

Being Towed On A Motorcycle

Being Towed On A Motorcycle or dangling on the end of a rope?

Greg Cowell tells an interesting story about being towed on a motorcycle:

"Towing a motorcycle can be done, but is rather interesting. Going back a few years we had to get a bike to the shop but didn't have a ute or truck. We tied a shortened water skiing rope to the back of the car and the guy on the bike had the handle. We figured that if anything went wrong then the guy on the bike could always let go of the handle and coast to a stop. What we forgot was that holding on to a ski rope handle made hanging on to the handlebars a little more difficult, it was fine when you had some speed up but in slow, tight corners it was hard to do both.

As it unfolded we were only about 200 metres from the garage which was up a bit of an alley. I was in the car and the tight turn put my mate on the bike on a 'whip', he ended up in a heap on the footpath. He wasn't too happy about this and made it known to me once we returned. He also forgot that we were right outside a police station and when they came out to investigate all they saw was a dropped bike and a grumpy rider having a go at a car driver. It took quite a bit of very fast talking to get us out of that one".

It's quite legal to tow a motorcycle with either a bike or car here in NZ.

As long as you wind the rope a couple of turns around the steering head and loop it over to the handlebar where you grip it along with the handlebar, it is scary but survivable - sort of like riding over gravel for the first time.

The main secret is to use a rope without knots and NOT to tie the rope to the bike but wind it around the steering head and loop it over to the twistgrip. The towing force is then taken by the steering head and if you get nervous you can just release your grip on the twistgrip and the rope will slide out from under your hand and uncoil from around the steering head. However, if the rope has a knot in it and won't uncoil around the steering head...

One thing to remember: On modern bikes, when you wind the rope around the steering head, you have to check that the rope under tension won't damage the bike's fairing.

Rules for towing:

The person towing must do everything very slowly and smoothly, brake as little as possible, and accelerate like s/he has an egg between foot and accelerator or the jolt the towed rider gets is REAL frightening.

Also, don't be towed downhill. Unfasten the bike and roll down any hills, then connect the bike up again.

Another rule is to pre-arrange signals. I've heard of a situation where the driver heard the rider tooting at him and thought the rider wanted to go faster..!

Bikes can be towed by bikes but the rope should be tied to the towing bike at the back and in the centre of the bike - the passenger grab rail, maybe. And the towing rider needs to keep a weather eye on what's happening behind because if the towed rider lets the rope go and it catches on something ...

On the whole, towing is really only for real emergencies and I've only done it a couple of times in about 45 years of riding. With luck, you may never need to worry about it.