



Living Large



With the introduction of the R80G/S in 1981, BMW established the Adventure Touring class of specialized motorcycles, which has spawned challengers from Europe, Asia and most recently, the good old US of A.

When it was announced that BMW was going to introduce a *skunk works* version of the venerable GS to be known as the HP2, members of the mainstream motorcycle press as well as many BMW loyalists, questioned the sanity of BMW producing an off road oriented boxer twin motorcycle with a MSRP of \$20,000. (A \$20,000 dirt bike? Are they nuts?) Intended to be a limited-production motorcycle for a limited number of buyers, BMW continues to produce this model, unchanged from the initial production run, for those relatively few riders worldwide who have a desire to be different and who possess the financial where-with-all to fulfill this desire.

Jim Hyde, owner-operator of RawHyde Adventures, seeing that there were a growing number of HP2's showing up at his Adventure Touring classes and camps, felt that there was an opportunity to provide a service to this select group of motorcyclists that would be unlike anything else in the world, an

HP2-only training/riding experience. As a graduate of the Hechlingen Off Road Riding School sponsored by BMW, AG in Germany, Hyde was familiar with the German technique of rider training. During his years of involvement with BMW, he had also become acquainted with Bertie Hauser who heads up BMW's HP2 worldwide racing effort and is himself a highly skilled off road competitor. Hauser accepted Hyde's invitation to be Guest Instructor at a four day training session specifically oriented to the unique capabilities of the HP2.

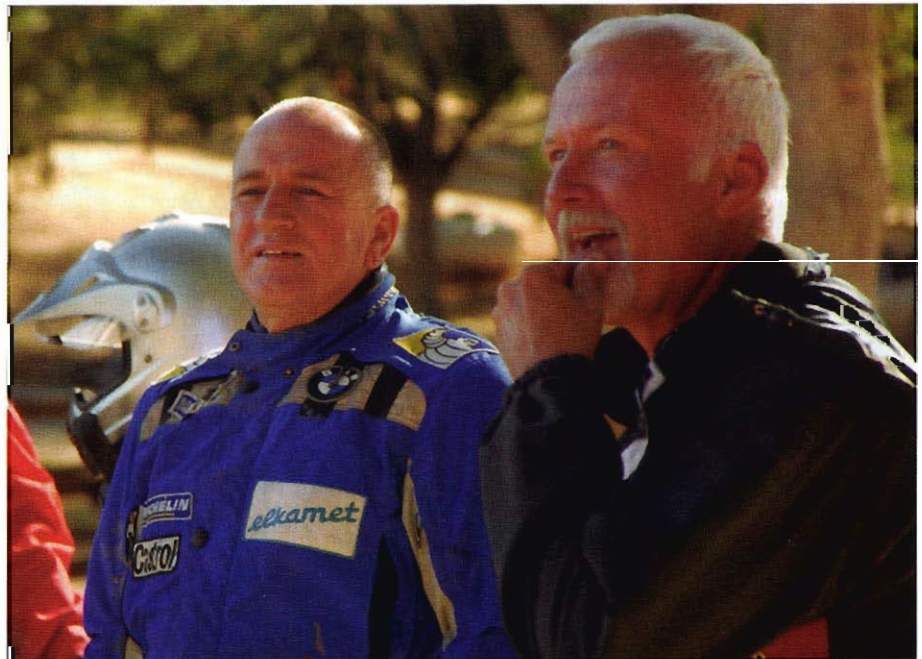
This course consisted of two days of rider training at the RawHyde Ranch north of Los Angeles, followed by practical application of the acquired skills during two days of mountain and desert riding. This would also provide for one night of wilderness camping, which was planned to give the riders a sense of the Paris to Dakar Rally experience, and hopefully induce Hauser to provide campfire entertainment by relating some of his experiences as a participating team member of a number of these legendary races.

Having the opportunity to gain access to an HP2 from the BMW's press fleet for the purpose of participating in and writing a story about this highly special-

ized and possibly one time only training course, certainly provided me with the opportunity to "live large," experiencing a limited edition, highly specialized motorcycle that has little chance of becoming a permanent resident of my garage. The "riding high" aspect of the title of this article has as much to do with my excitement at having this motorcycle available to me, as to the riding position. When I obtained the bike, the suspension was set up for hard off road riding and possibly leaping tall buildings at a single bound, in other words at its maximum height providing for the greatest suspension travel.

