

Bikes and Bike armies

1.1 Guide for the competitive player

The text you're about to read is for a competitive type of game and takes into account the following:

- You want to field armies with mostly bikes, attack bikes and land speeders
- You are using codex SM or DA
- The army will not be perhaps "very fluffy", but fluffy enough
- Have enough cash to buy all this.

1.2 Bikes as models

Bikes as fast assault units will crush the enemy and bring them death in the name of The Emperor!!!
None shall escape our wrath!

Ok, now that I've gotten that off my shoulders, realism. The hard cold truth is the fact that apart from specific situations a bike is not much better than a tactical marine. Tacticals are very good models (and I love them), but if you're not using skill - a bike is just an expensive tactical marine.

Here's my reasoning:

Tactical marine: T4, Bs 4, bolter, 4+ cover (when in cover)

Bike: T5, twin linked bolter, 4+ jink

This is the core of the problem. I know what you're thinking – "Hey, hold on there! Bikes get a 12" move, ignore terrain (for the purpose of speed), are relentless, have Hit and Run and Hammer of Wrath!"

True, and thank you, imaginary voice. They do indeed get all of those things. The problems start to arise when you have to make all those points you've invested pay off. Even though you're not using all those advantages all the time (and in fact some of them maybe once per game) you're still paying for them.

When I hinted something about skill earlier this is what I meant.

How exactly do we make these expensive models worth it, we will discover later- but let's make one thing clear:

1.3 Speed is my Armour

Repeat after me: speed is my armour, speed is my armour, speed is my armour. Good!

One key thing to remember here is that for any bike unit - if you're not moving, you're dying! People forget that bikes are not infantry - but keep using them as they do infantry!

Infantry makes up for their lack of speed with numbers. Bikes have speed. Infantry have volume of fire... bikes have speed!

Every turn you should be doing one of these:

A- get into a good position and keep out of LOS

B- move, shoot, assault

C- shoot an isolated target using superior numbers

A. Moving and turbo boosting is traditional for the first turn. However, this should be used on any turn when you haven't got a good target for your squad. A squad of a couple of bikes with 2 meltas turbo boosting behind a building to get closer to a tank instead of assaulting nearby infantry is not doing nothing - they are getting into position to do their task!

A large unit of bikes reduced to only 2 members should hide away and deny their KP to the enemy or in non KP missions, contest an objective late game.

Waiting: Move into a position mid board and wait with a small unit of bikes . What are they waiting for? They could be waiting for the enemy to advance, for a reserved tank to arrive, scouts that are outflanking etc. Or for the rest of the force to clear a path. They are not doing nothing, they are waiting for their moment.

B. Move, shoot, assault. Every large unit of bikes (and large here is anything more than 4 models) should do this every turn after the first one. They should kill unit by unit by ganging up on them. Don't charge with one unit - use 2.

Example squad using SM codex :

5 bikes, 2 flamers, sarge with melta bombs and a combi-flamer

What do we have here? A basic unit of bikes that can fire 5 twin bolters or 3 flamers, one grenade (thrown) and one bolter. Then they charge. Now as said, one unit is ok. Two, however, are the real thing.

Two bike squads loaded up with flamers hitting the same target. Not a lot of things can survive such an assault. In all fairness - they are a bargain for what they do. Any squad taking 6 flamer templates in the face is bound to be destroyed in the upcoming assault - if it's not a MC.

How not to get blown away by supporting units:

In the above example the 2 squads kill of every single opposing model in that one unit and are left open to be shot at by the rest of the army in *their* turn. This can be prevented by "controlled assault".

Conga line!!!

That's right, the idea is to get as few models into combat as possible. Put 2 flamers up front - parallel. Sarge 2" behind, then the next guy 2" behind etc. After flaming the target unit with 2-3 flamers, only 2 of your models will make it into the combat. After piling in you should get only 6-7 attacks and hopefully kill only a few models. The combat should be a draw or a slight win for you - and with a bit of luck you will stay in combat during the opponent's turn. After that, before your turn - Hit and run... rinse and repeat!

Pick a new target, and leave this one for a smaller squad.

Hitting both tanks and infantry at the same time: By mixing up the squad upgrades (or indeed, NOT mixing them) you can have your bikes take on 2 units or a tank and a unit. How?

A unit and a tank are next to each other. You move your bikes so that the unit is between the bikes and the tank. Declare that the bikes are shooting the tank and put down flamer templates over the tank (or aiming at it). You do have to cover as much of the tank as you can - but it's perfectly legal to cover as much of the unit in front.

Flamers to clear the way. The nearest models to the firing flamers should be the ones blocking the charge path for the sarge to charge the tank. The very reason why I included melta bombs is situations like this.

Best case scenario: The flamers decimate the squad, you do a multi charge and the sarge destroys the tank and the squad gets locked in combat in the opponent's turn. Careful not to get your sarge challenged out... take care not to have him engaged when the charges are made. That way he cannot get challenged.

Rinse and repeat...

C. Shooting an isolated target. This situation arises every now and then, though not very often. You will see it straight off the bat when it happens. A squad that shouldn't be charged – genestealers or a slower moving MC that will rip and shred in cc. Keep away and fire with 2 units. Bear in mind, the 2 unit combo above is not a good setup for this (plasma, melta or better yet grav guns are better) but in a pinch - better than nothing. You could also pick option "A" - turbo away towards a better target.

2.1 Picking your fights

Before the game even starts you should have a clear picture of the field and a plan on how each of our units will be deployed and what unit(s) you will engage. It's like a big jigsaw puzzle.

You have the speed advantage - it's up to you to capitalize on it! Rushing head on like a maniac... is fun but will get you killed. Speed is not used to get into the fight ASAP. It should be used to gang up on people. Bike squad with 2 grav guns not enough to kill the enemy unit? How about we drive 2 squads in?

2.2 Deployment

Deploying your units is key. One rule we haven't mentioned until now is your scout move. Deploying your units is used to lure the enemy into a trap. Key thing here is what to scout move and what to hide.

As a rule of thumb, we scout move small squads with meltas to destroy tanks. Experienced players will spot you deploying melta bikes up front - and keep their armor back. But, truth be told, he *wanted* them forward... and now you bluffed him out of it. What I meant here is - those bikes don't *have* to scout move.

