RAWHYDE ADVENTURE

RIDER'S CHALLENGE

The RawHyde American Adventure Rider's Challenge was a fitting venue to demonstrate Kawasaki's updated and upgraded 2008 KLR™650 motorcycle.

Story by Tom Reece, Photos provided courtesy of RawHyde Adventures

Balance Beam, Teeter-Totter, Rock Garden. Depending on the context one could be discussing an Olympic event, a children's playground, or Grandpa's low-maintenance front lawn. For participants at RawHyde Adventures 1st American Adventure Rider's Challenge, these terms took on a very different and much more dynamic form. Over a four day period, June 6-10, dual-sport, adventure-riding enthusiasts from across the U.S. and beyond converged near Castaic, California to put their off-pavement adventure motorcycle skills to the test.

Twenty plus years ago, most dual-purpose motorcycles—as they were called then—were relatively modest machines with equally modest capabilities. This was also true for their owners. Since then motorcycles and riders have evolved into their own distinct and illustrious category. Kawasaki's own KLR™650, introduced in 1987, was one of the seeds of this steadily growing crop of balanced and versatile machines. During recent years, though still fairly exclusive in sheer numbers, more and more *adventure riders* have been traversing the globe and experiencing terrain that would make drivers of Land Rovers cringe.

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For several years now Jim Hyde, founder and owner of RawHyde Adventures has introduced and coached his concept to hundreds of riders at his 120-acre facility located about an hour north of Los Angeles. His mission: Instill owners of these big, knobby-shod, dirt-capable motorcycles with the skills and confidence to explore the world that lies beyond asphalt highways and roads. According to Hyde, "The adventure begins where the pavement ends!" With the numbers and skill level of these riders growing, it seemed natural to offer a competitive demonstration event. What are 650cc and up, dirt-going motorcycles and their riders really capable of? How about a 300-meter, 35-degree hill climb; a deep and long stretch of evil sand; an ultra slow, super tight, feet-on-the-pegs hay bale course; a rousing, mud-caked finale and as it turns out, much more!

With the original KLR™650 having reached near-cult status among loyal adventuring souls for two decades this event was an irresistible attraction. Kawasaki's big thumpers were well represented and riders thoroughly enjoyed the competition and camaraderie. Larry and Patricia Ewing of Adelanto, California are avid enthusiasts with more than three decades of street experience, but relative novices on dirt pathways. "The Adventure Rider's Challenge brought together many people and their collective knowledge about this type of motorcycling. We have learned quite a bit just by being here and participating in the events!" stated Ewing. Veterans of motorcycle touring, the Ewing's have ridden through Canada, Alaska, and South Africa, and are planning a South America visit that will use their newly acquired skill set.

Tim Bernard of Boise, Idaho has been riding for forty years and became so enamored with the KLR™650 series and its capabilities that he started a small company that designs and manufactures accessories that tailor the bike to an individual's needs. "I found it to be such a dependable, all-around workhorse of a motorcycle that I wanted to help others adapt it for their particular needs," said Bernard. Ken Hunter, also from Boise, with 80,000 miles of travel on two KLRs, which includes a trip from Prudhoe Bay Alaska to the Panama Canal adds: "These bikes are solid, and there are lots of useful accessories available that makes it easy to customize them for your own riding style." On RawHyde Adventures Hunter says "It is a first-class operation in which people can have fun and enjoy the camaraderie. I'm already planning to participate next year."

Evenings featured distinctive food, entertainment, plenty of bench-racing, and mornings (after an equally tasty breakfast) were set aside for group rides around the area. Afternoons were for competition among more than 50 entrants with crowds watching and cheering the wide variety of riding skill tests. This included tight turns, hill climbs, jumps, steep descents, a dry river wash, big and inconvenient rocks, and some very off-camber turns. Some events were even timed—the slower person received the best score. Judging was based on staying on course, staying upright, and keeping one's feet on the pegs.

Saturday's finale brought 12 finalists to the center corral of the RawHyde ranch, and throngs of cheering supporters along the boundary fence. Points were tallied and division titles awarded. A notable phrase, which was uttered many times during earlier rounds, was again echoed among the riders: *"That was a lot harder than it looked."*

The RawHyde American Adventure Rider's Challenge was a fitting venue to demonstrate Kawasaki's updated and upgraded 2008 KLR™650 motorcycle. The Kawasaki demo area was a busy place each day, with riders eager to try out the heir to the legendary original before the competitive events began. "RawHyde Adventures is first-class when it comes to safety, organization and attention to detail. For any dual-sport rider, the RawHyde Adventure Challenge is the ultimate event for amazing rides, entertainment, relaxation, and camaraderie," said Kawasaki Marketing Specialist, Derek Natvig. It was a truly international affair yet brand loyalties melted away as it became clear that while the choice of machine certainly matters, riding skill was key. ◆

For more information on RawHyde Adventures and their upcoming events, visit RawHyde-offroad.com, or adventureriderchallenge.com.

**Logbook photos taken by Teri Conrad*

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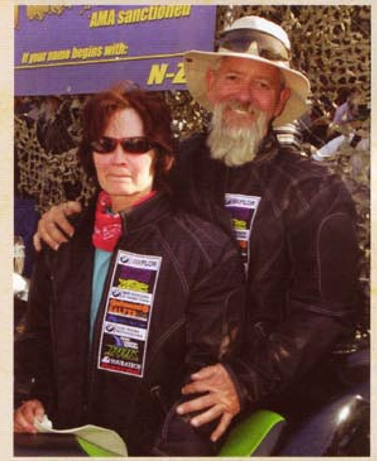

(Top) Group photo of those who participated in the 1st Annual American Adventure Rider's Challenge. (Second row left) Demo rides were provided aboard Kawasaki's KLR™650. (Second row right) Good food, fun and entertainment. (Third row left) The Ewing's model their Adventure Rider's Jackets. (Third row right) A rider makes his way through the mud pit in splendid form. (Bottom left) Hill climb rock shower. (Bottom right) Participants eagerly await final results of the four-day Adventure Challenge as points are tallied.