



Traveling with Your Bike to an Event

By: Marni Sumbal

By means of plane, bike or car, traveling to a race can be a stressful experience. Regardless if you are participating in your first triathlon or 50th, there's nothing easy about taking a trip to a new or familiar race venue. Whereas running events only require that you remember one particular item (you guessed it, your favorite pair of running shoes), the weeks leading up to a triathlon can become quite tense when you begin to wonder how you and your bike will arrive to the race venue on time and all in one piece.

While bike racks, or a large backseat, can accommodate the athlete who prefers to travel by car, flying with your bike creates a whole new flying experience. From the finding the right airline, dealing with airline fees and bike box regulations to packing your bike and booking a rental car, it is important that you become a well-educated, prepared and patient athlete when it comes to traveling with your bike.

Airline Fees and Regulations

Flying with oversized baggage was never an easy process but with stringent policies, airlines have become very strict on baggage size and weight. While experience and planning will take you far, never expect an unproblematic experience when flying with a bike. Especially in the case of dealing with a new or difficult airline attendant, you never want to create a scene with an employee who refuses to check your bike or feels necessary to charge you outrageous fees, even though your bike meets the regulations on the respected airline website. Whenever you travel, always have a plan B.

As the number of multisport events grows in the US and abroad, it is evident that more and more airline employees are in need of training when it comes oversized items such as bike cases. Depending on the airline and specific details on its web site (which can change periodically), it is recommended that you bring as much information with you on travel day, from your airline policy website. Ultimately, it is up to you, in a professional and calm manner, to inform the airline personnel regarding your very expensive and prized, oversized item.

While it pays to search for the most affordable airline to get you to your final destination, it is equally (if not more) important to know what your "cheap flight" will charge you for your bike. Whereas one domestic airline may charge \$175.00 each way (international routes may cost \$175-\$250 each way) other airlines may charge as little as \$50 each way. Because prices may change, always check on-line baggage regulations before booking your flight. Even if you plan on traveling light, keep in mind that a bike is generally a



separate piece of luggage and due to its size and weight, you will most always have to pay some type of fee unless the airline does not charge for bikes.

Examples of airline bike fees:

United: \$175

Jet Blue: \$50

Delta: \$175

US Airways: \$100

Continental: \$100

Southwest: \$50 (free if under 50 lbs and 62 linear inches)

Air Tran: \$79 each way

(Prices are one-way and domestic only, unless otherwise noted)

While it certainly costs a lot to travel with your oversized item, the only exception to traveling with a bike is if your bike case is less than 62 inches and less than 50 lbs. However, although airlines have a 62 inches or less (Length + Width + Height) maximum size regulation for free checked baggage, the standard hard bike cases will be more than 62 inches. Additionally, don't expect that your bike and bike case (plus any additional items in the case) will weigh less than 50 lbs.

Shipping your bike

UPS and FedEx will ship your bike to your final destination. The benefit of shipping your bike within the US is that the cost of shipping may be less than the domestic airline-shipping price and you don't have to worry about the hassle of hauling your bike to and from the airport. Additionally, shipping your bike will allow you to insure and track your bike. When flying with your bike, there is no guarantee that your bike will arrive to your final destination on time (or at all) and the airline is usually not liable for damaged bikes or cases. The downside of shipping your bike is that you must secure a place to hold your shipped bike until you arrive. Also, you will typically be without your bike for 4-13 days before and after your trip due to shipping time. While hotels may hold your bike with a considerable fee, check with your event web site in an effort to contact the preferred event bike shop to discuss your shipping concerns.

If you are traveling only in the U.S., a less stressful method of shipping your bike is through the use of a professional bike courier service. Depending on the transport service that you choose, the process of shipping your bike is simple. Make a reservation, pay the fee (typically around \$300 round trip), bring the fully assembled bike to the partner shop around a week or two before your event and the transport truck will take care of the



rest. Bikes are driven to the race site, stable and upright, and you will collect your bike at the bike expo/registration on the day or two before the race. While this convenient and worry-free method of bike shipping may be more advantageous than traveling with a bike case and a slightly disassembled bike, be prepared to be without your bike during your taper period. Lastly, it is crucial that your bike is in excellent racing condition well before the shipping date.

Bike Case and recommendations

In order to fly with your bike, you must have a protective, strong and reliable bike case. A cardboard box, which traditionally ships most new bikes to bike shops, is recommended over a soft bike case, as an affordable and safe way to ship your bike. However, if you plan on flying with your bike more than two times per season, a hard case is worth the cost in an effort to give you the most assurance that your bike will arrive to your final destination all in one piece.

