

Rinko: Packing a Bike for Travel

From complete randonneur bike to train-ready package in 12 minutes

The Japanese system of *Rinko* is a system of packing a bike for train or car travel, or for shipping. With a few special parts and some consideration during the design of the frame, a full randonneur bike can be made “*Rinko-ready*” without significantly increasing its weight or cost. This provides an interesting alternative to couplers, which add cost and weight, and may affect frame stiffness, and thus the feel and performance of the bike.

Japan has an excellent rail network that allows travel to almost any place in the country in little time. Unfortunately, the Japanese railways are not very accommodating of bicycles. To travel by train, a bike must meet standard luggage size requirements and be packed in a bag.

After World War II, Keirin racers developed *Rinko* as a technique for traveling to races by train with their partially disassembled bicycles. When cyclotourists started to use trains as jumping-off points for rides all over Japan, they developed more elaborate solutions to pack complete cyclotouring bikes into relatively small bags. There are many different ways to pack a bike for *Rinko*. Some of it depends on the frame size and the bike’s components, as well as the preferences of the builder.

On our recent trip to Japan, we traveled with a group of cyclotourists to Fukushima and rode in the mountains there. At the end of our ride, I was able to witness how Natsuko Hirose packed her C. S. Hirose randonneur bike (no relation between builder and rider) for the train ride back to Tokyo in just 12 minutes, using only two Allen wrenches.

I was amazed that only one small piece of padding was used, yet the bike remained in almost pristine condition, the frame without scratches, the handlebar tape without chain grease, and only a few marks on the rear fender as evidence of the many times this bike has been packed to travel by train. On the following pages, we show this process step by step.

Now I want a *Rinko* bike, too. More so, I admired Natsuko’s grace and speed as she reduced her bike to a small package. —JH



Natsuko’s C. S. Hirose randonneur bike has a few features that make it easy to pack.



Twelve minutes after arriving at the station, the bike is packed in a bag that is easy to carry on the shoulder and fits into the trains’ baggage spaces.



1. Natsuko has removed the handlebar bag and holds the two Allen wrenches she needs to disassemble her bike.



4. She unhooks the straddle cables of the front and rear brakes. Slotted guides make it easy to remove the brake cables.



7. She straddles the bike to remove the handlebars.



2. C. S. Hirose brazed a tube onto the locknut. This allows loosening the headset without a headset wrench.



5. The rear fender is split, so that the rear section can be removed. An insert (not visible) strengthens the joint.



8. The MKS "Ezy Superior" pedals attach like air hose connectors. Pull the outer ring, and the pedal slides out.



3. Natsuko uses her 6 mm Allen wrench to loosen the locknut while the handlebars are still installed.



6. After removing the fender, Natsuko unhooks the rear derailleur cable, so it does not stick out beyond the rear dropouts.



9. Pedals, handlebars and the rear fender are put aside. The insert that C. S. Hirose uses to reinforce the fender joint is now visible.



10. Natsuko removes the rear wheel and hooks the chain onto its hanger, using the Allen wrench. No dirty fingers here!



12. Natsuko unscrews the headset and removes the fork. The headset parts go back onto the fork, so they don't get lost.



15. Straps keep the parts from rattling.



11. She places the bike onto the rear wheel and wraps a piece of padding around the seat tube. No other padding is used, yet the bike remains scratch-free after many train trips. Natsuko explains: "If you pack carefully, there will be few places where the parts touch and can scratch each other."



13. She places the fork, with the front wheel installed, on the frame and wraps the handlebars around the package.



16. Natsuko comments: "An important point: The package stands securely without falling over."



14. The rear fender goes onto the rear wheel. The stays are threaded into the spokes, so they don't scratch the frame.



17. The package goes into the bag: "If you hear any noise, the bike is getting scratched." Now catch the train!