

# From India to Europe overland on a vintage Royal Enfield.

## Intro

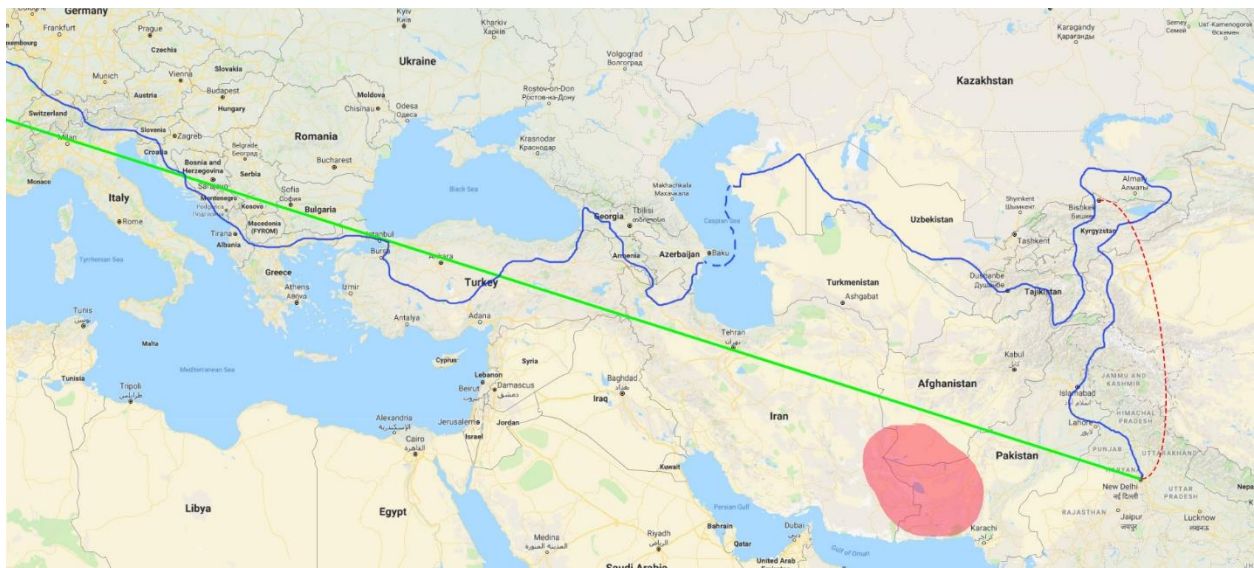
Bringing back a Royal Enfield to Europe is the dream of many travelers that fell in love with the Bullet while wandering across India. There are many ways to own a Bullet in back in your home country, from buying it new to ship a vintage one from India. Riding the Bullet back home is an option as well, certainly not the easiest one, but the journey is well worth it.

In this paper I'll try to summarize what I learned while preparing the trip, as well as the lessons learned while on the road. When we started the tip, none of us had mechanical skills and we did learned how to ride a motorbike. There is no need to be an expert to ride a Royal Enfield but being curious and having the right equipment and documentation at hand will save you the day.

If you're dreaming of embarking on this journey, I hope that this small guide will be of use to help you take the hardest step, the first one.

## The Roads – A quick introduction to Visa and requirements

There are many ways that lead from India to Europe, each having their own advantages and issues. I'll try to dress up a small summary of the three main ones. Crossing Afghanistan is out of the question, the Tribal Areas in Northern Pakistan and the Pashtun areas in Southern Afghanistan are amongst the most dangerous regions of the worlds for unaccompanied and noisy travelers (a Royal Enfield is loud, and you will get noticed miles away).



### 1. The straight road (in green)

Heading West from Lahore toward Baluchistan (the red area), this is the shortest road that requires military escort for the Western part of Pakistan. The escort is free of charge and provided by the government. Baluchistan is a region that covers parts of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan where national laws are less enforced than in the rest of the country. Rebels groups do sometimes (rarely but more often than in the rest of the country) attacks villages and cities. A group of unaccompanied foreigners represents a lot of money

if sold as hostages to Taliban, thus the military escort. Then from the South-East of Iran you can reach the North-West to cross into the Caucasus or Turkey.

Advantages: Not crossing through China and paying a huge fee, it's shorter and faster way.

Disadvantages: Dangerous regions, missing the beauty of Central Asia.

## 2. The scenic road (in blue)

Going Eastward when entering Lahore and following the Karakoram Highway up until Kashgar, China and riding through the beautiful landscapes of Central Asia. China is a hassle to cross, requesting at the time of writing the presence of a guide, which makes the journey more expensive. Once in Kirgizstan there's a few ways to go left, I would recommend riding through the Pamir Highway.

Advantages: Beautiful landscapes, avoiding risky areas.

Disadvantages: Crossing China is expensive and require the presence of a guide.

