

TAKE YOUR WHEELS ALONG

WHY BE "GROUNDED" AT THE END
OF A FLIGHT, WHEN A TRUSTY STEED
WILL FIT IN THE BAGGAGE COMPARTMENT?

By BARRY SCHIFF

EDWARD COGAN is a travelling book salesman who calls on customers in seven western states. He uses a single-engine aircraft to fly vast distances, and carries a motorcycle to drive the shorter ones from the airport into town.

Like so many pilots, Cogan tired of becoming stranded at airports where rent-a-cars are frequently unavailable, where courtesy cars have become as

impervious to traffic jams and can be parked anywhere.

Arnold Senterfitt, author of numerous publications about flying to Mexico, also carries a "Trail 90" in his Cessna 195. He claims that carrying his own wheels has given him a totally new perspective of Baja California by allowing him to explore places that simply can't be reached by automobile.

Bob and Marion Auburn produce adventure-filled motion pictures about flying lightplanes to exciting, romantic corners of the world. But whenever they fly their Bonanza to a new location, their motorcycle goes with them. The Honda gives the Auburns the same mobility on the ground that their airplane gives them in the air.

Many pilots solve their ground transportation problems by eliminating remote ports-of-call from their flight plans and flying only to where a set of wheels are readily available. This eliminates about half the airports in the United States and the majority of airports elsewhere. Also, it partially defeats the purpose of flying, which is intended to give us the freedom to go anywhere, anytime. Carrying your own motorcycle gives you that freedom.

Until recently, the only type of vehicle that could be carried in a small airplane was a mini-bike, a miniature version of a motorcycle powered by a low-powered lawnmower-type engine.



scarce as free avgas, and where he has had to wait as long for a taxi as it took him to fly there. In short, he found that the last mile of a trip was not only the longest, but the most difficult as well.

Cogan's motorcycle not only solves his ground transportation problems, it also allows him to fly to San Francisco, for example, and make 20 business calls in one day, something he claims is impossible using car or cab. The Honda "Trail 90" motorcycle is





These never became very popular because their small-diameter wheels make them dangerous to drive off the airport or at speeds in excess of 20 or 30 mph. They are banned from the streets of most states because the driver sits so low that he is not very easily noticed through the rear-view mirror of a car. Also, most mini-bikes are underpowered and are uncomfortable to drive for more than two or three miles.

But Larry Shapiro got a better idea when he was caught without wheels after flying his Beech Travelair to Mulege in Baja California. He decided to try modifying a full-size motorcycle that hopefully could be disassembled and carried in the baggage compartment of his plane.

Several months later, Shapiro completed the modification of a Honda, selected because it was (and still is) the most popular and available motorcycle in the world. The ingenious conversion required adding 90 new parts and modifying 12 existing ones. The result is a motorcycle that can be disassembled into four major components that will fit into *any* four-place aircraft. The mod affects neither the appearance of the original motorcycle nor its performance.

Ultimately, Shapiro began modifying Suzuki "Honchos" which have 57% more power (11-hp) than the Honda "Trail 90s" (7-hp) and weigh 7 pounds less.

The advantages of a motorcycle over a mini-bike are obvious, especially to the more than 700 pilots who have bought them in less than three years. The motorcycle is legal on the streets of every state, is relatively safe, comfortable to drive for long distances at speeds up to 65 mph and can be driven over virtually every type of terrain, including inclines as steep as 35 degrees. It is interesting to note that since Suitcase Cycle began selling full-size motorcycles, the company has not been able to sell one mini-bike even though it weighs and costs much less than a motorcycle.

A writer can sit sedately behind his typewriter and describe the pros and cons of packing a pair of wheels into an airplane, but he can't write with authority until he has actually done it. With this argument in one hand and a fistful of masterful cunning in the other, I managed to finagle a modified Suzuki "Honcho" from Larry Shapiro. And to my complete surprise, the Guardian of the Vault at PLANE &

PILOT released some of that stored-away green stuff so I could rent an airplane with which to make my getaway (with one eye on the Hobbs meter, please).

My wife, Sandy, flew co-pilot on this research flight to Big Bear, a pine-rimmed lake that nestles in a valley 6,750 feet up between the lofty peaks of the San Gorgonio Mountains in Southern California. We'd been to this scenic vacationland innumerable times, but, like so many pilots who have flown there, we'd never been off the airport. You see, it's a matter of rent-a-cars and courtesy cars... there aren't any. Taxis? Oh, yes. There are three of them in town. Trouble is, one driver is usually off duty, the second on a coffee break and the third — well, he's where he should be on a lazy, sunny mountain day... fishing. Even when a cab is available, it's too expensive to hire one for the day, to take us where we want to go on a moment's notice. But the motorcycle would take us wherever and whenever we would want to go. Total freedom. Total independence.

