

Loading Big Bikes in Pickup Trucks

I am not being paid by any of the manufactures listed here. Chaplain Farmer

There should be an easy and safe way to load a big heavy full-dress Harley Davidson or custom bike in a pick-up truck all by yourself. There is, but. It's the butts that cause the problem. You can buy the long and wide one-piece aluminum ramps that will allow you to ride your bike into the truck bed, but you will run into a major problem if you can't take the ramp with you. How will you unload the bike once you get where you are going? Get the picture?

Word of Warning and Danger: Did you know that those factory tailgate straps (cables) on your pickup truck are not intended to bear a load? How many times have you see people loading their motorcycles using that tailgate? Imagine what would happen to you, and your friends helping you, if just one of those straps failed? Somebody is going to be seriously hurt and the motorcycle will be destroyed. For safety, put a three strong supports under three sides of that tailgate: left, center and right side to hold up that tailgate, as a safety net in case the cables let go and break free. Better yet, buy a motorcycle loading system that does not rely on any weight on that tailgate! How much is your life worth? It is dangerous to use ramps!

The solution is to buy a ramp that breaks down and folds up so it can be placed along both sides of the bike in the truck, but...

If you have a standard pick-up truck an 8 foot ramp will work, but if you have a truck that exceeds 38 inches from ground to tailgate, then you need a 10 foot ramp. Will it fit into the truck after it breaks down? Many of these ramps have curved geometry so they don't fold up flat, leaving no room in the truck to bring the ramp with you. But...

You could purchase the 8 foot ramp, but to lower the back end of the truck you can buy recreational vehicle type wheel leveling chocks. You inch your truck's front wheel up a bit on the chocks and that will lower the back end of the truck. It's better than trying to find an embankment to back up against trying to find a good angle to load and unload bikes. But...

The 8 foot ramp's curve may still be too steep and the low-clearance bike, which may be your bike, will high-center (get stuck) on the ramp's curvature. So, you are now backed to the 10 foot ramp, with all its storage problems, but...

The 10 foot ramp may not allow you to close the tailgate in an 8 foot long bed pick-up truck. This may or may not be a problem for you.

So, what is the solution? Buy a USA Ramp if you want to load your motorcycle or other vehicles into your truck all by yourself. But what if you want to tow a trailer with this ramp? No problem, they have a Safety Tow Ramp. This is a good route to go. But what if you have a 5th wheel travel trailer?

You could buy a motorcycle rack to be welded on to the rear I-beams, but the bike must be less than 450 pounds or the towing geometry will be affected and that could cause you to lose control

and crash. It's not going to work with big heavy bike. A toy hauler 5th wheel is the only sane choice if you want to go with the 5th wheel, but... you will give up a ton of living space in the RV. Not a problem if you are using the RV for vacation, but living in it for extended periods would be punishing. You could tow another trailer behind the 5th wheel, but do not go beyond 50 feet total length or the Highway Patrol in some states will pull you over and force you to abandon the RV and hire a tow truck to get it off the roadway, also, some states require that you be licensed to triple-tow trailers. It's not an option for most people. Better to go the travel trailer route with a USA Ramp... problem solved. You will live in more comfort and the bike will be with you where ever you go.

Another system I have used is to use the "Big Boy" you can find them at MotorcycleRamps.com. (http://www.motorcyclerramps.com/motorcyclehd_ramps.htm) It is an aluminum ramp that folds up into three pieces and so it can be stored alongside the bike in the back of the pickup truck, or stack them in the back seat area of an extra-cab pickup truck. This also is a one man operation to load and unload big and low custom bikes in the truck. You can find the company on the Internet. I drive the bike up slowly with no problem. Backing down is a bit scary, but you will get used to it. Just keep the bike in gear with clutch in because the brakes will not work to stop you if you have to stop. If you just go easy and keep the bike straight you will be down off the ramp in two seconds. The Big Boy ramps allows you to load and unload the bike yourself, take the ramps with you to your location and still allows you to tow a huge travel trailer (not a fifth-wheel trailer).