Going first is an advantage at first sight. On second thought, this might not always be the case.

Let's take a look at things you can do while going first:

- scout move the whole army and do a huge sucker punch
- refuse a flank
- bait and switch

There are other advantages to going first, they can be used and are not specific to bikes in particular.

Going second:

- makes the enemy waste short ranged firepower as your guys are out of range
- leaves YOU the last turn to claim or contest objectives
- gives a chance to react to the enemy's actions
- maximises your firepower as you can have the enemy in range should he move forward

Either way, your setup must always assume you will be going either first or second (duh) and count on neither. If you go first, fine, if you go second - also fine.

What do I choose if I have the chance?

On a rule of thumb, you go first against a shooty army (Tau, Eldar, IG) and second against a CC army (Tyranids, Orks etc.) but there are exceptions.

3.0 Synergy on a large scale

A themed biker army should have primarily only models that move very, very fast. The reason for this is that slower units, in order to be supported require the bikes to slow down, or double back. This negates the whole "speed is my armor" concept and makes the army weaker than the sum of its parts.

Making a good bike list depends first and foremost on the "local" meta. If you're facing a lot of Tau - don't take expensive units. Those die just as easy as cheap ones. If you're facing a lot of fliers take some fliers of your own. Don't take AA units - these are too slow. Your whole army list should work as a big synergistic machine that sweeps the table clean while on the move.

3.1 The list

Hq - Khan / Sammael / Company master on a bike

Take 3-5 units of bikes with AB - depending on the total size of the army

Take some Attack bikes in single/dual bike squadrons (more is overkill)

Take some land speeders (CML + MM/HB)

Take a flier or 2

Bear in mind that this tactic is for both DA and SM codex - that's why the units have no specific setup. We'll cover this in a minute - but before we do one thing has to be said here.

3.2 Squad setup

This is a tourney list, right? That implies that all squads have to follow the standard doctrine of SM chapters (with variation). I'm not talking about rulesets here, I'm talking about the basic SM concept of play:

Be flexible, be tactically aware, keep it simple and effective.

3.3 Flexibility

8 bikes, 2 grav guns, sarge with Melta bombs + combi flamer and an AB with MM.

Not going to go into prices here but let me get this across - this unit on the surface looks like a beefed up AT unit- and it sort of is. But then again, maybe it isn't?

Let's see what it really does:

- One can have this unit in full strength and go from target to target.
- It can split 5 normal bikes + sarge and go after infantry, the other 3 bikes with 2 grav guns and MM AB can go tank hunting.
- 5 normal bikes combat squadded go and assault isolated infantry units (paired up with another such squad or joined by Khan... or both!) - while sarge, 2 grav gun bikes and MM AB go after tanks.
- Sarge and MM AB +2 normal bikers go after tanks while grav guns go after heavy infantry or MCs.

Creating such squads is essential. Don't make a unit with clearly one single purpose. Do flexible, adaptable squads that can, when supported, do their task.

The squad in this example costs around 270 pts....That's a lot of pts for a unit that would only do one thing! That's why it needs to stay flexible. You have to take a couple of big squads to avoid losing Tiebreakers on KP (which are standard in a lot of places).

Characters and joining squads:

Whatever character(s) you have, there is a rule. Always be prepared to join them to different squads in different situations. By that I mean, from squad to squad, game to game... and turn to turn.

A squad needs to have a combat squadded part that is optimised for the character to join them. Joining an IC to a MM AB with 3 normal bikers is not a good idea if they are going to kill tanks.

A simple and effective rule is: flamer/grav/plasma yes, melta no.

Melta is an AT weapon. After you fire the thing at a vehicle it will probably blow up. If it does - you're stuck in the open. If it doesn't, you charge and maybe destroy it - and are still in the open.

That's not the place to be... later on that.

3.4 Tactically aware

Do the math before you hit the table. Will 2 meltas be enough to pop that tank? How many bikers do I need to break that unit in assault?

These are just examples. Such situations will arise on a daily basis. Especially important in a biker list (a list with maybe 30 models in it) is the foreknowledge on these numbers. Mistakes will be very costly.

3.5 Simple and effective

Keep it simple. Don't add secondary characters. Don't do it - they are not worth it. Not by a long shot. A chapter master with The Sacred Relic Sword of Daemonike Destructive Overkillily Awesomness might seem like a good idea but it simply isn't.

Why? Well, you can just take more bikes or a flier...

How much would that character be able to kill anyway? At the end of the day, he has maybe 5-6 attacks and has a weapon that has AP 2 with various S.

Let's say he meets another Hq. He will hit maybe 3 times, 2 out of those will wound and one will not get saved. 1 wound per combat phase (and he has to get there alive!) just isn't worth the pts.

If you really wan't to get technical, that equals a couple of grav gun hits. I know, they have to get there too - but they can deliver from 30" away.

Killy secondary characters (after you have taken the Initial HQ that unlocks Bikes as troops) are a bad idea. 3 Bikes/2 grav guns and a sarge with combi grav gun are around a 100 pts.

How many wounds will they do? Depends, but one thing for sure, they ARE rolling more dice.

4.0 Hit and Run

A special mention to this rule.

This rule is crucial to your success. Learn it and examine it. Every round you spend in combat is a round you're not shooting your guns .

Several tricks to use:

- HnR in your opponent's turn to be free to shoot them in your turn
- HnR in YOUR turn if you're fighting on difficult ground and the terrain will let you move far enough not to get charged by your opponent, and the squad you have assaulted is a very powerful one
- HnR to "bounce" forward after you charged a squad midfield and want to keep moving forward

One thing to remember is that you fall back 3d6 and still get to move 12" in your turn, so being scared that you'll run too far is not realistic.

4.1 Refused flank

What is it?

In short it is a very old 40k trick that can be done with any smaller, faster force when facing a large lumbering foe. It is posted up with pics in the 3rd ed sm codex, near the end of it.

What does it do?

RF does 2 things. First it throws the enemy deployment off balance and makes several shorter ranged units useless for a turn or two. Secondly, it has the ability to separate the enemy force into 2 smaller sections so each can be death with by your WHOLE army.

What kind of force can use it?

