

On my first motorcycle trip I packed all my camping stuff and my clothes on my bike using a tangled web of bungee cords and cargo nets. As I twisted down the California Coast to Laguna Seca and the World Superbike, my gear was a mass that shifted, pushed and pulled against me like a passenger that desperately needed to use the bathroom.

One night, sitting around the campfire with a group of fellow riders the talk turned to stupid accidents people had while taking their bikes on road trips. I heard a story about a sleeping bag that slithered out of its bungee net only to be trapped between the rear tire and the sub-frame causing the wheel to lock up. Another rider bested the first story to say that when his sleeping bag jumped loose of its net, it wedged between the tire and the exhaust starting a fire, then slipped under his rear fender locking up his wheel and tossing him to the pavement.

The next year before our annual trip I went to Burnaby Kawasaki and tried to buy the right thing. I didn't want (and couldn't afford) hard luggage so instead I bought a tank bag and a set of saddlebags. For most travelers I am sure that would have been enough room to stow all their gear, but our next tour was a seventeen-day motorcycle camping trip. Trying to get everything on the bike was a challenge. To augment the motorcycle luggage I also purchased a duffel bag from Sears. We sewed webbing to the duffel bag and strapped it across the back seat of the bike, attaching it with a loops and buckles to the saddlebags. Having all of our camping gear tucked securely inside the duffel bag made us feel much better and safer than having it bungeed to the bike. There were still a couple of issues on the road with D rings breaking and the mass of bags shifting, but it was a vast improvement over the previous setup.

Years have passed since that first voyage with the bungee net. We have discovered that Mac Tack on your tail section may look ugly but it will save your bike's paint and bodywork. We have invested in a

lighter tent, smaller sleeping bags and a microscopic espresso maker. Our own modified system of luggage was close to perfect, but not quite there. It still had too many 'twist and shift' points. We were taking gear on our bikes and going motorcycle camping, but we were on sportbikes and riding them in the twisties.

Sometimes we are lucky enough to travel with a support vehicle but I always like to be able to take all my stuff on my bike so I can go it on my own if need be. Being completely self-sufficient on our bikes with all of our gear is a great way to travel. At first I thought that having all my stuff on my bike I would make it feel weighed down, but instead it has done the opposite; I feel a sense of freedom. I can go down a road that I

have never gone down before and when I get tired I can pull over and put my tent up.

In May, fish was at Burnaby Kawasaki seeing what was new in gear when he was asked to check out the Alfa Bag System from Wolfman. Wolfman is a bag manufacturer out of Colorado that got its start in 1992 making gear for off



road and dual sport use, specifically KLRs. As Sportbike bodywork and tail sections became more compact and high slung and under tail exhausts became more common, the Wolfman off-road systems are finally finding their way onto the street and on the back of sportbikes.

The Wolfman Alfa Bag looks like a soft duffel bag, but when you hold it up you see that the shape is more like an upside down 'U'. This combines the volume of a set of saddlebags and top mounted duffel bag into one unit. Once it is secured on your bike it won't twist apart like a combination of bags might. The design makes it an ideal candidate for a bike with an undertail exhaust, integrated turnsignals or few tie down points.

Although the Alfa Bag offers more than ample room for your average road trip, we had lots of extra gear with us so we bought a small duffel for clothes and seated that on top of the Alfa Bag. The Wolfman bag has compression straps already sewn to it that made it easy for us to secure our generic duffel to this system.



In addition to the Alfa Bag we also fitted the Timberwolf Strap Tank Bag to one of our bikes for this test. We needed the tank bag for the video camera, the digital camera, the laptop, the Garmin StreetPilot 2820 and the Bel RX65 radar detector when they were not in use. Although Wolman makes a magnetic version of this tank bag, we decided that the lo-tech strap down tank bag would be better because we didn't have to worry about magnets interfering with our sensitive electronic gear.

The Timberwolf tank bag offers a few cool features that most tank bags don't. The side pockets are attached with Velcro, and can be removed to either make the bag smaller, or to bring in with you when you park the bike. The clear 8 x 10 map sleeve on top of the bag is also attached with Velcro so that you can tear the whole sleeve off and bring it into a restaurant or into your tent to help plan the next leg of your trip (this proved extremely useful).



