



Adventure Ramblings

A new column featuring insights and tips for adventure riders by the owner of the USA's only BMW sponsored off-road training center.

TEXT: JIM HYDE PHOTOS: ALFONSE "FONZIE" PALIAMA, MOTOINSIDER.COM

Let's start by defining the word 'adventure' shall we? According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, it means to "face danger or take a risk." So let's take it one step further and ask, "What's your definition of adventure?"

I've asked this one question a million times over the years and it seems that I always get a different answer—but they all seem to include words and phrases like: new places, unusual circumstances, exciting, hazardous, unknown outcome, risky undertaking, some element of danger, bold behavior or the acknowledgment of the potential for physical harm.

So, if you take any of the above words and add motorcycling to that, you're beginning to define "Adventure Riding." And then, if you add taking a big bike like a GS on

an unpaved road traveling to "unusual, exciting or unknown" places, you're beginning to understand "Adventure Riding."

Here's my view on Adventure Riding—back in the old days we just called it exploring! Hopping on your bike and taking off to either go where you'd never been before or go to places that were a bit off the beaten path and were thus less crowded. And frankly, that's my favorite part—I like to visit places that are viewed as inaccessible by other folks because I enjoy the challenge of piloting my GS over rough four-wheel-drive roads. I find it exhilarating to ride deep into the backcountry using skills that I've built over the years because I also enjoy the sense of accom-



Jim Hyde,
owner of
RawHyde
Adventures.

OUR NEWEST COLUMNIST IS JIM HYDE, owner of RawHyde Adventures. RawHyde is one of only a dozen or so official "BMW off road schools" in the world and the only privately owned, BMW sponsored "off-road" training center in the US. As such, Jim says, "my entire world revolves around the BMW GS which is, without question, the pioneer bike in what is now called the Adventure segment of the motorcycling world. I'm honored to have been offered the opportunity to write a column for this magazine and this opening commentary is a series of loosely connected thoughts about what 'Adventure Riding' is really all about."

plishment that comes from reaching a destination that most folks don't care to attempt.

Now let me add some perspective—last year I led a group of riders on a two-month-long journey through South America. We were filming a documentary about traveling by motorcycle through the rural regions of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile. The trip was scheduled to be around 10,000 miles and was to transit roughly 65 degrees of latitude as we rode from Cartagena, Colombia to Ushuaia, Argentina.

As we entered Peru, we began to ride through some of the most remote areas I've ever been (let alone ridden a motorcycle in) and I had an epiphany. It came from the fact that I considered myself doing some "adventure riding." I mean, there I was on an incredibly scenic dirt road in the middle of the Andes Mountains at 12,000-foot elevation and I was using my bike for the purpose that it had been built. But suddenly, a family of three came up on me riding a small Chinese-made moto of some sort, with Dad "driving" and his wife protectively holding a small boy of six or seven years old with one arm, while carrying a shopping bag of groceries in

the other arm. That's when the realization hit me. My "adventure" was their reality. I didn't get a photo of the family on the bike, but five minutes later on the same road our photographer, Fonzie, captured a local guy riding with his dog. Neither the family, nor the guy and his dog, had an option to travel anywhere other than the mean, marginally maintained dirt road we both shared. I was riding there for fun, enjoying the challenge of what they faced on a daily basis, but they did not have a choice. Would they rather have been on a smooth, paved and dust-free road? I'm sure they would have. So, there is the dichotomy. I was on their road for fun and enjoyment, and they had no choice.

As I continued on my journey through South America I continued to reflect on the fact that I was viewing for fun and personal challenge the everyday reality of the locals. I decided to do some research on exactly how much of the world is paved and easy versus unpaved and what I'd call adventurous.

Those of us who live in developed countries are fortunate because getting around on our motorcycles for everyday matters, although fun and exciting, generally isn't what we'd call adventurous. However, for folks who live in developing countries, the simple act of daily living can be an adventure. For many, getting where they need to be on a daily basis for everyday living involves riding unpaved and rocky roads, water crossings, deep sand stretches and unexpected hazards, etc. Collecting safe drinking water for the day, getting back and forth to school, town, market or work, and gathering the necessities for life can take all the hours of daylight and then some, all the while presenting considerable risk. When you grow up doing that and are comfortable with it, it doesn't seem like an adventure or risky, it's just life.

I'm reminded of a quote by M. Scott Peck (author of *The Road Less Traveled*) wherein he states, "Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters." →

Facing Page: Finding adventure on a rocky and slick mountain pass in Peru. **Clockwise from below: One man's adventure** is another's everyday life on rural roads in Bolivia. **Some of the best roads**, such as this snake in Argentina, are found after the tarmac ends. **Not knowing** where the next hill will take you can be its own adventure.





This was illustrated to perfection as I traveled about South America because the daily life I saw there was damn hard by my standards, yet the people were cheerful, warm and happy as they faced the challenges and obstacles of their daily lives. Their roads weren't paved, many did not have electricity in their homes, and most rural villagers did not have cars to travel in, only cheap Chinese or Korean scooters to go about their daily affairs (if they were lucky) and we saw lots of ox carts and horse-drawn buggies for those not fortunate enough to afford a motorized vehicle.

Anyway, as I said, I decided to try and figure out some of the statistics of paved roads vs. dirt roads around the world and have since done some research on the topic. Below are some ratios of paved vs. unpaved roads in the US and South America specifically, and the rest of the world, in general.

In the United States there are 4,127,000 miles of public roads and of those 1,392,000 are unpaved. That means that nearly one-third of the available roads in the US are ones that most folks don't get to investigate or ride. In Canada it jumps to 60 percent and in Mexico 64 percent of the roads are unpaved. The views, vistas, camping, and adventures to be had on these roads are immeasurable. Open those statistics for the world and the adven-

tures are nearly unlimited. Years ago, BMW ran an ad that stated that 90 percent of the world was unpaved. That has changed now to roughly 70 percent, but that still leaves a hundred million miles of roads to explore that have not yet been paved. That's a mind-boggling number.

Regarding our South American trip:

- Colombia: 20% paved
- Ecuador: 19% paved
- Peru: 14% paved
- Bolivia: 7% paved
- Chile: 19% paved
- Argentina: 29% paved

Globally, some interesting facts: Austria is 100 percent paved, while Chad only has one percent of the entire country on tarmac. Regarding Chad, it's hard to believe that a country would have such limited infrastructure, but of the 25,000 miles (40,000 km) of roadway in the country, only 128 miles (206 km) are actually paved. If you're curious to learn more you can visit the CIA website on paved vs. unpaved roads around the world at www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2085.html.

So when you really think about it, one of the most amazing things about owning and riding a large adventure bike is that it presents a means to explore places around the world that most folks only dream about visiting or see in other people's photos.

I'll wrap up this first edition of the BMW adventure column with this final thought. The BMW GS is a bike designed to be used for exploration as well as daily commuting. If you have any real thoughts about international travel by motorcycle you most likely will encounter lots of dirt roads. Having enough real "skill" to navigate these roads becomes the factor that allows you to actually enjoy the adventure and in upcoming columns we'll be discussing some of the important things you'll need to know to have safe and enjoyable adventures. ▀

Clockwise from below: **Reaching the end of the world** (sign) in Argentina. **Jim Hyde** on his GS in South America. **Falls are bound to happen**—Tiberio Esparza in Bolivia.