Safety Notice: I have noticed some safety precautions when using gravity ramps to load heavy motorcycles. The ramps may come with a safety cable to attach to the truck bumper so the ramp can't be pulled away from the truck when loading or unloading. Don't trust these tiny cables! Weave a ratcheting tow or tie-down strap rated for at least 3,000 lbs to the ramp and the truck's tow hitch or other secure area, like the truck axle if need be. Do this to "each" ramp section independently. Each ramp section gets tied down with its own strap! If those tiny cables break without these straps you could die as the bike falls and crushes you. You also need to strap together the ramps so they will not separate horizontally. If the center ramp were to fail the straps tied to the other two ramps will support the bike so it and you will not fall down. Also, if you lose your balance or have to stop part way up the ramp you can safely apply much leg force to the ramp(s) to maintain balance without the risk of a ramp section slipping away causing you and the bike to tumble to the ground. To prevent ramp spreading I tie the ramps one at the top to hold the top truck tail gate sections together and one at the bottom near the pavement end to snug together the bottom sections with 3,000 lb tie down straps. With all of these straps in place, I know for a fact I will be safe.

If you have a large motor home (a Class A type) you can buy a loading ramp that will allow you to load the big heavy bike on the back of the motor home. But, the RV must be designed to take this load. Not all motor homes are designed to take on additional towing loads, but many are. Check with the lift manufacture on how to select a motor home that will accommodate their ramp system. Beware the cost of these Class A motor homes are outrageous. The larger motor home can be ordered to store bikes in a special compartment.

Danger: Loading or unloading a motorcycle onto a gravity ramp is dangerous no matter how many safety precautions you take. If the bike falls on you or the ramp breaks the motorcycle and ramp will entangle and crush you, likely unto death. The best system is to use the automatic loaders that will pull the motorcycle into the bed of a pickup truck. Pak-Rak (<http://www.pak-rak.com/>) is one. It will not work for custom bikes with long fork rakes and wide back tires, but for most all production bikes it will work just fine if the wheel base is no more than 67.5" long (but overall length of bike and tire width size needs to be the final consideration if it is to fit on the rack). All Harley Davidson's and Honda's usually will work fine, but check wheelbase first. Pak-Rak may be offering a larger rack system for custom bikes. Automated ramps are expensive, but a lot cheaper than paying a doctor thousands of dollars in medical fees and dealing with a life-long physical disfiguring or back injury. It is better to pay for a good automatic ramp. Ameridick (<http://www.powerdecks.com/index.aspx>) also makes an automatic lift system.

Also, there is another benefit to the automated ramp system that is well worth the price of the ramp many times over. Convenience and ease of operation. It laboring and time consuming to set up ramps to unload and load a motorcycle and many times you will not pull the bike off the truck to cruise around a city or town "because it is too much work to load up the bike." With the automated ramp you push a button and the bike is down and ready to go in about 3 minutes or less! I have found using these automated ramps permit a higher quality of life because now I can ride in areas of the country I would normally never would have. How many times have you traveled and said, "Gee, it would be nice to ride those mountains" but you could not because unloading the bike would be too much trouble. You need to discover the weight load limitations of the auto-loader motorcycle lifts and tire size limitations. Today the bikes are heavier and have wider tires, so modifications need to be made to some auto-loaders to beef them up in strength, even for some heavy stock bikes.

So, there you have it. If you want to load your big bike alone without assistance it can be done, but you need to do your research. More motorcycle dealers should have demonstration ramps so customers can try the product before purchasing.

There are new ramp designs always being made that are not covered here. Search the Internet under "Motorcycle Ramp" as a key word. Some use power to pull the bike into the truck, but there is always a catch to watch out for. Can you close the tailgate or if not can you stow it by the truck bed near the back cab? Can you still tow another vehicle with the automatic loading ramp installed? Will the ramp work with your truck? Is the truck bed size sufficient for the device to be installed into your truck? How large a motorcycle will the ramp accept? What is the ramp's size or other limitations? Can one person operate the ramp or are two persons required? What is the weight limit the ramp can handle? Most may not be able to accept motorcycles with large size tires or extended forks.

If you need a lift to mount your motorcycle behind a motor home, Hydralifts – Motorcycle Lift for RV's (<http://www.hydralift-usa.com/>). Another company that makes an automatic ramp to load motorcycles in a pick-up truck is called the Sport Loader by Blue Ox (<http://www.blueox.us/>).

Another product that allows you to carry a motorcycle on the back of your car, truck or motor home mfg., by Joe Hauler (<http://www.joehauler.com/>). Another site is Bikeloader.com