

TRAVELLING LIGHT

Taking a break from our regular bike review feature, we've put together some tips and tricks to enhance your performance in areas that have nothing to do with training harder or going faster. Over the next two issues, we look at travel tactics and transit tips to help you reach your destination feeling fresh and ready to race at your peak.

GETTING YOUR GEAR FROM A TO B WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK

TEXT BY JONATHAN HALL | PHOTOGRAPHY BY WWW.SXC.HU

One of the best and worst things about being Australian is that, regardless of whether we compete internationally or domestically, we have to travel great distances to get to some of the races we have our sights set on.

If you race Olympic or Sprint distance there is Budapest in 2010 and Beijing in 2011, while domestically there's a qualifier in just about every state. If you race Ironman there's the Holy Grail of Hawaii, as well as Roth, New Zealand and of course Port Macquarie and Busselton. If Half Ironman or 70.3 is your thing then Clearwater, Geelong, Busso or Port Mac may be one of your many destinations.

The one thing that all of the above have in common is that there is generally at least one flight involved, and when travelling to a race what we all need to do is take the stress out of this part of the pre-race preparation.

So why am I qualified to tell you this? Well, as an ex-athlete I have racked up 23 years travelling Australia and the world with my bike. I ran a small business while I lived in Spain that catered for cyclists who wanted to ride their bikes and see the Tour de France, Tour of Spain or maybe just chase their dreams of riding the major climbs in Europe while on holidays, and they all travelled with bikes and luggage. In my present role as Head Coach at the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS), I am responsible for all the travel we do as a team. In 2010 this will cover about 20 events and dozens of flights, connections and transfers – all with that most dreaded piece of luggage, the bike.

I know I am stating the obvious when I say preparation is the key to getting travel right but it does make a massive difference, and I hope there is something I write here that will make travel easier for you in the future.

I will use the itinerary of one of my VIS athletes to help you get an understanding of how I go about planning travel to competitions and events. The key is right here. I am not simply planning travel – at the end of the travel I want the athletes to be able to compete at the highest level and this is where attention to detail can be the difference between success and failure.

The first race I will use as an example is the Seoul World Championship series. Not only would the athlete be competing in Seoul but they would then travel on to Europe, where they will be based for four months and begin to travel to and from other race destinations in the Northern hemisphere.

STEP ONE

First and foremost, it is important to take into consideration how long you will be away, as this will determine how much gear you need to pack. In this example, my athlete is leaving Melbourne in early May and returning in late October – so this means a lot of gear needs to be packed. Between training gear (clothing) for swim/bike/run, shoes for cycling and running (three trainers, three race flats and bike shoes), training tools for the three disciplines (fins, pull buoy, etc), casual gear, and whatever else the athlete wants to take with them, this is a 23kg bag and right on the limit. Add the bike with training and race wheels, pump, minimal tools, spare tyres, tubes, helmet and a wetsuit, and you will have easily accumulated another 23kg. And when you consider most airlines offer a checked baggage allowance of about 23kg plus 7kg in hand luggage, the problems begin straight away.

It's important to find out what the rules are. For example, travel to and from Australia to Asia, Africa and Europe commands a checked baggage allowance

of 23kg. Given that most airlines charge at International rates of up to US\$60 per excess kilo for a one-way flight to Europe, you could be looking at an additional cost of US\$1,380 each way to bring your bike. With my athlete we are looking at 23kg x US\$60 to Seoul and then 23kg x US\$60 to Lyon, and the same on the way home. So for a ticket worth \$2,300 with a One World Company, the excess could be an additional US\$5,520. Choosing who you fly with, what route you take and what sort of ticket you buy is crucial, as the bill to

Photo: Karen Winton



EXCESS BAGGAGE: Plan ahead and avoid paying too much

compete in an event and return home at the end of the season has risen to \$9,540 – and that's not including the regional and international flights during the four months away.

So should your travel agent know this, and should they be the ones to provide this information? This is difficult to say as the rules are constantly changing and, as many of you will already know, until you travel with a bike it is hard to appreciate what challenges you will face. So here are a few tips on planning your flights.

