

Mosko Moto Backcountry panniers

By Ian Schmeisser #50592

OKAY, AFTER 45 YEARS OF RIDING adventure bikes, ranging from Bultaco Matadors to BMW HP2 Enduros, with sundry G/S and GS in between, it is time for a change. First, at 60 years old, it's getting harder to pick the heavy bikes up. Second, with a 29" inseam, it's always been hard to reach the ground. Attending most adventure rallies these days reveals a major shift in the Force. First, one notices many more pickup trucks and trailers in attendance, each with one or two orange, red, yellow, green and blue bikes in tow, 250-400cc, wearing DOT knobby tires. Almost everyone who rode a bike to the event is on something that weighs well north of 500 pounds. The exception are the riders on a 650, be it a DR, KLR, F or G bike. I've been looking at these bikes for years, never quite sure if something like this should be in the stable. Recently a friend put up for sale a cosmetically-challenged 1997 F650ST... a "Classic"... for a very reasonable price. Here was my chance to test out this concept without a big financial commitment.

Punkin'

Jeez, I never name bikes, but this very orange "little" motorcycle just had to be called something cute. Everyone who's ridden an F650 tells me it's a perfectly acceptable touring bike. Well, 65-70 mph on the Interstate is do-able, but Punkin' certainly isn't a big GS. However its engine cruises smoothly, far better than the KTM in this respect, the acknowledged leader in this class. And while I am still eyeballing a truly light bike shod with real knobbies to

take on more challenging rides, riding to my destination is still important, no matter how warm and dry it is in the cab of my pickup truck. All the F650 needs is some decent lightweight luggage to round out it's adventure touring capabilities.



Mosko Moto's slick mounting wedge attachment system.

Packin'

Enter Mosko Moto, a fast-growing startup company staffed by truly talented product designers. They've introduced a system of panniers, duffles and pouches that all work together, allowing you to build the right set of luggage for your adventures. As a fan of excellent industrial design, it's great seeing this degree of innovation entering our little corner of the world.

Built from a number of advanced materials, the Mosko Moto gear is up to snuff for hard use on the trail. But one of the most interesting features is the approach taken for attaching and detaching the panniers to and from the bike. Like some other soft luggage, the panniers require the use of a rack to support them. Frankly, I wouldn't use any type of soft luggage without a rack because they keep the bags out of your rear wheel. A full-loop rack is preferred, and these are available from a number of suppliers.

However, Punkin' came with some BMW luggage racks, which are designed to work with the BMW rigid plastic cases, so no full loop. By the time you read this, Mosko should have mounting racks specifically designed to enable BMW pannier mounts to fully-support the bags. For me, a good friend and tubing bender was able to craft the support I needed, and Mosko's simple attachment system quickly bolted up.

I mean, simply *brilliant* attachment system. The mounts are comprised of two mating CNC-machined plastic plates that slide and latch together, allowing for easy, simple and fast mounting and dismounting. The fit is impressively exact, the latch mechanism is simple, and it keeps the two pieces together without having to bear any weight. While the mounting plate attached to the bike is quite visible with the bags removed, it looks pretty cool and can be quickly removed when you don't need luggage. This is among the best mounting systems I've ever seen for motorcycle luggage.

You get the best of both worlds: lighter weight bags with a little "give" that makes your bike easier to ride and reduces the impact transmitted to your gear, and a rigid mounting system that's the equal of any hard bag, which is important in a get-off.



Mosko Moto's Backcountry panniers and duffel feature waterproof storage for dry things, external pockets for wet and dirty things and an attachment system for adding more carrying capacity.



Plantin'

Yes, of course I tested for crash-worthiness... intentionally choosing deep, soft sand for my first ride, so as to maximize the likelihood of a fall and minimize the chances for pain. With both 35 liter panniers and Mosko's excellent 40 liter duffel fully-loaded with camping gear, Punksin' took on soft sandy roads with aplomb, with very little of that impending disaster feeling you get as the front wheel hunts. Roll on some throttle and it straightens right out with little to no sense that you're carrying 75-80 pounds back there. My Aerostich tank panniers also deserve credit for this behavior. They carry my heavy, infrequently-used items such as tools, spares and tire irons closer to the bike/rider center of mass, making the bike less likely to go all huckabuck over challenging terrain.

Riding on to the single track, it was inevitable that I'd go down...but before doing so I noticed that paddling the bike through the deep sand didn't have my legs hitting the panniers. With square-finished metal boxes this can be a real pain, literally. And upon an up-close sand inspection, two more things became apparent. The first: without a horizontally-opposed twin engine, the bike falls all the way over. The second: Mosko panniers are going to hold up well to

this type of action.

The reason why is a design feature that Mosko calls a "beaver tail." This is an extra layer of very tough nylon, a flap that extends up from the bottom to cover the pannier's lower edge and outer side. The beaver tails are secured with a system of nylon straps that extend from all sides of the bags and fasten with beautifully-made aluminum buckles. If you were to fall on a hard surface, it's highly likely that the beaver tail will protect the integrity of the main compartment and can be repaired instead of tossed. Even better, you can stuff odd items behind the beaver tails, such as your smelly sandals, wet tent fly, ground cloth, tent poles, etc. Snug up the straps, use the ingenious velcro fasteners to secure the straps' tail ends and keep on rolling.

Perfection?

As tested the setup cost \$920 for two mounting systems, two Backcountry 35 panniers, a Backcountry 40 Duffel and two accessory storage pouches. Add racks and you're getting right up there. However, these are the best products I've seen in soft panniers and duffels. And a good thing, since my 20 year-old Ortlieb bag is on its

last legs.

The panniers feature a waterproof inner bag surrounded by a nylon exterior with roll-top closures. The Backcountry Duffel is a simply excellent design, featuring a waterproof inner bag with roll closures on each end for convenient access. A unique and elegant design feature is the two beaver tails through which your straps thread and then stow beneath for neat and safe attachment. There's even room for my 10 liter MSR Dromedary and a Kermit chair. An excellent tie-down strap that holds everything together is available from National River Systems, the best in the business. Think Helen TwoWheels straps on steroids, for less than \$15.

And while I've not touched upon the rugged MOLLE (military-speak for Modular Lightweight Load-carrying Equipment) attachment system, which allows you to attach several optional pouches from Mosko or anything else that's compatible, or a dozen other exceptional design touches, the designers at Mosko are still moving forward with a number of refinements to their current products as well as extensions into tank bags, tank panniers and other accessories.

To learn more about Mosko Moto gear, visit moskomoto.com

Pros

- 13-18 pounds lighter than metal panniers + top box
- Innovative design features abound
- Built with materials that will take abuse
- Fast attach/detach with carrying handles
- Duffel converts to backpack
- Everything is waterproof

Cons

- A thief with a knife is a problem, get Pac-safe protector mesh
- Not the same impact protection as hard bags
- Not inexpensive, but excellent value
- No tank panniers (yet)

Additional Resources

NRS Straps: nrs.com

Best F650 resource ever: F650.org