It can be any army, as long as it has faster units than the majority of the opponent's force and those units have to match each other's speed. The very reason why this article suggests the whole bike army needs to move fast.

Why do it?

Imagine 2 armies lined up across the board with 30+ inches between them. A gunline of the enemy, and your bike army across the table. What will happen if the bikes drive straight ahead? Most likely, a large part of the force wouldn't get there at all. They would be cut down by enemy small arms fire.

4.2 Reasoning and simple math

RF aims to avoid that scenario. Picture this:

The enemy army is divided into sections, surely. Some models carry heavy weapons (lascannons, missile launchers etc.). Some have multi shot weapons which are far more dangerous for your bikes.

A brilliant example here is a lascannon firing against moving bikes. 3 to hit, 2 to wound, 4 + cover

Or a heavy bolter firing: 3 to hit (with 3 shots), 4 to wound, 3+ armour save

One can clearly see that the lascannon will mathematically fail either to hit or wound. There's a 33% chance of missing, so 66% chance of a hit. Then 84% of those hits will be result in a wound. Combine that and we are at 55% to wound.

Heavy bolter, on the other hand will hit 2 times and wound once.

What is the point here? The point is - a lascannon no matter what you roll can only ever kill one bike. Sure, it will deny the armor save, but still it's only one bike.

A heavy bolter, on the other hand *might* kill 3. The chances are indeed small - but as soon as you have to roll saves, you ARE going to fail some of them.

Now we will see what this leads to and how not to get killed.

4.3 Divide and Conquer

Dividing that huge gunline is the key to Victory. Your army has only 30 or so models and that means that the enemy must cause 90 wounds to make you statistically fail enough saves to lose every single one of those bikers.

WE NEED TO CUT DOWN THAT FIREPOWER.

Divide the enemy army into 2 sections using an imaginary line across roughly the middle of his deployment zone. Do not look at pts values, just look at his guns. You must decide which section is less

dangerous on the approach.

It is surely the one with more single shot heavy weapons.

Driving up to 3 predator tanks packing lascannons and Auto cannons will surely lose you less bikes than driving up to 3 tactical marines. *(Yeah, for sure -edit)*

You have to pick one side as your side of approach. Once you decide which side of the enemy army has more heavy weapons than multi shot guns - that will be your column of approach.

4.4 The Approach

So the game started (let's say you go first) and your army is deployed mostly centrally. A unit or 2 on each side but stick to the central part of the field. Use the scout move to redeploy (key word here) your units that are on the opposite side of the approach side.

B - bike unit

AS - the side of approach

So this:

AS

B B B B B B

Becomes this:

AS

BBBBBB

What we did here is redeploy the the right, as that is where the most enemy heavy weapons are. Multi shot weapons are mostly on the left.

This can be of course the other way around, if the situation so dictates.

Inverting the refused flank should be a standard practise. In fact, you should deploy in a way to be able to swing both right or left if you are playing second.

Some simple math here:

12" scout redeploy + 12" move + possible turbo boost

Any bike can, after scouting and moving be 24" (or more) from its starting position. You can really easily outpace people with this method.

5.0 Into the fire

As said, pick a side of the enemy battle line and send your whole army there. Avoid units that have a rapid fire weapon. Those things might seem harmless, but their damage output is doubled in short range.

Your first move should be:

1. Drive into the fire of those heavy weapons
2. Use turbo with some units if needed to be in charge range next turn (that's 16-19" from the enemy for bikes)
3. Use AB and speeders to hit fast units of the enemy (later on that)

4. Concentrate firepower on the single most dangerous thing in front of your bikes
5. Spread out your bikes within units to minimize the number of models a template can hit
6. Use LOS blocking terrain to your advantage if you can

One more tip on list building here. Use minimal upgrades and take max number of models you can. I don't mean models in units, I mean models overall. A command squad on bikes with all the bells and whistles can go up to 250-300 pts. and they die just like normal bikes when hit by a battle cannon. Even worse, they are not any better than normal bikes at destroying those same big guns.

Command squad of five is not better at taking down ANY targets (ok, most targets) than 2 units of 5 bikes with grav guns are.

5.1 Concentrating firepower

The basic principle of playing space marines can be found in the 3rd ed codex in those little fluffy boxes like: "*With the bolter, we shall kill the mutant*".

I am serious here.

That example is wrong, but there are others like:

"Concentrate your firepower on a single target until it's destroyed and then move onto the next target"

Funny enough, that's true. A wounded Riptide will rip your face off just like a healthy one. You are better off at killing 2 units dead and then simply picking off squad members from 5 different squads.

The only exception to this rule are vehicles that are not transports and you manage to stun them. As soon as they are using snap shots - move on to the next target.

5.2 Cut their mobility

I do mean that. Land speeders are not good for their armor, but their ML can be used for this. They are excellent at that kind of thing. Destroy the enemy mobile units ASAP. Transports carrying rapid firing guys, or assault troops.

Next job would be killing the enemy fast moving multi shot models. This includes any models like Eldar War Walkers.

If they are reserved, keep the LS far and back and wait for them. Those units can destroy your army. Destroy them after they appear.

5.3 Like water through fingers

Have you ever tried drinking from your palm? It's easy enough, but keeping the water there sure isn't. That's how your opponent should feel - all the time.

The vast majority of your army should be in assault in every opponent turn after the first one. They get to move/shoot in our turn with... Hit and run!

Denying him his shooting phase is key. What's the use of 40 shooting models (in a gunline) if they have no target available? You *control* the flow of the game from turn one.

Do not look at cc as a part of the game where you destroy our enemy, look at it as a part of the game where he can't shoot at you.

5.4 Hammer of Wrath

What is a typical bike's damage output like in cc? Not that good. Ws4, single attack. How about charging? First off we move, then shoot with either a twin bolter or a special weapon. Then the charge, with possible HoW (with S5 if playing White Scars), and at least 2 attacks.

That is... 4 or 5 times more damage. Bikes should charge every round.

6.0 The Grand Plan

"Sure, that all sounds great - but you know the same plan cannot work ever time, don't you?"

Thank you, again, imaginary sceptical voice...

In a game against a really large army that has reserves, deepstrikers, outflankers etc - we need a backup plan. Before we even start with this - let's look at a typical 40k game with any army. How does one win at 40k? In 5 out of 6 standard scenarios, and a lot of special ones - it's rather simple.

