



SEE THE WORLD
ON YOUR OWN BIKE!

BY CHRIS GEISER

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING ALONG, a number of us just got back to the U.S. after being abroad for either all of the GFNY Double-Double, parts of it, or even one of those races. Simultaneously, cycling colleagues of ours were converging on the same places, in Germany, Portugal, and Indonesia, from all over the world. Most of them, brought their own bikes. Lately, there have been a lot of interesting discussions about the virtues and foibles of transporting your bike when you travel. As I am writing this, I have spent the last few weeks closing out the Fall season, first to California for a time trial, and then to GFNY Cozumel, and then perhaps back out West on business trip, down South on a short vacation – who knows. But the bike case is never far away, and so it's always top of mind. For me it's a question of when do I have to be finished with my last ride, in order to get the bike in the box, so I can take it on the plane, but I am probably on the high end of the curve for bike travel. But it wasn't always that way.

The year was 2007, and I was about to learn how to pack my bike in a bike box for the first time. There was very little in the way of YouTube videos and there was no one I knew that had ever done it. If you are reading this—you don't have that problem. By 2015, I was ready to tackle my first European race, and there was no doubt in my mind that I would bring my own bike. I had traveled in the States with my own bike several times, and I had become a pro at breaking it down and packing it up.

It just always made sense to me that if my primary reason for travel was cycling, that having my own bike was the primary thing that I should pack. Like tennis players and their rackets, like skiers and their skis, like golfers and their golf clubs—the cyclists, and their bikes. It just makes sense.

Therefore, it is absolutely baffling to me, why in 2016, I decided to brave the Belgian Ardennes on a rental. Oddly it was the same make, model and groupset as the bike I owned. But it wasn't mine. It didn't have my fit, it didn't have my saddle, it was different. At the aid stations, I hesitated in getting back on. "Is this the right one"? I thought several times before getting on and pedaling. It was a difficult day, made more difficult with the variable of picking up the bike at the start line, hoping it would be an ok bike, rushing through an "express fit" and then riding one of the toughest courses in Europe, on someone else's golf clubs.



Pack like a boss, unpack like a boss, travel with others who travel like bosses!

THE JOY OF TRAVEL

GFNY HAS GIVEN ME THE OPPORTUNITY to continue to travel and cycle, and our group has been creating some unbelievable experiences, and meeting some amazing people in the process. I can't think of any one of us who would trade these experiences for anything. Every one of us has a system for how we pack, travel, what we bring and how we put it all together to make it work. But there is one universal rule that everyone seems to apply.

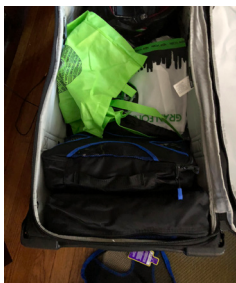
Control everything that you can control. Worry less about the things that you can't control, and focus that energy on what is in your control.

It's a simple rule. And we can use it to unpack—see what I did there—how to take any stress or worry you may have about carrying your own bike, into creating an unforgettable experience from your own saddle. I asked the founders of GFNY, Lidia and Uli Fluhme, to provide some of their best tips for traveling with your bicycle. Lidia and Uli travel farther, and more frequently, than anyone I know, including myself, and have had great success with bringing their own bikes.

FIRST THINGS FIRST



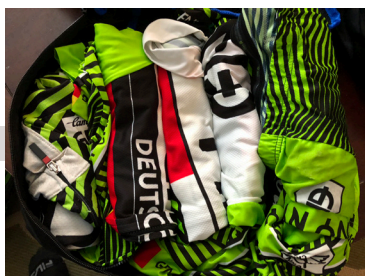
HAVE A CHECKLIST: A checklist will allow you to ensure that you have done what you need to do, and packed what you need to pack. Keep it consistent, and after each trip, run over it and eliminate things you didn't need, and add things you wished you had brought. The checklist will help you make sure that you don't forget a critical item like gels or your floor pump. But the checklist will also keep you from just tossing stuff in the bag. *(Editor's note: The tendency on your first couple of trips may be to bring too much, continue to dial this in. Extra stuff means extra weight, extra weight could mean extra airline bag charges.)*