We taxied the rented Cessna Skylane next to Shapiro's sales office on the Santa Monica Airport, deplaned and hopped onto an awaiting "Honcho" for five to a full stop, to get current in motorcycle riding. Learning to handle one safely is not at all difficult and is quite a lot of fun. The main consideration is learning to drive defensively so as to avoid conflict with the big machines from Detroit.

With Sandy reading the instructions from a printed sheet, I began to disassemble the Suzuki under Shapiro's watchful eye. The procedure is thankfully simpler than assembling a child's toy. It's just a matter of fitting tab A into or out of slot B, etc. No tools are required other than a wrench which is an integral part of the modified main frame.

It goes something like this: "Roll motorcycle onto built-in kickstand... unlatch seat and lay it aside... disconnect electrical fittings... unlatch tail fender and lay it aside... disconnect fuel line by pulling rubber tube... twist wing nut to remove fuel tank... twist large knob to remove handle bar... twist frame wrench loose and with it loosen two bolts... separate front section of motorcycle from rear section by simply pulling it away... twist built-in handle on rear axle and remove... lift out rear wheel." It's that simple.



Suzuki disassembles into units that will fit into any four-place plane. Front and rear frame pieces unbolt (below) with wrench that comes with cycle, and is the only tool needed.



My first attempt at disassembling the Suzuki took about 20 minutes, but I cut that time in half the second time around. Shapiro claims (and I believe) that taking the motorcycle apart or putting it back together again should take no more than 5 or 10 minutes when done by someone who's had practice.

One word of caution regarding fuel. The FAA prohibits carrying the volatile stuff in other than a sealed container. The modification for the Honda includes a vent shut-off valve, but the Suzuki does not. It's tank must be removed, emptied before

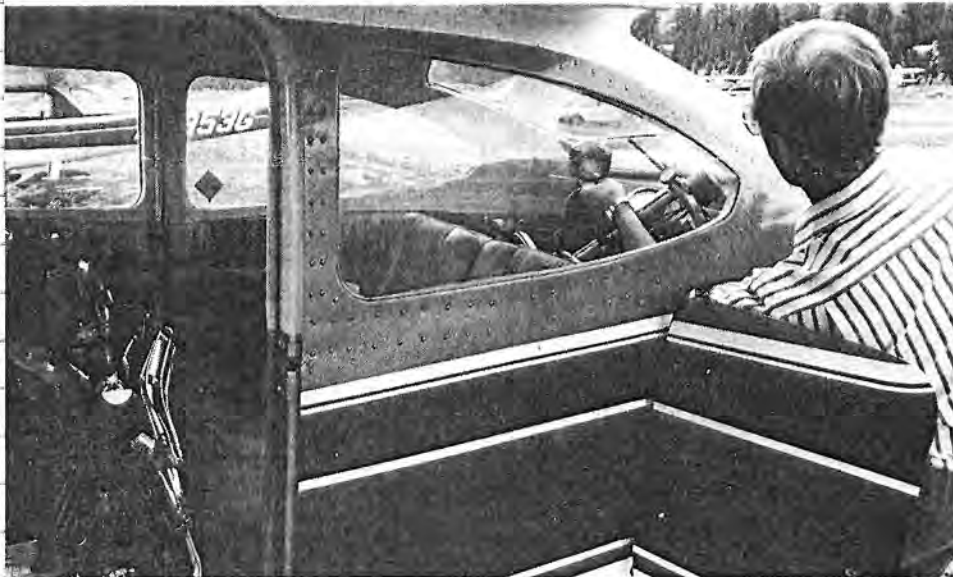


In a Skylane, below, a disassembled cycle fits in baggage compartment and on floor between front and rear seats.



Sandy Schiff folds Royce-Union bike, which can be carried in a Cessna 150.

When you take your own wheels, you can explore the byways wherever you fly, even where there are no roads!



flight and placed in a sealed bag. Also, the carburetor of both motorcycles must be drained of all fuel before flight. This is best accomplished by shutting off the fuel-supply valve on the motorcycle while about one-half-mile from the aircraft. Most of the fuel isolated in the carburetor will be consumed while driving that brief distance, and what still remains can be burned off by allowing the engine to idle until it quits from fuel starvation.