1. Kill the whole enemy army
2. Get troops on objectives
3. Kill the enemy main HQ
4. Get a unit into his deployment zone
5. Kill a unit before he does

To win, you need to avoid number 1 happening to you and try doing more of the rest than the enemy. If you just do 1 and 4 and deny the opponent everything - you will win.

That, as a concept is the true meaning of 40k. That is the "what to do" and this article (and 99% of them) is "how to do it".

In a single scenario, the only point of the game is to gather more KP than the enemy. Then the plan is even more simple:

1. Kill the whole enemy army
2. Kill more units than he/she does

Sure, this list would need to have numbers 3, 4 and 5 but that hardly needs to be explained at this point. Secondary objectives are done by default at that point.

The Grand Plan is in effect what every tactician will tell you. Pick a plan and stick with it. If your strategic idea was to get into the opponent's face - do it even if you do lose some models on your way in.

The whole deal of "Play your game and not his" is a generalistic statement that holds some truth in it. Somehow, it's often hard to get that point across - so I'll give it a shot.

Playing your game in this case means using each and every edge you can to beat the enemy. Bikes are expensive models, but they do have a lot of special rules that might help us achieve our goals.

Using every single rule is what needs to be done. If your bikes are going to get killed in a prolonged close combat - use Hit and Run. If you need to be near the enemy to use flamers, use the bikes' speed to your advantage. If you need to target the enemy tanks' rear AV to kill them (like Eldar Wave Serpents) - outflank some attack bikes or bikes with melta.

You have the solution for almost every possible situation in the horrible darkness of the far future. Except one.

6.1 Objectives and why bikes are hard to play

A lot of tabletop-related internet material is pure theory. The reason for this is that while we do play the same game across the globe - we all do it in different ways. In my town, there are 2 clubs you can play in.

One is a friendly club with a lot of new players and people that like to play WHFB and paint nice miniatures. These guys usually don't care to try to win at all costs, they just want to have fun. You will never see a BA list with 5 Land raiders in it at that club.

On the other hand, a couple of blocks away there's a smaller club with mostly veteran 40k gamers that like to bust each others' chops and play a fairly competitive game. There, all bets are off. 90% of the guys there have won at least 2-3 tournaments and all the tournaments are won by somebody from that small club.

The point of this is: No matter what you do, your list will always have a hard counter in a local tourney you attend. I will write more on that later- for there are a couple of things you can do to avoid being steamrolled and collect some tourney pts regardless of the fact that the chance of winning is slim.

There are a couple of things worth mentioning while playing with objectives:

1. They are held at the end of the last turn which is a problem if you play with random game length. Bikes are good at taking most of them, but not very good at protecting them - as the opponent will try to shoot them
2. If you go first, then he goes last (not a good thing as he gets to hit those bikes in the last turn). The other way around is perhaps better, though if he's playing Tau you might be in for a world of hurt if you're not careful with your deployment
3. Objectives at the top of a high building is a classic way of screwing bike armies over. Check with the TO if that is legal. I personally don't see anything immoral in it - it's a part of the game.

This leaves you with either having some units to claim those, or simply killing the enemy's units holding the objectives.

6.1 The hard counters

Hard counters for bike lists are simply put, units that hit you from afar and deny your armor and cover save. Often seen in Tau and Eldar lists. At this point, we have close to no idea what the future holds and how the IG and ORKS are going to look like so we will stick to what's current. (*not much to worry there, lol -edit*)

Both of these armies, Tau and Eldar crumble in CC and against close range grav gun firepower. Getting there fast is more important than getting there safe, as there is no "safe" against those.

IMHO, things like that (some Tau and Eldar units) simply break the game at this point in time since they are both fast, resilient, cheapish, shoot well and can be SPAMMED.

Countering those with White scar bikes includes rushing forward and simply charging them! It is somewhat harder if you go second - but hey, that's life.

Before you even play against a person like that (for playing Eldar used to be a thing of skill once upon a time) ask yourself the following question:

Can my army, if I don't make mistakes, kill his army?

Doing some math before you hit the table will help you decide, and this should be done long before you even get to a tourney. If you are not sure, here's what you do.

Examine closely at your opponent's setup. Look for units that *can be* killed easily... These will probably not be numerous if you're facing a good players. Next, look at the scenario you're playing.

7.0 Fliers

In bike lists there are some things only fliers can do. Game designers forced us all to buy some fliers and many armies simply cannot cope with them. Those models are severely underpriced for having such a strong game mechanism as being only hit on 6s without Skyfire.

An example of this is the Storm Talon. You can compare it to a land speeder Typhoon. ST has better AV, is immune to melta, is faster and has much better firepower than a Typhoon. The price should reflect it, and it does - but not proportionally, not by a long shot. You can get 2 speeders for one talon - but it will surely both outshoot those (as it can get places they cannot) and certainly outlast them.

Bear in mind here that ST is considered to be one of the "more balanced" fliers out there. By that, "they" (whoever the hell that means) probably mean in comparison to say a Heldrake or Cronsant or Vendetta/Valkyre/Vulture. Your call .

Enough of that rant....so why do we "need" fliers?

DA players will find this next part a bit boring, unfair or untrue. Their fliers are simply put, too expensive for what they do. I'm sorry to say this, but GW has done it again. It has released a DA codex early into the edition and given DA sub par models as far as fliers are concerned. All they do is what the rest of the codex already does better - kill lots of infantry. Perhaps the meta will shift and they get a FAQ that makes them somewhat better at what they should be doing (killing tanks, FMCs, fliers), we can only hope. *(luckily it's not so bad anymore -edit)*

7.1 Storm Talon in a bike list

It does a couple of things no bike unit or speeder can do. First off, the speed. Don't get me wrong, bikes are fast. This thing is even faster. It should be used as a "double tap" or "armor buster".

But first off, let's see which weapons to use.

7.2 Storm talon weapons

ST can be fitted with several weapons and it can fire them all at once. This is good, and the first choice is the Assault cannon OR Lascannon... This question is a fair one. I will compare them up to a point where we will see why there can only ever be one "correct" choice.