PACK YOUR STUFF WELL: I like to use compartment bags as a way to add clothes in organized groups. Especially when I am packing for a trip that includes business as well as cycling. It allows me to separate my kits/bib shorts, from my t-shirts, and other stuff, as well as find a more compartmentalized place for my dressier clothes. It saves space in the bag too, and allows you to organize your packing thoughts a little. While packing—take the opportunity to clear out all the fun flyers, postcards, receipts and anything else from your bag, that were collected during your last trip.



Compartmentalizing your clothes helps you organize your thoughts as you pack and make sure you have all the right stuff. The pump, helmet and shoes go in early so they are not forgotten. If you do enough GFNY races, you can organize your jerseys by GDP of the country, or by finishing time — you can't say that anywhere else. For T-shirts and things, a chance to plug the sponsor's gear, your coach's gear, or your to shamelessly plug your friends cycling blog. Pack an extra bike bottle, just in case.



NOW, LET'S GET THAT BIKE PACKED!

KNOW HOW TO PACK: As a student of the book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, I can tell you that self-reliance with your own bike is paramount. Remember—controlling what is in your control. With most modern bike cases, like the Elite Borson, there is a minimal amount of breakdown you need to do on the bike itself. Often you can get the bike packed inside of 15 minutes and do it well.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6tE7Uwg2b4&t=68s>



Bike packing leads to an ideal opportunity to clean and inspect your bike. Some people prefer to clean the bike just after they assemble their bike, I prefer to clean my bike before packing it in the case. Look for any wear and tear in critical places and inspect your frame. So often we ride, wipe the bike down, and put it away. This is a good chance to know your bike up close and personal. It's your machine, treat it well and it will reciprocate. Just about every bike case out there has a YouTube video on how to pack it. Using padding, or foam pipe covers, or bubble wrap, you can add extra protection to allay any fears you may have about the bike's ability to handle the trip, although most cases are designed to do that work for you.

When packing the bike in the box, be mindful, and prepared, for airport security to open your bike box for a manual inspection. Wrap the bike with bubble wrap or Styrofoam blocks where it makes sense. You can also get foam pipe insulation from any hardware store in thicknesses that you can then cut, to wrap around frame parts. Use Velcro or zip ties to secure parts together.

For most bike cases – but they all vary somewhat – you can plan on having to doing some or all of the following:

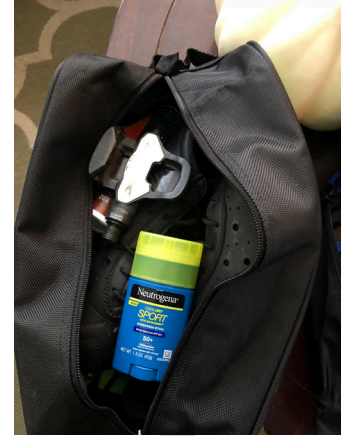
1. Remove the wheels – either to put in wheel bags, or into a dedicated space inside the case.
2. Remove the pedals – easily done with a 6mm or 8mm hex wrench for most pedals.
3. Remove the seat post (in one piece including the saddle, the saddle does not need to come apart from the seat post).
4. Remove the handlebars from the stem – you will not in most cases need to detach the head from the front fork, much easier to remove from the stem. That said, some cases only require you to rotate the handle bars with the stem bolts loosened slightly, while others, like the Elite Borson, don't require you to move the handlebars at all.
5. Remove peripherals, like your bike computer, or saddle bags.
6. With some cases you may be better off removing your derailleur. Having a spare derailleur hanger for your bike is always a good idea when traveling, even if you don't have to remove it (and in most cases, you won't have to).
7. Remove the bottle cages so they don't rip out of the frame during the trip.
8. Deflate your tires fully.