Bike case options:

- Rent a case from your local tri/bike shop
- Borrow a case from your friend/teammate
- Choose a hard case over soft case for maximum protection due to its supportive framework
- Consider buying a used bike case (a new case may cost \$300-\$550)
- Clearly mark and secure your bike case before arriving to the airport
- Contact your local bike shop for a leftover cardboard bike box

Getting to your final destination

If your hotel offers a shuttle, it is important that you check with the hotel to see if the shuttle will accommodate you, your bike, your luggage and other passengers. If the event is new to the area or brings little attention to the city, it is likely that your request will be an inconvenience to the hotel staff. However, if the hotel is prepared for the event, or your stay, you may be able to speak with the hotel manager in order to discuss a few options of getting to the hotel with all of your belongings. In addition to hotel services, you may want to check with the airport regarding travel arrangements to your hotel or final destination.

The easiest way to get to your hotel is by rental car. The downside of a using a rental car does not know what kind of car will accommodate your bike case. Depending on the dimensions of your bike case, the easiest solution is to find out the back seat dimensions of your preferred rental vehicle in order to make a wise decision of what size car you will



need to rent. While an SUV may fit 2-3 bike cases, it is likely that a midsize car will have no trouble fitting one bike case in the back seat or with the seats down. In the case of traveling with friends or family, you may need to take two or three trips to and from the airport in order to commute several bike cases, luggage and/or people.

Helpful tips of bike traveling

- 1) Don't stress yourself. Always have a plan B and plan C
- 2) Opt for direct flights to avoid changing of planes and multi-handling of your bike case
- 3) Give yourself lots of extra time and be patient
- 4) Deflate tires before packing your bike in your bike case
- 5) Come prepared with as much possible from the airline website, specifically regarding the baggage policy
- 6) Feel 100% confident in the assembly and disassembly of your bike. Have a professional bike mechanic show you (and one of your travel companions) how to disassemble, pack and assemble your bike
- 7) Bring mechanical tools, scissors (for zip-ties) and extra accessories for your bike
- 8) Do not travel with pressurized CO2 inflation cartridges and flammable aerosol lubricants. Do not give the T.S.A. any reason to search your bike case for you never know if they will accidentally remove an item or carelessly move around parts
- 9) Use clothes, towels and other soft and light materials to fill in empty spaces in your bike case
- 10) Use zip ties, Styrofoam, insulation tubes or other non-scratch materials to secure your bike and prevent it from moving during travel. Be sure to bring extra materials (zip ties) for the trip home
- 11) When flying, if you do not see your bike on the luggage carousel, plan to pick up your bike by a luggage cargo door
- 12) Clearly secure the outside of your bike case and mark your case with the following information; destination, departure date, flight number, name, phone number, email
- 13) Secure all movable bike parts with zip ties and remove handlebars, pedals and seat. Smaller bikes may only require that the pedals are removed. Be sure to mark your bike seat and handlebar placement (use a piece of electrical tape) before removing parts. After removing parts, be sure that you and/or your bike mechanic remembers to pack all disassembled parts (ex. don't forget to pack your removed pedals and seat post)
- 14) When traveling international or domestic be prepared for the 'what if' situation when maneuvering your bike case to and from the airport terminal (ex. no elevator, tight staircase, no shuttle from long-term parking, etc.)



- 15) Don't forget to pack your helmet, cycling shoes, wheels, spare tubes/tire, bike pump and any other accessories (water bottles) for your race. It is best to travel light in your bike case and carry-on as much possible when it comes to your racing gear/accessories
- 16) To ease your fears, watch out the airplane/airport window to make sure your bike case boards your plane
- 17) When you land at the airport, immediately check your bike case for any damaged or stolen parts/goods
- 18) While it is good to be prepared before you travel, you can buy most bike accessories at the race venue or at a local bike shop
- 19) Get a professional bike-tune up at least 1 week before you plan on flying or racing with your bike. If you do not keep your bike regularly tuned-up or well maintained, be prepared to buy new parts (ex. chain, bar tape, tires/tubes, cassette, chain ring, etc.) in an effort to race with a clean, functional and safe bike. While you are at the shop, do not be talked into buying unnecessary, spur-of-the-moment, "must-have" bike parts in an effort to try to have a faster racing time
- 20) Always check the event-website "travel" section prior to booking a flight. Some events websites will provide a promotional code, or special price, for athletes who make flight reservations with the sponsored airline

Every race will be different. Depending on your final destination and length of trip, recognize that there are several options of getting your bike to its final destination.

About Marni

Marni holds a Master of Science in Exercise Physiology, is a Certified Sports Nutritionist (CISSN) and holds a certification by the American Dietetic Association in Adult Weight Management. Marni is a Level-1 USAT Coach and is currently pursuing a registered dietician degree. She is a 2007 Ford Ironman World Championship finisher. Marni is returning to the 2011 Ford Ironman World Championship, as she qualified at Ford Ironman Wisconsin in 2010. Marni enjoys public speaking and writing, and she has several published articles in *Hammer Endurance News*, *CosmoGirl* magazine and *Triathlete Magazine*, and contributes monthly to IronGirl.com and Beginnertriathlete.com.

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*Marni enjoys her meat-free diet and has been a lacto-ovo vegetarian for the past 16 years.



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