An interesting dilemma presented itself when I picked up the bike from the BMW warehouse. Simply getting on the thing was a challenge. At 5'8" in height, mounting the bike required the use of the left foot peg while the bike rested on its side stand. Once on the seat, the next challenge was to get the bike in an upright position. This required a technique of sliding my butt off the seat to the left, placing my left foot on the ground and executing a sideways jump to the right in an effort to rock the bike upright, quickly sliding to the right side of the seat and placing my right foot on the ground to keep it from falling onto its right side.

and Riding High



Living Large

After several tries, this feat was finally accomplished and there I was astride the bike with just the front edges of the toes of my boots touching the ground.

Okay, now the next step was to back the bike, which was parked with the front wheel just a few inches from the warehouse door through which it had previously been backed and parked. Dismount, roll the bike in a backwards arc so it is pointing toward open space, then repeat the mounting and up righting process over again. Then, balancing carefully on the right foot while retracting the side stand with the left foot, it was time to get moving. Negotiating the several stop signs and lights between BMW's warehouse and my home took some careful planning. I'd slow down and slide my tush off the left side of the seat so that when the bike came to a stop my left foot would be able to reach the ground.

Arriving home provided the opportunity for some quality garage time with my new, temporary acquisition. The first order of business was to drop the air pressure in the rear shock unit to provide for a more manageable ride height. As it turned out, my arbitrary deflation pretty well matched the amount of suspension "sag" suitable for my weight, about which we would learn more during the first day of training.

I had completed a RawHyde Adventure Camp training course two years ago on a R1200GS, so I was looking forward to the chance to experience a similar event on the HP2, the newer, "edgier" iteration of this popular model. I was not at all disappointed. Although I had been

impressed with the off road capability of the 1200GS, I was quite literally blown away by the capability of the HP2. At 55 pounds less than the GS, with seven more ponies between the valve covers, the HP2's off road performance makes these numbers seem grossly understated.

Whether it is slowly maneuvering around trees, through ditches and over rocks, or up and down a series of hillside single track paths, the HP2 stays connected with the terrain and responds to rider input like a bike of considerably less heft. And the power – oh, that power! It takes judicious use of the throttle to keep from uselessly wasting traction and digging tire ruts, because there is plenty of power on tap regardless of speed and gear selector position. In fact, it is very easy to get into trouble if one injudiciously rolls on the throttle in the middle of a turn in a low traction situation. Fortunately, well thought out features such as the very effective valve cover guards and the color impregnated plastic body parts that mask scratches and dings, leave little evidence of having gotten up close and personal with Mother Earth.

Before beginning the ride training on the first day, adequate time was spent learning about design objectives and unique features of the bike, especially the suspension components, which were individually tuned to the weight of the rider. The rear air shock absorber was especially designed to mitigate high frequency movement as well as the severe compression and rebound actions of jumping the bike in off road terrain. Due to its progressive compression characteristics, we were informed that it is virtually impossible for this shock absorbing system to "bottom out." This system

also incorporates a two position damping adjuster that provides one setting for comfort, and the other for more severe riding conditions.

Setting up the rear suspension for the individual rider requires adjusting "sag." The first step is to measure the fully extended length of suspension travel. This is a two-person operation. One person stands on the left side of the bike and rocks it to its left, supporting it on the side stand and front wheel. The second person measures the length between the middle of the opening in the rear drive and a fixed point on the rear subframe or rear fender. The rider then mounts the bike, balancing it in an upright position while the other person again measures the reduced distance between the two previously selected points. The difference in measurements is "sag," which should be 3.5 -3.7 inches.

Adjustment of "sag" is made by inflating or deflating the rear suspension unit. BMW has included a hand pump with integral pressure gauge for this purpose. Although it is possible to make a note of the final pressure, and use this as benchmark for future adjustments, there is a direct correlation between air temperature and pressure, so re-measuring and possibly adjusting "sag" is recommended under differing ambient temperature conditions.

Adjusting of the front suspension components enabled us to position each of the three settings in their more-or-less middle positions, offering the opportunity to fine-tune each one for optimal response as riding took place and conditions evolved. Compression and rebound damping are adjusted by slotted adjusters on the tops of the left and right fork



legs, respectively. The top surface of each leg is clearly labeled with a "C" or "R" and directional indicators "-" and "+" indicate less or more damping effect. A third component, "linear compression," is controlled by a slotted adjuster located at the bottom of the right fork leg. This aspect of suspension controls the degree of "sacking down" of the front end under extreme conditions.

Setting of the lower right fork leg adjuster consisted of turning it all the way left (open), then rotating the adjuster to the right 12 clicks. Setting the upper right fork leg (Rebound damping) adjuster consisted of the same movement and number of clicks. Setting of the left fork leg (Compression damping) adjuster consisted of backing off the adjuster to full open, then rotating it to the right 10 clicks.