Let us consider what AC is best at, as a weapon in comparison to the Lascannon. For the purpose of this argument, we will assume both weapons are mounted on vehicle like a Razorback. This does relate to flyers, I'll get to it in a moment.

Assault cannon has a much better chance of destroying/glancing a AV 10/11 vehicle.

Lascannon shines in the AV 12-13 department .

Both are good vs AV 14.

Now let's look at their targets and their armor values considering front, side and rear AV. The number of vehicles in this game is far, far too long to consider here but the next is true:

Majority of vehicles have front AV 11-13. A big majority have side AV 11. 90% of them have rear AV 10.

In fact, only some types of Leman Russ, Monolith and Land raider have rear AV higher than 10. I might have forgotten some, but not too many I hope. If you see a vehicle on the table, far away from your bikers and don't know how you're going to get to it, fear not !

There's a hidden jewel right there, on the Storm Talon: Assault cannon can be rotated 360 degrees.

In effect, that AC can always target the rear AV of any vehicle, almost anywhere of the board. Simply fly ST over the model in question and fire away. One exception is if the target in question has another

vehicle or terrain blocking LOS to its rear AV. Otherwise - fire away.

I don't know if that was already discussed on the net, I certainly have only seen this info a couple of times when browsing the articles on the net. Authors focus on choices of weapons, on the math behind those etc. The 360 degree firing arc is the most valuable piece of wargear in the SM flier arsenal.

Now that AC vs LC argument seems a bit different, doesn't it?

Suddenly, that same model can be used to reach any part of the battlefield and deal with 90% of vehicles out there.

The rest of the weapons are up to you. Multiple shots is where's at, however.

8. Stormraven

This model has several things going for it: speed, AV, transport capacity and firepower. The price range, in both dollars and points is rather steep. Not really when you consider what the model *does*. The question is "Will it do it"? Depending on the opposition and their anti air capabilities - this model can be a huge benefit or a huge point sink.

One thing to bear in mind here is the price of the model. And the fact that it starts in reserve. And it's a flyer.

Why am I second guessing this? Several reasons. Let's look at the pros:

1. It has great speed
2. Firepower
3. Transports infantry models to take those objectives on top of tall buildings
4. Shoots down flyers

In short, if you use it - you should use *everything* it does. The price of a SR plus a tactical squad inside will reach 400 pts really fast once you start adding weapons to the flyer and the squad. Incorporate it into your plan and you'll be fine. Unless you're facing someone with lots of Skyfire/Interceptor.

Cons:

1. It cannot do everything at once, has that problem just like a Land raider
2. reserves are risky and can be delayed by the opponent, and by that time it might be too little too late
3. For the price of it and the squad, you can get 3 (!) Storm Talons

One major drawback to this unit the following logic that has its benefits (which I already have talked about):

If I'm taking a Storm Raven it *should* transport *something*. If I'm taking it for the firepower - then I might as well take 2 Storm talons. They can, however, engage two completely different targets on different sides of the table (which is better than PoMS) and it takes more than one lucky hit to knock down the both of them. They also follow the whole "target saturation" theme that roams this article from the start.

So if Stormraven, then a unit in it. What should it be? Taking a cc unit is a possibility. It can be Centurion Devastators or Sternguard.

Since that transport has an assault ramp, and if fast as hell you can put any unit in it and it will work. I know that's like coming to a waiter in a restaurant and asking what's good on the menu and getting the response that you can order anything you like...

There is a thing to consider here: Stormraven will not start on the table. That being said, let us see just how fast can we get the unit inside to work.

Storm raven and CC unit deployment:

Let us assume we are lucky and we roll a 3 on the reserve roll on turn 2 and the Storm Raven can now enter the board. Good.

1. Storm Raven can deploy the unit right away, but the unit will have to be deployed probably far from the opposition. Not good for a cc unit

2. We move the flyer in and shoot stuff, deploy the unit next turn

Best case scenario (where everything goes well) the unit will be in assault turn 3. If the deployment is delayed - turn 4 by which time it might be too little, too late.

A CC unit in a Storm Raven will cost around 500 pts - a solid third of a 1500 list.

Storm raven and shooty unit deployment:

The math is the same as above except shooty units are possibly effective right off the bat even on your own table half. That makes more sense in a biker list. They can even contest midfield objectives if no bike is near it at the end of the game.

Last note specifically our on flyers.

Take your pick. They are undercosted (all of them - but some khmcronssantkhm even more so) for what they do. No unit has that *kind* of firepower in the game. If, for no other reason - take at least one to have a fighting chance against other flyers.

9.0 Enemy flyers

The ones to be afraid of at this point are the ones that deal with infantry/bikes. So Heldrakes, Dakkajets etc... those. There are 4 things you can do against a Heldrake/Dakkajet:

1. Spread out - having your units bunched up is a bad, bad idea. Get a 2" marker and spread those bikes out. If you're not sure how to do it - take a flamer template and practise on your kitchen table! Doing this against a Dakkajet makes no difference - but if you're fighting a Burnabomma - yes!

2. Saturate targets - combat squadding all the way. A minimum number of bikes in a unit will ensure a Heldrake is not killing as many a turn. If he gets only 3-4 under the template - they will be wounded on 3s and he/she might roll some 1s and 2s.

3. Get stuck in! Charge ANYTHING you have a fighting chance against. It doesn't really matter if most of your bikes will perhaps die in the process. Better they charge and at least take some guys with them. If the Drake gets them, they will die anyway.

4. Tanking - I did say expensive ICs on bikes are not worth it. They aren't. Every coin has two sides - and in this case they are pure gold. The Artificier armor is what I'm talking about. That flamer has AP3. If you can have the IC as a front model he can us his 2+ save to save the unit.

There's a problem though: Wounds are saved and casualties removed starting with the closest models to the unit firing. So when one says "Tanking" (as in saving with a 2+ in a 3+ unit), "they" (as in imaginary internet friends) probably mean:

Firing unit

IC

B B B

B B

The problem if that the Heldrake is very fast. It can fly over the unit and attack it from any side. That effectively makes this tactic useless. (*not anymore! -edit*)

Solution

Firing unit

B B

IC B

B B

The right "B" should be a bit positioned closer to the back of the unit. This way, a Helderake can kill 2 bikes before you get to save with a 2+.

