

Trailer Hitch Fundamentals

Connect those chains properly

By James R. Davis

While at my favorite cycle accessory shop the other day I met a man who was the proud owner of a new Wing and a color-coordinated trailer that he was polishing mightily in preparation for a week out on the road.

He had 20 years of riding and experience and has 'always' had a trailer, so he said.

We talked at length about handling characteristics effects on gas mileage, tire wear (including that of the rear tire in the bike), and proper weight distribution and loading practices. All in all I believe I learned a lot from him.

Then I noticed his hitch. It was a beauty – all chrome and besides the typical ball connector, it had a swivel in it. Even the chains were chromed!

So what's the message all about? Those chains. The man did not have them crossed. In all his years of pulling a trailer nobody had ever bothered to tell him to cross those chains so that they form a 'catch' for the tongue should the hitch ever disconnect from the ball. (When he left the accessory shop they were crossed.)

If that man's hitch had ever managed to dislodge from the ball the tongue would have dug itself into the pavement and a good ride would have been over. Further, unlike what happens when you lose a trailer from the back-end of a car or truck, the trailer's tongue is right in line with the motorcycle's rear tire. Even if it could not quite reach the ground should it disconnect, that tongue could certainly reach the tire if the chains are too long. In all, bad news!

So, when you attach that trailer to your bike be sure to cross a pair of chains under its tongue before connecting the chains to the hitch and be sure that the chains are not so long that the tongue can reach your rear tire after a disconnect.

Also, don't use cheap spring clip connectors on the end of those chains. If those chains are supporting the tongue of your trailer and you were to then stand on that tongue (as some policemen are apt to try to 'test' them), they **MUST HOLD**.

Incidentally, in most states you are required to use **TWO** chains when pulling a trailer, and in every state you are totally responsible for any damage that the trailer might cause should it get away from you.