



# The Tarheel Traveler

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## SIDECARS FOR WIMPS

by Mike Currin

Every time I see that line in the newsletter plea for articles, I feel like a finger is pointed directly at me. Maybe more than pointing, more like *thumping* me in the chest and calling me a wimp. (But hey, it worked).

Do wimps attach sidecars to ZX-14s, Hayabusa, Concours 14s, FJR 1300s, FJ 1100s, or K1100 RSs?

Would a wimp passenger in a Yamaha FJ 1200 / Side Bike Comanche sidecar while it's doing a smoking burnout during a right hand turn? I did. Did I mention that you are almost laying flat on your back, similar to a Formula car and the sidecar top closes over top of you?

Would a wimp ride in a ZX-14 / Hannigan sidecar where the GPS showed a max speed of 85 mph between the overlook and the "resort" on Deal's Gap? Number one son Cody did.

Would a wimp ride a BMW K1100RS / EML Speed 2000 on the same route and when getting off the bike at the "resort" have a couple on a Hayabusa tell you "We were upset to be behind a sidecar, thought it would slow us down, then in the first corner you left us and we never saw you again"? That happened to me and Cody.

(Granted that might not have happened if they had been a BMW couple with their known superior riding skills.)

Would you consider a blind in one eye, paralyzed from the waist down person who drives a Hayabusa / RDS sidecar, pulling a trailer for his wheelchair, and is the fastest rider in your group...a wimp?



Or do a tire smoking 180 degree "bat turn" on a two lane road? Or stopping your descent into a river by using a strategically placed tree wedged between the sidecar and the bike? Or had your passenger get whacked in the head by road side weeds from leaning out on right hand turns? Or just carrying your 14 year old wheelchair bound son in the sidecar, pulling a trailer carrying his wheelchair and keeping the rest of these crazies at least in sight? Or drifting the rear wheel around corners while pulling a trailer? Or installing a nitrous kit on a Hayabusa sidecar rig?

Is any of that smart? Well, probably not. Could any of that land you in jail, or at least require a traffic lawyer?

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

Yes. Did the rigs come out unscathed? Yes, most of the time. Is it great fun? Yes.

Granted sidecars are not for everyone. They are very different from riding a motorcycle. Like a car they direct



steer and you don't lean into the corners. Then there is the whole asymmetry thing, where left hand corners require a little different approach than right hand corners. Plus your passenger has a more active role in cornering, by shifting their weight to help keep the rig stable.

All your motorcycle buddies will try to scare you off with horror stories of rigs that run off the left side of the road when the brakes are touched, or require bungee cords from the handlebars to the bike frame to keep the rig rolling straight down the road. They'll also tell you how slow they are and that you cannot take a right, or left, hand corner without flipping over. With some of the rigs I've seen some of this is probably true.

However, a properly setup High Performance Sidecar (HPS) (car tires on all three wheels, alternative front end, swaybar, etc) will stop in a straight line, won't be affected by the crown of the road, and will not require nearly as much steering effort as a more traditional sidecar. On straight roads and long sweepers a solo bike will be able to out run a HPS but in the tight stuff, such as most of the smaller roads feeding the parkway the rig will hold its own, or depending on the riders / drivers, have the advantage.

Sidecarists are seen by non-riders differently than riders. It's almost a given that if you ride to the store, someone will be standing by the rig to ask you some



questions, or shout them to you at traffic lights. Sidecars are not for the timid or shy. You will never blend in, except maybe at a sidecar rally. And forget about going anywhere incognito. Just park in front of the local tattoo parlor and see how many people will notice and remark about it.

People who would might not talk to you if you pulled up on a motorcycle will ask for a ride in the sidecar (this can be good or bad depending on the status of your relationship.) At gas stops strangers will ask where the handle is to release the sidecar while going down the road. I've been asked that so many times I've thought of mounting a handle labeled "WARNING, DO NOT PULL, SIDECAR RELEASE" between the bike and sidecar. [Please do this ! Ed.]



Even fellow riders are not sure if you're really one of them. You're in that strange land between bikes and cars, and you're not quite a trike. Riders have asked "Why would anyone want to put a sidecar on a motorcycle"?

Answer: *To make it go faster.* Or said "Maybe I'll get a sidecar when I'm too old to ride".

Answer: *When I get too old for sidecars I'll get a sport bike.*

I have owned my 93 K1100RS / EML Speed 2000 sidecar for about 11 years now and still enjoy riding it. So much so that my solo bike rarely gets out of the barn. During that time it has had a few upgrades, including

swapping out the original leading link front end for center hub steering, redesigning the sidecar hub so that toe in and camber can be adjusted at the hub instead of at the

(Continued on page 3)

*(Continued from page 2)*



sidecar attachments, going to 16 inch car tires and wheels, installing two calipers on the sidecar brake where one is tied to the front brakes and one is tied to the rear, and finally, adding a swaybar.

That is part of the joy of sidecars; there seems to be no right or wrong way to do things. There are many different opinions on most aspects of building and design. What makes the best front-end design; a true center hub steering or one with the ball joints offset to give some steering axis inclination and scrub radius? Should the sidecar brake tie to the front brakes, the back brakes or both? Is a swaybar necessary?

*Sidecarists tend to be a little "different". Some people would use a different word, but they have all been interesting, welcoming, and good friends.*

*TT*