

Motorcar Teck-Talk with Dick & Ron



In one Internet discussion, someone asked, “**Where do I put everything I need to take on a multi-day trip in one of the smaller cars?**” Another person going on a first trip as a passenger observed, “I did not need to take as much as I thought.” This article examines how much gear you really need, and suggests places to stow it. It is intended to assist the new member in bringing enough but not “the entire ranch.”

Each person will need a set of clothing per day plus coat, raingear, hat and gloves. Additional items may include personal items, alarm clock, a camera/video camera plus batteries/charger. Add a cooler, a 5-gallon can of fuel inside the car, a few quarts of oil, two flags, tools and extra spark plugs in the tool box, and finally the required first aid kit and fire extinguisher. Two-cycle cars need a gallon jug for water. Include also paper towels and cleaner for cleaning windshield, ear protection, safety glasses or goggles, meet info and maps in envelope and possibly a cell phone. Don't forget alternative footwear for dinner. That seems to me to be the minimum.

Now, where to put everything. Hard-sided luggage eldorm fits the space available and doesn't always pack to advantage. A typical M19 cab is 57 inches wide, and the top of the engine cover is 15 inches below the windshield. There is at least 15 inches from the front of the car to any interference with the controls such as the brake. Assuming you have the cooler on the floor ahead of the driver and the gas can on the floor ahead of the passenger, there is room for two rectangular soft-sided bags—each 15 x 15 x 28 inches—end to end across the front of the car. They are supported by the engine cover in the middle and the gas can/cooler at the outer edges. Such a rectangular “Gear Bag” holds about 3.6 cubic feet which—I can verify—holds a LOT of clothing. Avoid having a lot of small bags and boxes. When the bus arrives to take the group to the motel, you will be unpopular if you need three trips back and forth to your car. Everything you have to carry, except the gas can and cooler, needs a shoulder strap. It does not matter if you look like a mule; he others look the same.

I carry a box under one seat that contains a variety of items I might need. These occupy only one-third of a cubic foot of space and include: sun block, Wash and Dry, DEET to prevent bites, insect bite itch reducer, hand lotion, plastic eating utensils, guest ear plugs, electrical tape, wire, tiedowns, small flashlight, digital volt meter, spare buzz coil, toilet paper, rosin bag for belt, clip leads, chain and lock for securing fuel can overnight, and a spare towbar pin and clip.

Coat hooks mounted high up in the front corners of the cab can carry your coat when the weather turns warm, and can provide a place to hang the flags if they have a loop at the end of the handle. I have seen a few cars with a shelf mounted across the front of the car just under the windshield. A six-inch deep, four-inch high shelf provides a perfect place for all of those odds and ends. It is most useful for day trips where you do not have to secure your car or its contents at night.

Some operators suspend a net under the roof near the front. This provides a convenient place for coats and other light items, but tends to sag in the middle. I am planning a more rigid, overhead shelf for the rear of the roof in my M9. It will be only three inches below the roof at the edges and will be supported by the curtain rods and by an attachment to the roof. It is intended for coats, gloves and other light items and will be used only for the infrequent long trip and removed the rest of the time.

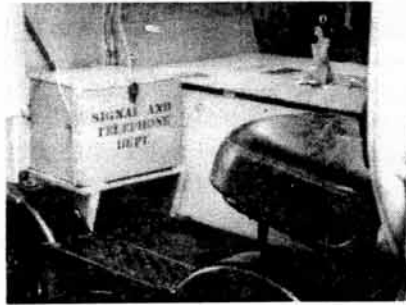
Another spot for soft-sided luggage is between the control panel and the rear piping that supports the roof. A 24-inch equipment bag that is less than 10 inches high and deep will give you a lot of capacity without interfering with access to the brake handle.

Note that there is no need to carry a platform on the rear handles of your car. It does free up more foot-room or allow for a third person, but in my opinion, it is unsafe. Not only does it take weight off the front wheels, possibly contributing to a derailment on uneven track, it may need to be removed for you to use the liftbars, delaying everyone. If you must have a rear platform, keep it only as wide as the car and shallow. Load it with the lightest gear. Remember that a M19 with a full cab and two people is probably at its weight capacity. A third person on a long trip requires a heavier car such as an MT14.

Now about that cooler. Just how much is needed in it anyway? Most of us could benefit from a light lunch now and then. In my experience an 18-quart cooler does fine for two people, getting sandwiches from restaurants after the first day. Pack small rather than “family-size” containers. Plan on replenishing ice each day and using the melted ice water in your cooling system or your water jug. Remember you may have to take that cooler on the bus to the motel, and you may have only one hand to carry it.

Finally there is a way to increase the foot-room in an M9 even with all your stuff aboard. Instead of standing your cooler or gas can directly on the floor, make a shallow platform high enough for your feet to fit under. My gas can sits to the right side of (cont. on p. 10)

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the engine compartment on a platform which creates about six inches more foot-room. The platform is made from two short pieces of treated six-inch deck lumber and a piece of plywood.

It fits exactly between the front fender and the engine housing. The legs slant a little, so that the top surface slopes forward, preventing things from sliding off. My passenger-side platform carries the first aid kit under it, while the drivers-side platform carries a 2.5-pound fire extinguisher underneath. In each case these are fastened to the underside of the top surface and do not detract much from the additional foot-room. Customize your platform for the size of your car and equipment.