## 3. The airborne road (in red)

To avoid the hassle of getting a CPD if you do not intend to go through Iran, crossing China or the dangers of Baluchistan, sending the bike by plane to Bishkek or Almaty is an option. The price is "reasonable", meaning around 1.200€ and is similar to what is asked when crossing China. From there the road goes full West.

Advantages: No need of a CPD, shorter trip.

Disadvantage: Missing the beauty of the Karakoram Highway and the gentleness of Pakistani.

For a very detailed explanation on the possible ways of Central Asia and the details for the visas, I highly recommend you the bible of Central Asia, [Caravanistan.com](http://Caravanistan.com).

## The legislation and paperwork

The biggest hassle isn't the mechanical side, but the paperwork.

To matriculate (and for insurance matters) a vehicle in Europe it must comply with emission and safety standards that have been stated in the "**European Certificate of Conformity**" that was passed in 1974. The Royal Enfields bikes does not conform to these specifications thus can't be registered in Europe. Should they be vintage ones or even the newest presently sold in India. European importers won't help you to get the papers because of the price difference of the bikes in Europe and India, segmenting the market accordingly (~2000€ in India for a new Classic 500cc Vs. ~6000€ in Europe).

The good news is that the Certificate does not apply for the bikes produced before it was established, thus making the Royal Enfields from the 60's and early 70's highly sought after by Europeans. At this stage, shipping it to Europe is fairly easy and plenty of garages in India will happily assist you in this matter.

Now, to drive it through Central Asia and exit India by land, **the bike should be in your name**. To register a vehicle in India at your name, you should have a residency permit of at least 6 months. This is to do it the legal way, but if you don't have these requirements, fear not, there's nothing that a bit of "Indian magic" can't fix. Just ask around in the motorbike market area of the town you're in for someone to fix it for you.

Now that the bike is yours, a "**Carnet de Passage en Douane**" (CPD) is required to cross Pakistan and Iran. India will not issue a CPD to a non-Indian. What you should do is to get a former refusal from a "Indian

Automobile Association” affiliate to the FIA. With this former refusal, inquiry to the Automobile Association of your own country if they can provide you with the CPD. If it doesn’t work, ask other European Automobile Association till one of them will provide you with the CPD (in exchange of fees of around 250€ and a deposit of 3500€ that you’ll get back once the bike is arrived in Europe).

An **international driving permit** is also required, even if no-one asked us our driving permit during the journey.

Insurance is required in some countries, such as India, Kazakhstan, the Balkans... Usually it can be bought locally right after or before the borders. Few countries really enforce it, but once crossing West from Turkey it is mandatory. I would recommend arranging for a **temporary European Green card** that will be much cheaper than buying insurance for your bike at each border.

### [The bikes – A good start and maintenance advices](#)

Buying a bike in India is a lottery, especially vintage Royal Enfield. The chassis and the engine usually come from different bikes to form a working “Frankenstein’s creature” of a bike. This is why it is important to trust your mechanics to be sure that he uses reliable parts to build up your bike.

Most mechanics will offer you an “à la carte” bike, with parts from different eras that they will assemble together to form a working, matching numbers, motorbike. This is another part of the “Indian Magic”.

Basically, the choice involves: 4 or 5 gearbox, gear on the left or the right, 350cc or 500cc, original or rebored 500cc, drum brakes or disk brakes, the volume of the tank.

The choice is yours, but if I recommend a large tank size (18L), disk brakes in the front and drums in the rear, avoid rebored engines at all costs. For the rest choose as you please.

We noticed that the parts available in India are of a lower quality than in Europe. Much lower quality. If we had to do it again, we would bring some European parts to start with, avoiding a few issues that we encountered. Here are the parts that I would recommend changing immediately:

### [The Pushrods](#)

The “**clutch hub nut**” as seen on the picture here: Those are nuts using an imperial standard while most of the spare parts available in the world are of metric standard. Mine broke during the trip because of it’s low quality and I had to sold it to the case. It doesn’t move anymore, but it’s better to avoid this altogether.

Basically, all the standard **nuts, bolts and washers** available in India are of low quality and will wear off quickly during the journey. You will have to constantly screw them back or will lose them along the way. A solution we found along the way was to buy **Nyloc Nuts** to prevent them to unscrew. Buy a bottle of **Loctite** is also a nice idea for an easier ride.

For maintenance, three well written books will help you in time of despair. They are available on internet and I highly recommend printing them out as you never know when you will have an issue with your bike.

### [The Bullet Workshop Manual](#)

### [The Bullet Service Guide](#)

### [The Bullet Service Manual by Pete Snidal](#)

Those guides are well made, cover extensively most of the failures that your bike might have on the road

and how to repair them. Hitchcocks is a well-known RE specialist that provides custom made parts and a page with great advices: <http://www.hitchcocksmotorcycles.com/technical-notes>

We did not use Hitchcock's parts, so I do not personally know about their quality, but the consensus is that they are more reliable than Indian ones.

