

Preparing a bike for long distance rallies



Having been asked to provide an article with the above title and relevant to the demands of the BBR and similar rallies in the UK, here are a few thoughts on the subject.

Not every bike is ideal for doing a Saddlesore on - you can do a Saddlesore ride on virtually any bike but some will make it a far easier and more comfortable experience. In the same way, not every bike is ideal for competing in long distance rallies on, and while even on the IBR there have been some pretty incredible rides on small machines, some will make it more likely that you finish, and certainly help determine how competitive you can be. And then the best bike for completing a Saddlesore or similar ride on, and the best bike for competing in a rally such as the BBR may not be the same bike - each ride has slightly different demands: spending 24 or 36 hours sat on a bike circulating a motorway system when you can choose your timing and weather, is very different from spending the same length of time travelling along a wide range of roads, often in remote parts of the country, while navigating and constantly calculating your progress.

Since few of us are in the fortunate position to be able to own a range of bikes for specific purposes, most of us are going to be using the bike we own for a rally. Whatever the bike, there is, however, a number of ways in which you can modify it. Not all of these may be appropriate to your bike, but I am sure some of them will be worth considering. The main aim in all this is to make the bike 'fit' you and the particular demands of long distance rallies better. Only you can decide what will work for you - often it is possible to get feedback from others on forums about what they have done or recommend, but people are often unlikely to give a bad report to something they may have spent a lot of money on!

1. Seat - if your stock seat isn't comfortable, you have several options: obtaining an alternative seat from aftermarket companies will be possible for some bikes; getting your seat rebuilt, possibly with gel inserts; adding an on-seat addition, such as an Airhawk, a beaded cushion, or a sheepskin.
2. Lighting - HID lights are without doubt the greatest improvement you can make to any bike's lighting system in terms of seeing where you are going. Proper HIDs for bikes are better than the cheap ones you can buy on fleabay but are expensive. Consider also the value of extra lights in being seen by others - a triangular pattern of lights is supposedly the most likely to be noticed by other road users.
3. Windscreen - try raising, lowering your screen to find the optimum position for you. If it still noisy/windy, try changing it - depending on the bike there are a number of different manufacturers out there.

4. Comfort - as well as the seat and screen, look carefully at your bikes ergonomics: experiment with moving bars and footrests if possible, or raising or lowering either.
5. Navigation - whether you are using maps or *GPS*, make sure you are confident in using what you have, and practice using it. Consider what your backup plan will be if the *GPS* fails, your map gets soaked etc.
6. Luggage - consider what you are going to carry and work out what you need to keep it all safe, dry and accessible. I always use a small tankbag on rallies because there a number of things such as the rallybook, my notes, the rally flag and receipts I like to keep in front of me so I can keep checking they are there!
7. Fuel systems - this is a bit more extreme, but it is possible to add a fuel cell to any bike to give you extra distance between fuel stops. For some bikes it may be possible to change the fuel tank for a larger one.
8. Service it - you wan to make sure the bike is going to finish the rally so it may be worth getting it checked over not long before the rally. At the same time, if you are having any work done to the bike, get it done a few weeks before so you have time to ride it and make sure everything is okay.
9. Ride it - the best way you can make sure your bike is suitable for the rally is to get out and ride it, regularly, and if possible in similar conditions, using other rallies as preparation exercises .

Note that I have not attempted to suggest which bike is best for long distance rallies (after all it would be so dull if everyone rode a *GS*!)