

INTO THE RIDE #77

Heavy Hauling in the Hammer Truck

by Randy Schlitter



A HammerTruck is your ticket to a lifestyle that brings freedom and vitality. It only requires your willingness to explore the possibilities of what a heavy-duty cargo bike can do. As the maker of such a device I am prone to use the product rather than sit behind a desk and expound on the how it might be. Using proves the product, and bares the soul to what it is really like out there...and it is good!

To track the use of the HT I log the miles and the pounds hauled. The average load for groceries runs about 30 pounds with a 6 mile round trip. We have done testing with loads up to 250 pounds of dead weight, and live weight of a bit more. There is a big difference in live or dead hauls. Squirring passengers will influence the bikes handling. Test loads are one thing, but taking it to the streets...well is another.

To push myself (the bike seems not to mind) I decided to haul 4 forty-pound bags of water softener salt. To haul this kind of a load on your HammerTruck will need at least the runners; my bike has the full bag system and runner covers. The salt fit into the bags with no problem. The strap system did a

fine job of securing the load. The basic loading technique is to lay the bike over on the runner, load the upside, then tip it onto the loaded side, and load the empty side.

While loading an extra heavy load it is wise to position the bike to access both sides, and have an exit path determined. There have been a couple of times I failed to do so, and lugging a loaded bike in a tight spot is a clumsy chore.

Knowing where to grab the bike when heavy helps. I grab the bars at the head of the riser, and the frame at the junction of the seat tube and top tube. The closer you grab the frame to the load the easier it will be.

As with other heavy hauls the load of salt felt like a large displacement motorcycle, easy to hold up, with a well balanced load. The HammerTruck will handle the torsion of an offset load, but the ride can be decidedly turning in favor of the heavy side. I avoid such out-of-balance loads when possible, because starting can be challenging. You quickly become very apt at even loading.

With the load even on the rack, pushing off was easy, especially if you use lower gears and clip-less pedals. Using clip-less pedals will off-load the knees and keep you cycling. Heavy hauling places a lot of demand on the body, and taking advantage of gearing and clip-less pedals will make it practical. Heavy hauling boils down to a couple basics: keeping energy, and safe handling.

Speaking of keeping energy...my fear is a runaway load down a steep hill. There is a speed where your brakes are going to be merely suggestions. Avoid that unless you want air time on the evening news. My salt run included some hills, mild, but curvy, and this is where the HT shines. With a heavy even load, low on the rack, it is awesome pay back after a hard climb. The ability to corner at speed is increased, since traction in a curve is enhanced. But again the fun can end in a hurry if your brakes are not up to the task. I test broke well before gaining speed to gauge the margin for stopping. I can say from experience after 20 MPH even really good disc brakes will have trouble stopping a 160-pound load. I braked so hard on the front that front wheel skewer slipped, jogging the wheel into the fork. I stopped and honked down on the skewer a bit beyond leaving a palm impression. So haul with caution when doing hills.

I played with the bike while at speed, doing gentle “S” turns. There will be a point on a HT where an “S” turn can turn into an out-of-control oscillation. Lucky for me on this trip I did not find out just where. The bike felt willing to stay in command with a little sloppy handling, but I caution users that whipping is waiting if you are willing to tease. The main idea when making a heavy haul is to take it slow and make gentle, smooth turns.

Handling is affected by the amount and position of the load, that is obvious, but other things like tire pressure, headset tightness, and handlebar position will also have an impact. I prefer to keep the tires at 80, not too hard, absorbs the road, handles well. The headset is tight too. This helps dampen steering, and is welcome when loaded and needing to make a sudden move in traffic. Handlebars are huge world to explore. For the HT we spec the B-37, ‘paper boy’ bars. I find them the best for all around use. They are wide enough to keep control, have room to stand, and offer a couple of place to grab on.

The handlebars will play big into how well you stand ride a HammerTruck. This will be a different enough experience that I recommend a few practice heavy hauls, before venturing across town to haul a month’s worth of groceries.

I have not had the pleasure of changing a flat on either wheel of the HT. I have thought about it, and depending on the weight, it makes sense to unload for a rear, and not to for a front. It could turn out

the hassle of getting the rear wheel off with a heavy load will be greater than the effort to remove or lighten the load.

Tips on riding heavy loads

1. Do not make rapid moves on fast downhill
2. Use clip less pedals, save your knees
3. Use the gears, save your knees
4. Braking with heavy loads be sure to tighten your front wheel skewers!
5. Tire pressure and handlebars are important for control and efficiency
6. Remove the cargo when changing a rear flat
7. Create your own haul log

I am sure as the season progresses, there will be more adventure and lessons learned. I look forward to racking up an impressive log of miles and pounds hauled. It is just plain fun to gather your consumer needs on a cargo bike. Maybe it is a 70's Hippie vibe, or simply the joy of being able to do so at 55. Either way if you get into the HT, I hope you will find the same or better enjoyment/utility as I have. Until next time, stay safe and stay into the ride!

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