There is a lot of literature on how to service a Royal Enfield. During our 17.000kms trip, we did experience many mechanical breakdowns that could have been avoided if we would have checked our bikes more often or if we would have paid more attention before leaving Delhi.

What is very important is to **check regularly the engine oil level**. At least every 500kms, each morning before starting the bike, as a ritual, would be ideal. Even if no oil is leaking from your engine it disappears through the breathing pipe and is being burned in the combustion chamber. **Change the motor oil at least every 4.000kms**. It's cheap and easy in the "-stans" countries.

Learn how to **tune your tappets**. You will have to regularly check them as soon as you hear their typical sound.

Learn how to **change every cable** on your motorbike, if the break and clutch cable are fairly easy to change, the compression cable might be trickier, and the throttle cable is hard to tune correctly, remember that you can tune its length on the lever but as well on the carburetor.

Speaking of the carburetor, learn how to clean it, change it, and tune it correctly.

The **rear chain** is very important and must be **cleaned often**. After a ride of a few days in sandy environment, or every 2.000kms I would recommend [you clean the chain with a toothbrush and diesel](#) or specially made product. Having a can of special grease for the chain will also help extend its lifespan.

Learn how to **change a tire** and **replace correctly the rear wheel**.

Check the **tire pressure** every few days, and never hesitate to top it up if needed, this will extend your tires life and prevent you from taking another one. Plus, your bike will be much more stable and the braking power is better as well.

This is the strict minimum for a smoother ride. The more you know and the more you experience by yourself while in India before the trip, with spare parts available in case of your break something, the best it is!

Repairing and learning mechanics in an Indian workshop is easy, the mechanics will always correct you and will have all the needed parts available nearby. This will not be the case as soon as you leave India. You will not find spare parts on the way and the local mechanics will have a very limited knowledge of what is happening inside your engine even if they claim the opposite. In the rest of Central Asia, only small Japanese engines are sold. Thus, if you are stuck in some remote areas and the mechanics has crazy ideas of how to repair your bike, trust your feelings and don't allow him to break the bike.

### [Spare parts – What to bring?](#)

Spare parts are very important since they're not available outside of India. Weight is the enemy, so you should balance carefully your luggage.

Here is a small explanation about parts that we used along the way, the link leads to Hitchcock website because it was the easiest way to show what I am talking about and give an approximative price. Remember than in India the prices are a tenth of what Hitchcock's is asking, but the quality is way lower.

[Pushrods](#) You will be adjusting them often, very often. If the adjusters give out while riding, the pushrods might end up bend and it's better to have a spare pair. They don't have the same lengths thus at least a pair is important.

[Pushrods Adjusters](#) They will break before the pushrods, it's small and super useful, have a few of them. They are identical. Since they are cheap at Hitchcocks, buying from them might be a clever idea.

[Oil Pump worm and Spindle](#) If this part breaks down, you better need the help of a proper mechanics to help you replace it but without a spare one, even the best mechanics won't be able to help you. You better have one with u.

[Piston Rings](#) Very light and easy to pack, the piston rings won't break if you don't open the cylinder, but they will brake if u attempt to open the cylinder but yourself. They are once again very specific to the Royal Enfield and you won't be able to find spare ones on the road. Pack at least two pairs, just in case.

[Primary chain](#) After a few thousand kilometers the chain might come loose and changing it will be suited. It's a small one and not very heavy, and you can change it anyway in the middle of the trip if you think that it is too heavy, disposing of the previous one.

[Rear Chain](#) Same as the primary one, but you will have to change it after max 10.000 km. It is a heavy spare, but you will feel much lighter once you change it and you dispose of the old one that will be totally worn out.

[Enough Gasket](#) Opening and closing the engine will become routine work, especially if you have a few issues that you can't really solve. Gasket is very light yet very useful, you better have too much of it than too less. If you don't have gaskets anymore, they are able to custom draw them in Iran for you.

[Tappet Cover](#) It might sound stupid, but too much pressure on a tappet cover and it will bend, allowing the oil out of the engine. You better have a spare out in case you have an accident with yours.

[Breather pipe](#) Allowing the oil and air to get out of your engine but not in, it is an overlooked element but still very important. Hard to replace if lost or broken, having a spare one might save your day and it is a light addition to your lot. Just by a spare one in India.

[Kickstarter spring](#) These things break and are pretty helpful. If you feel that your spring get out of place too often, just change it and the issue will disappear. You should have a few as spare (3?)

[Spare Cables](#) : Clutch, brake, decompressor, speedometer and throttle cables break at any moment, for no reasons. Have a least two spares for each cable and if you fear you're running out of team, you can always "repair" them in Iran.