The bottom of the Timberwolf bag is made out of some bizarre rubbery material that we couldn't quite figure out. Burnaby Kawasaki claimed that this material would protect the paint, and the bag lived up to this promise. In over 3300 miles of riding, the tank bag did NOT scratch the tank surface, although it left some weird checkered smears that easily washed off with quick spray of Pledge.

We set out from Irvine, California on two brand new Kawasaki ZX-14s courtesy KMC, both fitted with Wolman

luggage. The Alfa bag attaches to the bike at three points; two front straps attach to the passenger pegs and the rear strap attaches either under the tail section, or in our case we attached it around the license plate

bracket. The bags have several cinch down points where you can compress them around their contents to form a rock solid, bomb proof load the doesn't budge.

Using the Alfa Bag system requires a revision in your thought process, and in the way you pack your gear. You have to get used to filling the side pannier type voids first, and then pack your soft conforming contents into the main section at the bottom of the bag so the it can mold itself around the tail section of your bike. Then you're left with tons of room for long straight pokey things like tent poles or hard odd shaped objects like shoes, tools, beer etc. Once you get used to packing like this, you're on your way. I experimented in packing the bag while it was mounted to the bike but I didn't find it any easier than packing it on a flat surface like a picnic table.



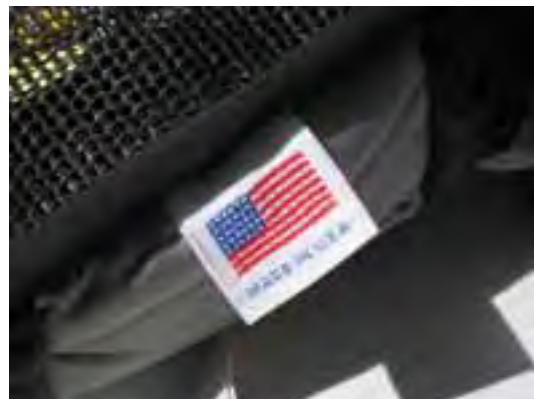
Removing the bag from the bike is as easy as undoing the three buckles that hold it on. After putting 3300 miles on the bikes with these bags we can safely report that they did not fail, however they did show a few minor flaws that can easily be addressed. Curiously, all of the straps on the bags have a doubled back safety tab stitched into the webbing to prevent the strap from backing out of the buckles. All of the straps except the three key tie down points. We discovered this the hard way when the rear strap on my bike worked itself loose from the bag side. After that we always made sure that strap was done up with lots of extra webbing sticking out of the buckle. It would be great if Wolfman sewed the safety tabs on these straps too. Why they did not do this we have no idea. Perhaps there is a good reason, but we can't think of one.



The only other gripe is that the stitching on the two front tie down points looks like it is starting to stretch. We'll know more with more travel time in the saddle. So far the color hasn't faded. While our 'generic' black bags have already started to fade to a muddy red color from sun exposure, the Wolfman bags are still a dark rich black and look as good as new.



With our history of disappointments and delays caused by faulty gear, breaking zippers, tearing bags, self destructing seams and disappearing D rings, the Wolfman bags have been the most reliable soft luggage we have used to date. They haven't let us down. They've taken lots of abuse; from bikes and high speed travel, gravel roads, paved goat trails, campsites, bugs, firewood, over stuffed with tools and camping gear to the pounding heat from the sun. We highly recommend this product to our membership, and as a last and pleasant surprise they are proudly made right here in the USA.



You can find out more about Wolfman Luggage and their products by visiting their website at

<http://www.wolfmanluggage.com>

The Wolfman Alfa Bag retails for \$159.99 USD and you can order it online here:

<http://www.wolfmanluggage.com/Enduro/AlfaRearBag.html>

The Timberwolf Strap Tank Bag retails for \$124.99 USD and you can order it online here:

<http://www.wolfmanluggage.com/03Tank/TimberwolfStrap.html>

Bikeland readers can also contact Burnaby Kawasaki to check for discount member pricing on these bags . Contact Trevor at 604 525 9393.

www.burnabykawasaki.com