra preload plus a little more compression damping will help reduce fork-dive when braking transfers the extra weight to the front. Tyre pressures may also need to be adjusted, and you may also need to adjust your headlight to avoid dazzling on-coming motorists.

THINK...

Remember, if you want that pillion to get back on at some stage – make it an enjoyable experience. The pillion is in a vulnerable position and is relying on your skill and decision making to get them to the end of the ride comfortably and safely. The magic word for riding with a pillion is consideration.

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