[Carburetor](#) I still didn't understand how it really works, but I know that it can cause many problems if it doesn't work properly anymore. Cleaning it and trying to repair it might help, but having a full spare one will alleviate many of your problem while your try to repair the one that doesn't work.

[Air filter connection rubber & intake manifold hose](#) These things break, not much, but still. Having two of each is maybe a good ratio. If the bike doesn't work anymore and everything looks normal, always check

thoroughly these rubber that might be broken. If you ride a lot, checking them every week for a leak might be a clever idea to prevent further damages to the bike.

[Air filters](#) and oil filters are important. Bring four at least and change them every 4000kms, with the oil, to avoid further issues with the bike.

[Inner tubes](#) Very handy, bring two in case of problems in remote areas. They are easily repaired in villages along the way. Thus, always keep the broken ones with u to use them again.

[Brake and clutch levers](#) Very fragile yet very important. They might break during the trip, making it worthy to have at least one spare for each.

[Mirrors and mirrors support](#) Mirrors will take a hard toll on the journey and might turn loose after a few thousands km. Having a spare base for it is helpful when it's impossible to screw it back.

[Lights bulbs](#) These things break a lot, have at least two or three spares for each bulb. You don't need much more than that. No need of spare indicator or whatsoever, these things are sturdy and can be repaired if needed along the way.

Many fuses are also important. They do usually brake for a reason worth to be investigated but don't forget to bring many spares.

Extra nuts and bolts is always a good idea, as well as foil tape and Colson rings are your best friends to repair the many small issues that arise on the way. Don't forget the Loctite and Nyloc nuts in assorted sizes.

### **To bring it or not to bring it?**

There were some pieces that we used that weren't necessary. I would like to share my experience on 20.000 km riding with an Enfield. You might hear story of others that think that those spares are absolutely necessary, but in my experience, I think otherwise. Ask around you about the use of those pieces.

[Rear wheel sprocket](#) It is a very heavy piece that we didn't had to change in over 20.000kms ridden. We were convinced into bringing one for each bike, but it ended up being just dead weight. I wouldn't recommend bringing one with you if you ride for less than 20.000kms and you manage to have a new one before the departure. Changing your rear chain and cleaning it regularly will help you maintain this piece in working order. If you have enough space, bring one and change it with the chain after 10.000kms. You will feel much lighter after both the changes.

[Rocker Oil feed pipes](#) The top part of the engine, there is very few reasons for it to break, and it can be repaired on the way if there is a leak. It's still easy to pack and might come handy.

[Rocker set](#) It might be suitable to replace it during the trip, we did but it was due to bigger damage on other parts of the engine. Not the most important but might come handy.

[Valve Stem Caps](#) It's a very small piece, if the engine is not correctly tuned they might worn out faster than usual. It's a very small piece, easy to carry. It might be worth it to bring an extra set.

[Cylinder head](#) Someone recommend us to take a cylinder head, but that was maybe one of the craziest idea we heard. It is damn heavy.

[Brake shoe](#) As replacement for the drum brake. Ours never worn out, so maybe it's not a very useful piece if you believe that yours won't break either.

[A front disk brake](#) We had one for three, none of us had used it. A heavy stone curving it would have been the end of the trip but that didn't happen. Thus, think twice about bringing a spare one because it is a heavy piece.

Tires After 21000kms with the same tires, it's about time to replace them but you won't need spare during the trip. It is heavy and if you check the tire pressure often, they won't suffer that much during the trip. Make sure to have high quality tires (for Indian standards, anyhow) because the usual shitty tires provided will not help you in the different terrain you'll encounter.

### [What about the trip itself?](#)

There is no need to worry about gas station or getting food if u have an autonomy of >350km. There are people living along the Silk Road and many travelers use the road. We did not hear of anyone dying of starvation or thirst. People on the road are incredibly kind and welcoming. For sleeping arrangement, you can either use a tent or sleep in guesthouses along the way. Having a tent is recommended in case of emergency. We had no issue security wise. There are a ton of forum or blog about this aspect of the trip, so I'll leave you the pleasure of researching all of this for yourself.

### [Conclusion](#)

When I dreamed of crossing Central Asia on a Royal Enfield, I had no experience riding a bike or servicing it, yet, 20.000km later my Bullet is sleeping in the garage, at my home in Belgium. Scattered by the journey but each of the scars makes it even more unique. Such a journey is easier to accomplish than it looks, the hardest step is to decide to do it.

I prepared a lot for the trip by reading many different articles, blogs, advices on adventure and nothing did really prepare me to what we experienced while out there. We had to rely on ourselves and the help of the locals to through the trip. In the challenging times we always found the help needed to go through!

I can only recommend you to undertake such a trip, live your own adventure, build your memories.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to send me an email, or if you have remarks, want to add up to those advices, please contact me as well!