I know this is a corner case scenario, for several reasons and the major one is why would the Helderake shoot at this unit exactly and not the one near it, or one on the other side of the board. To explain that would take hours - but remember this if you ever come across it.

10.0 Final chapter of this Saga

Brother, thank you for making it this far. I hope that the article was as fun to read as it was to write. I also hope that it will help in creating new ideas for bike armies out there as the "meta" will change constatly as always, so the bike armies are going to change with it. Up to a point where they will be a thing of the past, only to spring back to life again.

The meta will change, bikes will be bikes.

It does take skill to play 40k. The sheer number of combinations out there is a major factor in the grand scale of things. Mastering the whole game is IMHO impossible - but we try anyway.

The way new books change the way the game is played makes it even worse. One thing that does separate newbies from vets is seeing the process. Once you've seen it (and it happens every five years due to marketing) you start understanding how exactly you could keep up with it.

I'll give you an example of an early 5th ed bike army I played:

Orks ,1500 pts

HQ: Wazdakka

Warboss on bike

Troops: 12 Bikers, Nob with PK, bosspole

12 Bikers, Nob with PK, bosspole

12 Bikers, Nob with PK, bosspole

Fast attack: Deffkopta with Buzzsaw

Deffkopta with Buzzsaw

Buggies with twin linked Rokkits

This list was fun and mean back in the day. Bikers would start on the board or in reserve. You had Wazdakka turbo boosting and shooting at the same time (hitting enemy rear armor), Warboss on bike

with T6 and a combi-skorcha. Fearless bikers with twin linked dakka guns shooting 36 S5 shots on the move. Also, Deffkoptas did first turn charges...

Yeah, it was fun. Then the meta changed. Came the GK, IG, Necrons... you get the picture. Pretty soon the list had more and more 3 member units with a PK, and models that weren't bikes. Until finally, it wasn't a "bike" list anymore. It had bikes, but the majority of the models in it weren't bikes.

If I wanted to play that army now, sure it would be fluffy - but not really that good. With all the flyers / FMC craziness, ignore cover shenanigans...

What I'm trying to get across here is that bikes are cool. That will not change.

From a real life perspective, a box of 3 bikes cost a lot of cash. Some people can afford them, I'm not one of those people. I bought my fair share of those. DV bikers are cool and can be converted, so that would be the good thing to do when building a bike list.

Going off and buying 12 boxes of bikes and White scars conversion bits is a great thing if you're a collector and painter, as well as a player. If you just want to have fun playing, your list might as well have other models too - as that will happen sooner or later anyway.

Funny, I've spent the first zillion words explaining how to play bikes, and now I'm saying "Don't do it?"
Do it. Do it. Do it, don't overdo it.

11.0 Land - Air battle

With realism out of the window, we come to the last strategic (not tactical) info.

I'm not a military man, but have read a fair number of books of military history. Land - Air battle is an idea of a land force supported by tactical aircraft fighting on the move. It was first executed with success by the German army in WW2 and is in practise to this day by every modern army in the world.

We cannot fully use all the doctrines of it since 40k is a space fantasy game with unrealistic elements. It's also (still) a skirmish game. The number of troopers at both sides range from 25-30 to 150 (you could deploy more as IG, but lets be real here).

11.1 Dividing the army by tasks

As we've covered in the list building process, a unit of bikes can look any way we want it to. Flexibility of one unit allows us to group combat squads into "task forces".

As an example of this is we take 2 combat squads from different bike squads and assign them a task, according to their equipment.

3 bikes w/2 meltas + AB MM

3 bikes w/2 meltas + AB MM

These 2 combat squads will be deployed (or reserved) together and act in effect as one unit. They are 2 units, can engage 2 targets, will suffer casualties as 2 units... I'm dividing them from the rest of the force to do anti tank as their primary goal.

Same goes for any other combat squads, bikes with grav guns or flamers. Before we even deploy the army, we have to decide who does what.

So if you take, for example, 4 bike units with ABs - you can split them into anything between 5 to 8 units, you can leave any of them in reserve. Reasons for this are numerous. One major reason is Khan's special rule:

Master of the Hunt: If Khan is your Warlord, friendly models with the Chapter Tactics (White Scars) special rule that are Bikes or have Dedicated Transports have the Scout special rule.

Bikes with scout. Look at your 8 combat squads. Look at the opponent army deployed. Where are his

tanks? Where are his soft artillery pieces? Devastators? Interceptor units?

In your head, try calculating how many combat squads it would take to deal with each of these enemy elements. Now try thinking about how would that be possible. Can those bikes reach their targets more or less intact? If not, then take bigger squads (or don't combat squad some units). If not *at all*, look for alternative options (flyers, land speeders).

11.2 Early, Late and Separated Commitment

Deploying a major part of your force all at once is committing Early Commitment. Reserving it is Late Commitment. Separated Commitment is attacking in waves.

Early:

You do this against an army which will gladly give space for time. It trades you space to advance into for time to shoot you while doing this. Tau are (in)famous for it. The army you are playing against has a fairly small number of CC units on the table from the start. Divide your army into sections, group them, use scout move - and get in there fast!

This is also useful against an army that uses too many reserves. Try killing them all before the reserves even get there! Be aggressive, be bold and get in his face. Use Hit and Run to bounce from unit to unit.

Late:

Say we take those same 4 units of 8 bikes + AB.

1. Bikes x 8, AB
2. Bikes x 8, AB
3. Bikes x 8, AB
4. Bikes x 8, AB

These are now 4 units. So deploying 50% of them means deploying 2 and reserving 2.

Now we combat squad units 3 and 4 into 5 bikes - 3 bikes + AB. Then we get:

1. Bikes x 8, AB
2. Bikes x 8, AB
3. Bikes x5
4. Bikes x3 + AB
5. Bikes x5
6. Bikes x3 + AB

By deploying units 3, 4 and 5 we have 50% of the units deployed. We have deployed 11 bikes and 2 AB. 23 bikes and 2 AB are in reserve. If we add to the same list land speeders and ICs, the number of bikes in reserve will be possibly greater.

Why do this? Why reserve a major part of the force?

One good reason to do it is if you are playing against an army that you know you cannot defeat from the start. Or you're playing against a drop pod list. Deploy in the far corners, use terrain and move completely out of LOS to 90% of the enemy models.