Airlines book tickets using two systems, the weight system and the piece (PC) system. All flights to and from the US and most South American countries use the PC system for checked baggage. Flights to and from Europe, Asia and Africa use the weight system and this is anywhere between 15kg for the low cost flyers to 23kg for the more established airlines. All airlines have their own excess rules for travel. Some incorporate sporting equipment into checked baggage allowances while others charge independently to carry a bike. You need to know what your airline does.

There are too many variations to cover here, but one example is that most US airlines charge up to US\$150 each way to carry a bike. This is irrespective of weight and can often end up costing more than the ticket price. In Europe, Iberia Airlines and Lufthansa charge about €75 (euros) per sector to

Photo: tania64.sxc.hu



TRAVEL WELL: Join an airline club and get there in style

carry a bike, even if it is the only piece you have and is within the luggage allowance.

There was a time when British Airways did not charge to carry a piece of sporting equipment and you could travel with a suitcase under 23kg as well as a bike, as long as it was less than 23kg on European sectors. However, with the crisis around fuel prices, BA have scrapped this policy which is disappointing for athletes who, for a time, made BA their first choice when booking flights.

An even better example of the differences between airlines lies with the two largest One World carriers, British Airways and Qantas. These two airlines code share flights out of Australia and it is easy to end up on either of these two without really attempting to. They both offer rewards for frequent flyers on reciprocal cards, but when it comes to handling excess they are poles apart. To highlight this, I will use a Sydney-London return flight as an example. If you have your 23kg suitcase and your bike at 23kg, you can pre-purchase an additional piece of luggage from British Airways for as little as AUD\$50 each way. So your \$2,300 fare becomes \$2,400, you have a receipt to prove payment and there is no reason to stress at the airport. But if you fly Qantas, for the same extra piece of 23kg luggage you will be looking at a minimum of AUD\$700 pre-paid each way. And avoid leaving payment until you arrive at the check-in desk because you could also incur an added cost of \$60 per kilo – adding between \$1,400 and \$2,600 to your \$2,300 ticket.

In the case of my athlete, I tackled this problem by purchasing a round-the-world fare. This means travel through Hong Kong, Seoul, Hong Kong, London, Lyon, Madrid, Lyon, London, Lyon, New York, LA and back to Sydney, all for about \$4,000. On top of this I am able to purchase sectors within Europe or the US and all of these sectors appear on the one ticket or itinerary. Therefore, I am actually entitled to two pieces at 23kg on every sector on this ticket. I have no hassles at the airport, I know exactly what I can and can't take, and I have saved myself and the VIS program literally thousands of dollars.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Here some ideas that I apply when I am travelling to an event:

- Did you know that if you are a Qantas Club member, not only do you get access to the lounge and a shower at every stop on the way to Europe, priority check-in and wait-listing, but you are also entitled to an additional checked baggage allowance? This means you could travel to the US with three pieces at 23kg, value which easily covers the cost of joining Qantas Club in one event.

Photo: Paul Campbell



- Know what your entitlements are, keep up to date with changes and print out the airline rules for your carrier. Many airlines use non-airline specific staff at check in and they may not know the rules. There is nothing like having it in writing when you are arguing for what you thought you had purchased over what may cost thousands of dollars more.

- Take time to see who will be checking you in – I like to stand back and watch for who has been working seven hours straight and may want to throttle the next bike carrying customer, and who has just started their shift and is still smiling. Approach the counter with a smile, it really does go a long way, and don't try to talk your way past any rules that the airlines guard with a vengeance.

Good planning and organisation, attention to detail and due diligence can save you a fortune on a trip like the one I have just described. In the example I used above, we arrived excess-free with 26kg and 10kg of hand luggage – while others have already incurred upward of \$1,400 in excess from three sectors and one event.

With airlines cutting costs at every corner, travelling to events will only get harder without proper planning. Even if you take out the physical cost, there is a massive amount of stress when facing the interactions at the check-in counter, not to mention the potential to blow your budget before you even have your boarding pass in your hand. Doing your research and following these tips will hopefully make for smoother travels, so you can concentrate your energy on the event, not the transit time.

Next issue, I am going to offer a few ideas about how to pack all your gear up when you are going to an event and travelling on to a new training base. Safe travels. 🛫

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