When taking the bike apart, and putting it back together, you will want to have a torque wrench – very easy to get at any bike shop – for tightening the bolts for the seat post and other parts, like handle bars. This will allow you to achieve the safest level of “tight” in those parts, without doing damage to your carbon frame.

CREATE PEACE OF MIND: Travel with a bike and parts that can be easily replaced, even if only basic mechanical equipment / service is present at a race destination. Most events will have basic mechanical services at the start and on the course. There are great mechanics there, but they won’t be able to have the unique parts of every bike on the market. Make sure to bring any special item and tool that is unique to your bike and would be hard to get in a random bike shop or from a service mechanic that is at the start line or out on the course.

Things to have for peace of mind:

- Derailleur hanger / drop out specific to your bike – you can find and order on line at <https://www.derailleurhanger.com> (I kid you not).
- Torque set and bits that you need for your specific frame, as well as a pedal wrench for your pedals.
- If there is a special type of tire that you prefer, having a spare in the bag is never a bad idea; you never know if your specific tire will be available at the race destination.
- Spare spokes, in case there is spoke damage during travel. This shouldn’t happen if you have packed your wheels in good wheel bags, or if you have them attached to the bike box, if that is an option, but if you break a spoke on a group ride before the race, having spares is an inexpensive way to have insurance that a mechanic can repair your wheel with the spokes you have before the race.



WHEEL SELECTION: Consider a few things when choosing which wheels to bring. If you have more than one set of wheels, packing the less sensitive of the two is probably the best quick decision you can make. If you have wheels for multiple purposes, evaluate the course before choosing. Consider not using your deep-set carbon wheels on races that have unpaved road sections, or if you’re heading to a destination where the conditions may be wet.

LEAVE THE CO2 AT HOME: In many cases you can probably get through airport security with CO2, but it’s not something you should ever do. Having your CO2 from home could hold up your bike case, or your other luggage, so it’s hardly worth the risk for something you can buy for just a few dollars. When departing for home—leave the cartridges in the bike garage, or at your rental, or with the concierge. If cyclists are frequent guests, they will pass them on. Or you can always leave them with the local bike shop. Imagine, if you left all your cartridges, because you didn’t get a flat. You leave them, and the cyclist they are given to gets a flat and can fix it, because of YOU! Sleep well—you just paid it forward!

BUT BRING THE FLOOR PUMP: There is no better comfort of home than your own floor pump. And nothing is worse than scrambling for one on race morning. One year in the Double Tree Hotel before GFNY NYC, I made my way to the lobby with my floor pump. One of the moto drivers remarked “you are gonna be popular”.

“Good karma”, I replied.

“Bad karma to be unprepared, though” he replied.

I haven’t traveled without it since.

Related to this—**DEFLATE THOSE TIRES**—you are bringing your floor pump, maintaining your tire pressure in the bike case will only cause trouble.

THAT SAID—HAVE A BAG STRATEGY: Your bike case won't be your only bag. Whatever else you are packing, and checking in with the airline, will need to be something you can roll in one hand while rolling your bike with the other. Weight will matter here. If you are over 23kg/50lbs most airlines will charge. Try to check the weight before you go to the airport to make sure you are in tolerance.

Look for a suitcase with 4 wheels to make the whole travel experience more comfortable. My suitcase fits a floor pump, my small tool kits bag, cloths for bike cleaning, my shoes, spare tires, and on several occasions, an espresso machine. #WorthIt (not in Europe that time). The suitcase rolls easy and I never worry about space.



WATCH THE FEES: The airlines all post different fees at different times for bicycles. Where this goes sideways is when the check-in desk agents don't know what the fees are supposed to be. Calling the airlines ahead of time and getting the information on your specific route, and asking where you might find that in writing, will help you in your conversation with the check-in agents. Plan on \$100-\$150 each way, but it's worth it. To rent a decent bike in Europe will usually run between €85-€115 per day. **AND IT'S**

NOT YOUR BIKE. If your airline has an app, they may also have a baggage tracker that you can use to track your bike and other luggage by the claim check number. It's a great piece of mind when you see that your bike has been loaded as you are sitting and waiting for take off. It makes that "wheels up nap" that much sweeter.