Evade him, lure him, bait him to come to you. He won't do it if he's smart. Most people aren't though. In a tournament, you don't win the event or get placed high by simply going out and fighting toe to toe. No, you play the mission, deny him the objectives and, late game, claim yours. That's it.

You deploy those bikes and the rest will use scout to outflank and come onto the board in unexpected places. And they all have to be death with.

Separated:

Means a total, crazy complicated management of reserves. The melta guys will outflank, flamer guys will scout and try to get first blood - the rest will hang back until the melta guys deal with those tanks/heavy suits/whatever. When the flyers get on the board we all move forward.

In short - it can all work out exactly as planned, or go horribly, horribly wrong. If you lose, you can say that at least you played your game. If you win... stuff of legends!

11.3 Managing Reserves

The overall plan has to take into account the arrival of reserves and a plan B if they are delayed or destroyed. Flyers are a major factor here. If your opponent has those and they are not really a threat to your bikes - ignore them and concentrate on the stuff on the ground with your flyers and troops alike.

If those flyers carry troops in them (like Vendettas do for example) and you can choose to go second - do it. He will roll for his reserves first and hopefully your flyers will come in after their flyers and take them out.

Take note of your outflanking force (you do have it?). If you're facing an opponent with a lot of transports, there are 2 things you can do:

1. Reserve the melta guys and hope he will stay back. Then when they come in, they target rear AV and the rest of the force that has been hanging out in your deployment zone joins in for a pincer type of attack
2. Reserve the Flamer guys and commit your melta early on (scout move first turn suckerpunch). Then when the reserves come in - they roam the board and secure objectives late game. Hopefully those troops that had transports will have less than optimal firepower to deal with them.

11.4 The Triad of every list

Separate your forces into 3 groups in your head before deployment.

Group 1: Anti infantry

Group 2. Anti armour / heavy stuff

Group 3: Command group

Now take your units, combat squad them as needed and put them into the group they fit in. Bear in mind, that this is in relation to the army you're playing against. A land speeder Typhoon with CML+HB might be in Group 1 against a Tyranid swarm list, or Group 2 against a Mech Guard list.

Same goes for all your units, and as we already covered - everyone can do everything - all units need to stay flexible. They can also be deployed, reserved and combat squadded /grouped as the situation on the field demands.

Command group is not "command squad". It's just a squad you happen to join your IC's to. It can be anything.

If you're playing against an army where you need a beefy big squad of bikes to attach the IC to and charge people with, then do it.

Next game you're playing against Mech Eldar and the first wave of bikes will probably not live to tell how the game ended - reserve that IC with an outflanking unit and keep his "Slay the Warlord" secondary objective safe.

There are games where the IC will be of absolutely no use to you (fat chance, but still) - then make sure you deny the opponent from killing him.

12.0 Thank you for reading!

If I've been boring, sorry. You will find probably parts of the text that give completely opposite advice. The reason for this is that in 40k, using one trick will win you one game. That same trick might cost in

your next battle.

Thanks brothers!

P.S - While writing this, I found the way of not allowing the opponent to place objectives on tall buildings. Just place "your" objective next to the building first- so he cannot place anything within 12" of it. If you get to place first, do it from the very start. Bikes are fast enough to get there.

Addendum:

Why a combi flamer is *almost* never out of place?

2 reasons:

1. Flamer was and still is one of the best weapons the SM codex (or indeed any codex) has to offer. You all guys know what the weapon does - no need to preach to the choir. No need to hit and it will hit every model under the template. That last part works wonders on a mobile platform such as a jump pack or bike.

The option to move 12" and then put the template down grants the flamer model a 20" range (size of its template being 8")! Range is one thing, range of fire plus angle of fire is another, and bikes have both. Flamers can be fired at models they cannot hurt to hit things if front of those.

An example of this is 10 guys in front of a tank. You have 3 bikes with 2 meltas and a combi-flamer in front of all that. The flamer model only needs to be positioned so that it doesn't touch any friendly models and covers as much of the tank as possible. "As much as possible" leaves a whole range (pun intended) of options. That way, 2 meltaguns blast the tank, and the combi-flamer fries the unit. If the tank survives you can do a multi-charge too.

An opportunity to use that weapon will arise - and it's up to us to see it.

2. A flamer is seldom fired more than one time per game. When it is fired, with care it can swing the game in your favour. The downside of taking a *normal* flamer (not a combi weapon) in a bike squad is that you're not taking another weapon instead.

Normal flamers in a bike squads are still a very good idea (as the trick above works just the same for them, except most of the unit covered would probably be dead, making the assault that follows much easier). However, a bike unit with only flamers can only flame infantry, and since there aren't so many targets for them, a combi flamer unit (in any shape or form) might be enough as it is. I suggest a typical bike list needs one "all flamers" unit. They have their uses when you come across genestealers, orks en masse etc.

Why larger units are better than smaller ones?

This is where codex SM and codex DA go their separate ways. The following applies more to codex SM and less to DA.

This whole thing is meant for "competitive" playing in a tourney, and so on. Joe is just making his White Scars army list. He needs a solid list that is both "skewed" enough and can stand up to any other opponent he might come across. Once the list is done, it's done and he cannot change it in between the games he plays.

The decision on which units to take has to be made with the following factors in mind:

1. How many different armies I'm going to face? - if you know nobody's bringing a mech list take more grav guns and less melta
2. What scenarios are you playing?
3. What are the secondary objectives?
4. What are the tie breakers?

1: The answer to this question is simple. If you know everyone is bringing certain types of lists, there you go - you should know what to do. If you have no idea (or the tourney is 50+ people) who's coming - plan for everything.

MSU will put you on the back foot here. Small units that can be easily killed aren't the best choice here as they are not flexible. 3 bikes with 2 meltas are great in game 1 vs mech guard, suck in game 2 vs a footdar list, or tyranids or ork. Note that a unit of 3 bikes is easy first blood (easier than a unit of 8 in any case). Having flexible units might mean that one unit is a weaker choice in a game (and so each game a different unit is less than useful). It also means those flexible units will do some damage at least, will be harder to kill etc.