This brings up an interesting point regarding mini-bikes. Most of them do not have a provision for sealing the fuel tank or a means of removing the

tank and placing it in a sealed bag. Carrying such a fuel tank (empty or full) is both illegal and dangerous. Enough vapor lingers in an empty tank to feed a rather nasty explosion. In reality, a full tank is less dangerous than an empty one because it contains little or no oxygen.

After disassembly, the main section of the motorcycle (which includes the engine) is placed on a thermoplastic tray and secured with shock cords. The tray is equipped with small wheels so that the weaker of the sexes can roll it into the aircraft. But now the little lady will need some help. It takes one

strong man or two not-so-strong men to hoist the 102-pound section into the airplane. The remaining components are quite light.

The total dry weight of the "Honcho" is 193 pounds while the lesser powered Honda weights 200 pounds, which means that the prudent pilot is going to have to watch his c's and g's. All components of the motorcycle can fit into the baggage compartments of any twin, all Beechcraft Bonanzas and Debonairs, single-engine Cessnas starting with the 205, and the Piper Cherokee Six and Comanche. In

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WHY NOT BUILD YOUR OWN PLANE?

CYCLES

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other aircraft, the various parts must be distributed between the baggage compartment and the rear seat area of the cabin. What this means is that many four-place airplanes suddenly become two-place airplanes when a motorcycle is taken along. In some cases, four people can be carried but their baggage must either be left behind or shipped ahead. But since a motorcycle is built only for two, it would be impractical to want more than two people in the airplane, especially if the holiday is to be an intimate one.

Incidentally, a pilot doesn't need a big four-placer with which to carry a motorcycle. One will fit not only into a Cessna 172, for example, but also into a Cherokee 140. Those who fly Cessna 150's can... oh well, sorry about that. On the other hand, a Cessna 310 driver and a friend can carry two motorcycles and embark on a sportsman's holiday like they've never had before.

It is noteworthy that the dimensions of a disassembled, full-size motorcycle are less than those of a mini-bike because the rear wheel of the smaller vehicle is not removable. Consequently, some aircraft have enough room to carry a motorcycle but not a mini-bike.

Sandy and I were soon above the semi-permanent, yellow-stained under-cast covering the Los Angeles basin, pointing the Cessna's nose toward the 11,502-foot silhouette of Mt. San Geronio and cruise-climbing to 9,500 feet. Ninety-three air miles later, we slid down from the sky into another world, a pine-scented world where fragrant air can be inhaled without having to inspect it first.

The various "Honcho" parts were laid bare and inanimate on the grass like the remains of some dissected beast. Sandy began directing the reincarnation, printed instructions in one hand, a Hershey bar in the other.

As the Suzuki began to take shape, I partially filled the 1.6-gallon fuel tank with avgas drained from the Skylane: The high-compression, 2-cycle engine not only runs well on any kind of gasoline, it runs far, too. With a full tank, the Honda or the Suzuki has a non-stop range of 160 miles. Not bad, 100 miles per gallon... a cost of less than 1/2c per mile.

Other operational costs are minimal,

too. Maintenance is laughable when you try to think of it in dollars and cents. This costs 37c, that costs 82c *ad cheapeum*. Tires, should they ever wear out, cost \$32 a pair to replace. The Japanese firms of Honda and Suzuki have sold literally millions of these vehicles (unmodified for aircraft) which have been developed to a high level of low maintenance. They are virtually trouble free. But should a motorcycle break down, no one has to look very far to find a factory-authorized repair shop. There are more than 3,000 of them in the United States.

Other costs include licensing the motorcycle annually (about \$15), insurance which varies from about \$15 for liability only to \$80 for full coverage, and about \$40 for safety helmets which are required by most states. Many states also require motorcyclists to have special driver's licenses.

When you assemble a motorcycle for the first time with the intention of driving it along the highway at 65 mph, it is natural to have some misgivings about the structural integrity of your creation. But this needn't be so. A 50,000-pound load is required to separate the main clamp holding the Suzuki together, many times the force that would totally destroy the motorcycle (or a car) in the first place.

With this comforting fact in mind, I mounted the "Honcho" and motioned for Sandy to do the same. A quick kick on the starter gave life to the one-cylinder engine and we were liberated, no longer marooned on an airport.

