

Make it a trip to remember

10 top tips for having your best riding holiday – **EVER!**

The sun warms your back as the bike purrs beneath you and the motorway stretches to the horizon. You can't help grinning – finally, you're off on the summer trip you promised yourself. Ahead lies a weekend, a week, or maybe even a month of freedom, excitement and exploration. Motorcycles produce highs galore, but for many of us the summer trip is the pinnacle, the time when you feel happier, calmer and more alive than ever.

It could be a long weekend in the Scottish Highlands on your own, finding gorgeous new roads and chatting to locals at pubs serving unpronounceable whisky. Or 10 days with a few mates blasting to a foreign GP with camping kit strapped to your sportsbikes. Or a fortnight with your other half meandering through the Italian Riviera staying at posh hotels.

It really doesn't matter: provided you're on a bike, you have the potential to arrive home having had the time of your life. There are a few basics to getting it right though – it's all too easy for trips to be marred by poor planning, nerves and an excess of chaos. We asked the coaches from Rapid Training – police-trained riders who each rack up over 25,000 miles a year – for their top tips to make sure your summer trip is one that you'll be talking about for years to come (and for all the right reasons).

1 Sharpen your brain game

Getting travel-fit is crucial. We're not talking press-ups and cross training here – unless you're planning a trackday holiday, physical fitness shouldn't be a problem. It's mental fitness that can catch riders out. Going from riding 100 miles a week on roads we know to 250 miles per day on new roads is enough to leave even experienced riders exhausted. This is a problem for two reasons: 1) We'll make more mistakes, which is never a good



Take a break, take a pic... take time to relax

idea on a motorcycle, and 2) We're on holiday, not a bootcamp. The trick is to either build up your mileage at home or, more realistically, plan the trip so you keep daily mileages lower during the first few days. The other tip is to improve your riding before you go. It's a fact that just a day's training with a decent coach can give you the skills to help you ride more efficiently, and safely rack up miles without getting over-tired.

2 Stop more to go further

Stops are a crucial way to stave off mental exhaustion. If you've set yourself a big-miles target for the day, don't try to do it in massive chunks. It's far safer and more pleasant to stop for a five-minute leg stretch every hour. This works as a reset – you'll get on the bike feeling refreshed and won't hit that horrible drowsy stage where you start making silly mistakes, taking micro-naps, or zoning out for miles.

3 Master the limit point

To effortlessly master roads you've never seen before, and

keep doing it for hours at a decent pace, you need an elevated ability to read the road, effective and continuous planning, and precise machine control. That one sentence contains weeks of one-to-one coaching and years of practice, but there is one technique you can apply that can make a huge difference to how you ride twisty roads you've never seen before: the limit point.

This is the furthest point you can see into a bend, where the nearside kerb meets the far kerb. If you are approaching a bend and the limit point remains static, the bend is likely to be tight, so you need to slow down until you see the limit point moving away from you at the same speed that you're approaching. That means you've got your approach speed about right. Once you are in the bend and the limit point starts to move away from you faster than you're approaching, the bend is opening, and you can begin to consider rolling on the throttle. It's a useful technique, but make sure you don't become fixated on it, as that can stop you searching for other

Continued over



'Prepare to feel happier, calmer and more alive than ever this summer'



Be ready for unexpected wildlife



Those energy levels won't stay high by themselves



This beats a rammed beach in Benidorm



Anyone mention high-speed Pooch sticks?



Check out a bit of local history along the way



Ride smoothly and you'll have a happy pillion



Take a moment... sound advice

'Remember to stop and soak up the atmosphere'

crucial information such as lines of telegraph poles and views across fields, both of which can show where the road goes.

4 Establish a group riding system

If you're doing a trip with mates, some will want to ride faster than others. That's fine, but the important thing is to agree ground rules to make sure everyone enjoys the trip. Here's the system we use: 1) No overtaking each other. Everyone's got enough to think about without worrying about being passed. 2) If you can't see the rider behind at a junction, wait for them so they can see which way you turn. That way, no-one gets lost, and slower riders don't have to ride faster than they want to in order to keep up. Ideally, everyone should know where they're going, too. 3) Put faster riders at the back, because they generally have to keep catching up. 4) Ride staggered. This lets you ride in a tight group while maintaining a decent gap to the rider in front. 5) Be stealthy. Big groups of overtaking bikes can be intimidating to car drivers, who are sometimes freaked out enough to call the police. Just breeze past.

5 Beware the first two seconds

If you're riding abroad, you face a powerful enemy: your brain. Every time you pull out from a European garage, restaurant or campsite, your brain will instinctively guide you onto the left side of the road. This isn't a problem on busy roads because the traffic makes it obvious where to go, but on quiet roads it can be a killer. There's no harm in putting a 'RIGHT!' sticker on your screen or clocks to act as a prompt.

6 Lose some speed

Because road furniture, speed limits and driving standards vary throughout Europe it's easy

to allow your vision to drop as you take longer to absorb each piece of information. If you find yourself reacting sharply to hazards that seem to have come from nowhere, that's a sign you're not looking far enough ahead and giving yourself time to plan. The solution is to drop your speed until you can process all the information in good time, then slowly build up again as you get used to the new environment.

7 Master mountain hairpins

One of the joys of riding mountain ranges are the hairpins and the method of riding them is the same as for any other corner – get your position right, adjust your entry speed and select the right gear. But there are a few extras. Firstly, expect oncoming traffic to be on your side of the road – coaches and HGVs will have to swing out to get round, and boy racers will cut the corners. Modify your speed and position accordingly. Secondly, you need to turn your head a long, long way to see through the corner. This will feel odd at first but is crucial for picking the best line. Thirdly, there's often gravel aplenty washed onto mountain roads, so the safest line may not be the one you first imagined. You need to adapt. And finally, on downhill hairpins, the old adage of 'slow in, fast out' is especially important – make sure you scrub off enough speed before the corner so you can calmly pick a line and fire out.