If necessary, front end ride height can be reduced by lowering the triple clamp on the fork legs. A frame-mounted leveling device, much like a carpenter's level, is an aid to balancing front and rear ride height.

The only other personalization adjustment necessary was to rotate the handlebar ends slightly upwards to accommodate a standing position. In this position, the rider is standing on the foot pegs, with the upper body leaned slightly forward, wrists straight with the forearms and backs of the hands, and elbows splayed slightly outward. Additional forward positioning of the handlebars can be accomplished by reversing the leading and trailing edges of the handlebar riser mounts. In this riding position, the clever little retractable foot brake pedal should also be deployed for ease of access.

Rider training began with some very basic exercises to orient those riders who were new to off road riding to some of the techniques involved in low traction riding, as well as to enable our instructor to assess the general skill level of each rider. Dirt riding skill levels varied widely within our group, however as new skills were learned and practiced, we found ourselves moving to progressively more difficult riding situations. It struck me that the common thread connecting all of the different exercises we did, as well as causing me to relate this training experience with all of the other motorcycle training classes I have attended over the years, is the critical nature of keeping your head up and your eyes on where

RawHyde Adventures offers beginner and advanced off road rider training for folks interested in exploring the "back country" on bikes like the BMW GS or HP2. Classes run monthly. See their Web site for details. www.rawhyde-offroad.com, PO Box 244, Castaic, CA 91310, tel: (213) 713-5652

you want to go.

Bertie Hauser's oft repeated admonition was to continually be looking at least 15 ft. ahead. One of his defining comments was that anything closer than 15 ft. was *the past* and too late to do anything about. You had to be looking beyond 15 ft. to have any hope of controlling where you were headed, whether it was straight ahead, up or down hills or around corners.

One of the exercises designed to help riders develop the discipline of looking ahead and not down involved the use of four, 8 feet long 2" x 4" boards. These were placed on the ground forming two 16 feet long barriers initially about 12" apart. The idea was to ride between these barriers without touching them. The technique for success was to approach the entrance to this "chute" looking at the entrance until you were about 15 feet away, then shift head and eyes straight ahead into the distance until you cleared the chute. Even with this fairly wide space between barriers, several riders demonstrated that a momentary lapse of focus and a quick peek down to check the relative position of the front wheel and a barrier was an absolute guarantee that the front tire and barrier would meet. As we all gained proficiency with this exercise, the barriers were moved closer together until the space between them was 1-1/2 times the width of the rear tire. This exercise developed the invaluable skill of looking ahead not down, so necessary for negotiating the single track routes we would be encountering during the next few days.

While many of the training exercises would apply to any off road motorcycle, there was always the combination of awesome power coupled with the weight of the HP2 that had to be managed. There is more than enough power and torque to enable a rider to climb a hill just by grabbing a handful of throttle and hanging on, known as the "point and shoot"

method of motorcycle control (or lack thereof). The technical downside of this method is that by the time the marginally out-of-control motorcycle reaches the physical upside of the obstacle, bike and rider may find themselves plunging into space on the opposite side of the hill's sudden and precipitous drop off. Applying the correct amount of power to scale an obstacle and reach the top with while still maintaining speed and steering control was the objective of several exercises.

At the other end of the speed spectrum is brake control, and the brakes of the HP2 are competently matched to the bike's power characteristics. One of the more memorable braking exercises took place on a flat open dirt field. Riders were instructed to attain a speed of about 40 mph then, upon a signal from Hauser, apply optimal braking force to achieve a controlled stop in the shortest possible distance. As the riders quickly learned, locking one or both wheels is considerably easier on dirt than on pavement, precise control being the remedy for that unfavorable situation. Coaching and repetition provided the opportunity for all riders to sharpen their off road braking skills considerably.

One of the signature aspects of any RawHyde event is the food. Jim Hyde prides himself on providing memorable motorcycle experiences, and within his personal sense of values is the appreciation and enjoyment of good food and drink. This event was no exception, and Certified Cordon Bleu Chef-Jeff Gallegos once again demonstrated his culinary skills both at the ranch and during the night of camping in the Mojave Desert.

Following two rather intensive training days and two days of desert and mountain riding, all in attendance agreed that their off road riding skills as well as their appreciation for the capabilities of the HP2 had increased substantially. BMW has several other projects in the works that will carry the HP (High Performance) designation, the recently introduced HP2 Megamoto being the second of this new family of products. If the other products of this development effort raise the performance level of their respective motorcycling niches to even half the extent that the HP2 has done for off road riding, members of the BMW motorcycling community are in for some exciting times indeed. 