AT THE AIRPORT: We love to see our GFNY stickers on our bike box. However, there are bike bags out there that intentionally don't look like bike bags to avoid the excess baggage fees. If you have one of those bags, you'll want to make sure you don't tip your hand by adding your cycling stickers. Most airport check-in agents have seen and heard it all. Don't jump to the conclusion that you are outsmarting them, especially if you are giving yourself away.

No matter which kind of bike box or bag you use, you will want to weigh it with the bike in it, to make sure you are under the airline weight allowance. Most airlines won't make a fuss about the weight of the bike if you are paying for it, until you reach 70lbs. But, remember, if you want to have a shot at sneaking it in as regular luggage, keep it at 50lbs and under. You can always check in pedals, seat post, saddle in your suitcase. It all adds up, so know how the weight is distributed. (I am pretty sure you can tell us exactly how much your fabulous bike weighs while discussing at a cocktail party, so why not know what it weighs when packed in your bike box).

If you do end up paying the fee to check your bike, check with your credit card company before you travel. Some credit card companies refund a certain amount per year in excess luggage fees. It may not make up all the fees, but it is worth checking.

With your fees negotiated, and your luggage claim tags being printed, take a photo of the bike bag or box. The photo will simplify the claim process if you need to fill out a luggage claim at your arrival if lost or damaged. And while that phone is out photographing your bike box, get a picture of those luggage claim tags. This will provide you with a record of your checked bag, that you will not lose. Those luggage tag numbers become critical if your bag should not come out to the luggage claim area at your destination.

Speaking of which, 90% of airports have an oversized bag pickup in a corner of the luggage hall. Often, the oversize bags will come out just around the time that the belt with other luggage starts to move. If you don't see where oversize is, ask the airport staff. If you don't see an airport staff person, there is usually a luggage office associated with your airline. Should there be a baggage delay, the staff at the airline's luggage office will be able to track your bag (based on that claim tag you took the picture of), and figure out how to get your bag to you if it arrives later.

KNOW YOUR ROUTE: Remember that it's usually "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles", not just planes.

When you put together your travel itinerary, your baggage setup should be capable of getting through the weakest link, and you should have a plan for how to do it. While the plan doesn't always pan out, having one will help you handle the unexpected without feeling like you are in a Marx Brother's movie. The trains are the ones to really watch here. Some of the European train lines have restrictions on bikes, and you need to make sure to be on the platform 15 or so, minutes early to make sure you can get your bike to a convenient place. For car rental, be sure you're renting a car big enough to fit your bike box and the rest of your luggage. For a taxi, be sure the company sends you a photo of their taxi before your trip, so you can be sure the car picking you up is the right size for you and your luggage.

AT THE HOTEL: If you are staying at a large hotel, they likely won't notice you rolling your bike into the elevator and up to your room. In the smaller hotels in Europe, they will likely have a locked garage or room specifically for bikes and bike cases. They are often great places to set your bike up and get ready for the race, and they are usually secure. I have even seen them with bike repair stands, to make it easier on cycling guests.

For your convenience, official GFNY hotels allow bikes in the sleeping room. Some non-GFNY hotels may not allow bikes in the hotel at all, or offer only shared storage rooms, which can be accessed to many guests, so they aren't 100% safe or aren't open at 5am on race day when you need to leave for the start line. If you are booking at a non-official GFNY hotel, check with the hotel before finalizing your booking, on what their policies are, and advise them that you will absolutely need access to your bike at an appropriate time on race day. You don't want to risk a missed start (the dreaded DNS – and don't think it can't happen), because the hotel is not aware of the race start time and does not have the staff to assist in the wee hours of the morning.

OWN THE ADVENTURE— WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

That's all there is to it. With a little planning, and a little effort, you are creating new opportunities for a cycling and racing adventure, from the comfort of your own bike. While it will be new, and may make you a little nervous the first time, you will feel like a pro when you are able to tell your envious friends where you and your bike have been. It makes the adventure complete.