Ten minutes and five breezy miles later we entered the resort community and pulled up to the entrance of a Swiss-style restaurant for some mountain food which, no matter what it is, always tastes better than the same food served in the city.

Palates pacified, we began an exploratory trek around the lake, stopping at will to enjoy the vistas which improved in serenity and beauty as the distance from civilization increased. We found paths leading downhill to the lake, paths which became more difficult to resist as our awakened sense of freedom from the highway peaked.

We investigated inviting byways wherever we went and scamped up and down steep slopes. At one point, we found ourselves at the rim of a

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CYCLES

Continued from page 57

mountain meadow which, as far as we were concerned, had never before been visited by another human being. I made a mental note to avoid stopping at restaurants on future trips. Picnics are more suitable for occasions like these.

This communion with nature came to a disappointing and necessary end as the sun began its slow, downward descent. Big Bear is not the kind of place to take off from at night.

Heading back toward the airport, I noticed the apparent temperature of the air decrease with an increase in motorcycle speed. At 45 mph, air at a temperature of 50 degrees Fahrenheit feels as though it's only 25 F, a good reason for wearing a jacket when motorcycling. If the air temperature were as low as 30 F, the apparent temperature at 45 mph would be -8 F. The cooling effect of the wind on air temperature is a convincing reason to park a motorcycle in the winter. Nor would I want to drive one through a rain shower or hail storm. Motorcycles are fair-weather vehicles, so some thought should be given to climate before packing one into the family bird.

Once again planeside, we disassembled the Suzuki, being careful not to get our clothes dirty from the road grime and trail dust that can collect on the motorcycle. It seemed a shame to dump all the remaining fuel; we had used so little of it.

To date, Suitcase Cycle is the only company that produces collapsible, full-size motorcycles. The Honda "Trail 90" sells for \$619 as compared to the Suzuki "Honcho" which has a price tag of \$659.

The "Honcho" is a conventional motorcycle with five forward gears and is intended primarily for street and trail riding. Pilots interested in traversing particularly difficult terrain (such as sand dunes and gravel pits) can pay an extra \$10 for the Suzuki "Blazer" which has eight gears and knobby-treaded tires.

Shapiro recently completed modifying a Suzuki "185 Sierra" to fit into most aircraft. This powerful, 17.5-hp vehicle meets the minimum requirements (15-hp) for freeway driving. It sells for \$890, weighs 215 pounds and is intended for those who take their motorcycling seriously. At the other end of the spectrum is the lightweight,

155-pound Suzuki "Gaicho" which sells for \$498.

The cost of a modified motorcycle is \$240 - \$300 more than buying an unmodified machine from a factory dealer. Pilots who are already owners of a conventional Honda or Suzuki can arrange to have it modified by Suitcase Cycle. For further information, write to the company at 3013 Airport Avenue, Santa Monica Municipal Airport, Santa Monica, Calif., 90405.

Carrying a motorcycle in an airplane is more than just adding a heavy accessory. Combining these vehicles results in a transportation system, a reliable, self-contained method of travelling from your driveway to wherever in the world you want to go.

If the motorcycle is used to its potential limit, there is little doubt that it will pay for itself. Consider the savings in not having to hire cabs or rent cars, particularly on a flight to Alaska where Fords rent for \$25 a day and 25c per mile. Also, a motorcycle costs less to buy and maintain than most pieces of avionics, has a much higher resale value and, in many cases, has more practical value.

A motorcycle obviously needn't be carried on every flight, but only when the need for one is indicated. At other times, a pilot can use it (when his wife isn't) for trips around town, particularly when traffic is heavy and parking spaces scarce. It can and should be taken along in the back of the station wagon, in the trunk of the car or even in the outboard motor boat to add spice to family outings. Its use as a survival or emergency vehicle shouldn't be ignored either.

One of these dandy machines can even be taken along on airline trips. Suitcase Cycle has designed two suitcases to accommodate the disassembled components of a Honda or Suzuki. Simply lug them up to the ticket counter and check them in as you would conventional baggage. When you land in Bora Bora or Sharjah, your wheels will be there waiting for you.

(Pilots needing only short-range transportation should consider a folding bicycle. It weighs little more than a bowling ball and can be carried in aircraft such as a Cessna 150 or a Mooney Cadet. These pollution-free, pedal-powered vehicles are available for \$89.95 from the Stevens Company, 1142A 7th St., Santa Monica, Calif., 90401) □

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