2: I wrote about how scenarios can screw you over and how to deal with it. When we take a theoretical situation here (as there's no other possibility as I am in South East Europe and you guys are all over the globe) that we have an army to play against and a scenario to play up to – things get complex to explain.

The six scenarios are different in nature but come down to the few things I already have talked about. When we multiply that by 3 different deployment types – 3 deployments x6 scenarios plus possible night fight, plus going first/going second (and that changes everything sometimes) times number of armies I may or may not encounter... I don't have the math skills for that. Saying that I can predict all that would be foolish.

I take those flexible units as they are and improvise on the spot. A tank commander in WW2 was quoted saying:

"Improvisation?...that's when nobody notices the preparation involved"

Having units that are flexible will allow to improvise on the spot. You *can* split the units apart or not. You can reserve those combat squads, or not. Sure, a weapon might be out of place here and there. A squad might end up being overkill in some (rare) cases. The overall picture will show that over the 6 games the army will have more options.

MSU doesn't allow that. All it does is give me more units that are cheaper (as 2 units of 3 bikes is cheaper than a large unit combat squaded) but can be killed easily and doesn't give me as many options.

Take an example here: A MSU list vs a Flexible list playing a KP mission against Tau

3 large bike units will surely give away only 3 KP, where 6 units will give away 6. And the look on the opponents face when he just killed 7 out of 8 bikes is memorable... especially when that last bike turbo boosts away and denies him ANY KP.

To be fair here, lets say those same two lists play next round against a Mech guard list. MSU list will have the advantage, true. Flexible lists need to improvise, split up etc. but can still do the job. They will have perhaps a melta or 2 less.

3: This goes without saying . There will be games where not handing out first blood KP or getting linebreaker is more important than the primary objectives, as those can be hard to achieve. One such example is the Relic. Whoever goes for it will try to move away with it, while wasting a troop unit to do it, and moving at 6" while doing it. If a bike list plays that mission getting those secondaries and just preventing the primary is a better idea than slogging it across the board back to your DZ . Bikes lack the staying power for it. In other missions, such as The Scouring and Big Guns some enemy elements will be worth KPs.

Again, big flexible units are adaptable to all of these needs more than MSU are. Especially when you consider the fact that the weapons needed to kill such targets vary, and at the list building stage we don't know who are we playing against. How can we make it with MSU?

4: Tiebreakers are points that we collect during the game that determine the placement within the swiss system between rounds by separating equal game results. They are for all intents and purposes Tertiary objectives.

Round one:

Example: John and Will play the Relic on table 13 and get a 2-2 draw

Erik and Sven play the Relic on table 14 and get a 2-2 draw

Mark and Francois are playing on table 15 and Mark wins 4-2

5 players scored the same number of points at the end of the round. Who plays against who on round 2?

Tiebreakers could be:

- did you win or lose, in which case Francois is clearly the last
- how many KP (though they weren't part of the mission) did you collect
- how many KP have you given out?
- how good is your KP ratio (gained vs lost)

Some or all of those could be used. They could be even scored themselves. for example winning the game might be worth 1, 2 or 3 tiebreaker points, and each KP difference might be worth $\frac{1}{2}$, 1 or even 2 KP. From that perspective, after 4 rounds of a tournament a player with 2 draws and good Tiebreakers might be better positioned than a player with 3 victories and 1 loss. We need to know if the tourney has tiebreakers, and if yes ,then what they are.

In any case, having large flexible units is better than having MSU. A list of 24 bikes bikes in 3 units might lose 21 bikes and still give out Zero KPs.

Think about it, your opponent practically sweeps the table clean and as far as KP and Tiebreakers go he did absolutely nothing.

Compare that to those same 24 bikes in 5 units of 3 and one unit of 9 (it would be eight but this is just an example). They could lose only 6 bikes and give away 2 KP. After 6 games, it adds up.

If you're playing against your friends and know what you'll be facing - then by all means tailor the list. Some people will disagree, but we are not talking about a WAAC army here and no one in their right mind has the moral high ground to call you out for doing it. This list is Fluffy. Bikes are hard enough to play as it is. If you're going to a tournament - expect and prepare for anything.

Veteran Sarge or base?

I say both. The 10 pt upgrade is not a big investment and brings 2 things. An extra attack and +1 Ld. The former is always a bonus, having an extra attack is better than not having it (duh). The latter leads to a paradox. The paradox being, that there are times when you NEED to pass a Ld test, for example when guarding an objective. Failing a Ld 9 is far less common than failing a Ld 8.

To fail a LD 9, we are looking at these rolls:

-5,5

-5,6

-6,5

-6,6

The chance of failure on 2d6 is 4/36 or 1/9.

From that perspective, paying 10 pts for the upgrade for an extra attack and +1Ld is a bargain. There are times, though when we'd rather FAIL a Ld test. Such as a unit that's about to get charged by a powerhouse unit (how did that happen with the bikes' speed in mind?) but gets shot at first.

If the bikes, by some blessing of The Emperor, have a sudden outburst of common sense and make a run for it they will flee 3d6 (average of 10") and regroup next turn.

ATSKNF works wonders. Not only do they consolidate 3", they get to move, shoot and charge. That makes the fall back move as long as it needs to be, when it needs to be (before they would get charged they run away and are surely out of charge distance).

It also means they close in when they need to close in, making that effective fall back around 7" total on the average. So first they flee, then they come back with a vengeance!

Having that +1 LD sure does suck sometimes. Paradox in itself. There should be a compromise. I did say having large units brings more benefit than the MSU build. That would imply that they DO get Veteran sergeants to lead them. They will be required to hold objectives and with their leaders still alive those bikes need to be able to pass Ld tests. This can be dealt with by attaching an IC to the unit.

Having all the units with veteran Sergeants is surely a point sink. Perhaps taking maybe 2 of them? Their units could have a secondary task of holding the objectives after they deal with their original target(s).

The whole +1 LD only comes up if all the IC's are dead and all the sergeants alive, a safe(r) backup plan.

Editor's notes:

The original text was written by Garath on the Bolter & Chainsword forums, the thread in which he wrote the text can be found <http://www.bolterandchainsword.com/topic/285312-are-bike-lists-hard-to-play/> here.

Edited, formatted, spellchecked and translated into proper English by Timo K/Lammikkovalas 11th of Feb 2016.