8 Hone your pillion skills

If you're taking a pillion on the trip, it's worth practising riding smoothly before you go. The key elements to smoothness are vision – ie, where you look – and how you plan, based on what you've seen. So instead of jumping on the brakes because a car nudges forward out of a junction, you rolled off the throttle a quarter of a mile ago when you first saw him arrive

and can brake smoothly to a stop if he does actually pull out. Improving how you read the road is the single most transformational thing you can do for your riding – with or without a pillion – so it's worth perfecting your skills.

And if you want your pillion to really love you, fit a topbox – the security of that backrest can transform their experience.

9 Don't fear the U-turns

Slow speed riding on a heavily loaded bike with a pillion understandably gives some riders the willies, with U-turns usually at the top of the fear list. But if your technique is sound, there's no reason this should be perilous. The key tip is to look where you want to go, roll in slowly, drive out, and keep all inputs smooth. Don't just look at the halfway point of the turn though – twist your body and look all the way to the exit. Other points to remember are that you need to keep the clutch at the biting point throughout the turn. Then, if you want a tighter turn, just take away some drive via the clutch which will cause the bike to lean a little more. You control the tightness of the turn as much with the clutch as the bars. Also, if you've got a fidgety pillion, ask them to get off until you've turned round. The last thing you need is them shifting their weight around mid U-turn.

10 Don't forget to enjoy it

It's not a race – even if you're late for your crossing – it's a holiday. Remember to stop, look around, get off the bike and soak up the atmosphere, speak to the locals, and relax. Everything above is about removing obstacles to your riding ability and pleasure, but don't get so bogged down in training your brain – or your pillion – that you forget why you went in the first place. However far you're going, make sure you remember the journey.



'However far you're going, be sure to remember the journey'

Get bike fit and enjoy mile after mile of bliss

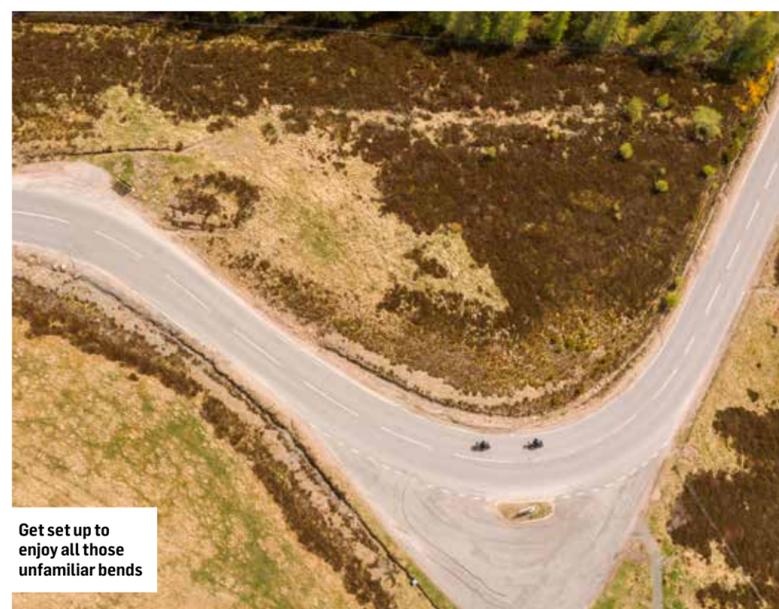


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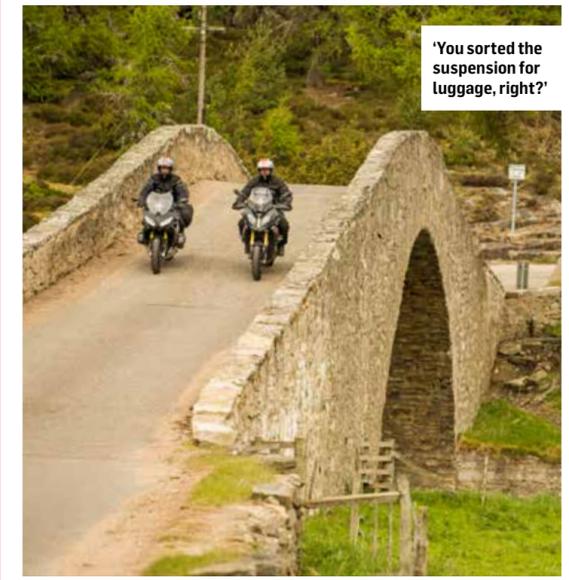
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Get set up to enjoy all those unfamiliar bends

PLAN YOUR ESCAPES



'You sorted the suspension for luggage, right?'

'Don't forget the touring essentials'

- **Think about the mileage**
If you're going to do 2000 miles, for example, make sure your tyres will last the distance and that the bike won't need servicing halfway round.
- **Pack bike essentials**
Experienced tourers will take a security chain, a small tool kit (Oxford do a decent one for £25), chain lube, duct tape and zip ties and spare bungees.
- **Paperwork**
Don't forget your insurance docs and a V5 photocopy. A green card is no longer needed. Travel insurance is a must.
- **Plan modest daily mileages on twisty roads**
200 miles a day might not sound much, but across a mountain range you might struggle to average 30mph... that's nearly seven hours of intense riding.
- **Prepare for a puncture**
It's the mostly likely inconvenience, so pack a puncture repair kit to prevent it ruining your day completely (£15-£20 from dealers).
- **Plan for more weight**
Wind up the preload front and rear and add more air to the tyres (your bike's handbook will give a guide to optimal settings for both).



Find space in all that luggage for tools and puncture repair kit