

THE DIRT ON RAWHYDE ADVENTURE CAMP

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If you want to conquer fear,
don't sit home and think about it.
Go out and get busy.

Dale Carnegie

ADVENTURE CAMP CUSTOMERS:

Welcome to your first challenge,

“Our Driveway!”



A

nd so it was. I was invited by the good folks from Kawasaki to attend a Ladies Only weekend with

RawHyde Adventures in beautiful Castaic, California. Kawasaki would be providing the ride - a brand new KLX250S - Jim Hyde and crew would supply the education and I would bring along my fear and trepidations of leaving the pavement along with my great need to overcome and conquer said feelings. The mix was perfect and the weekend would turn out to be the same.

Preparing myself for this experience, I packed my Ogio bag with a new pair of Alpinestar Stella Tech 6 boots, a Shark off-road helmet and goggles, Thor body armour and camelpak. Arriving at LAX, I grabbed a rental car and made my way to the headquarters of RawHyde Adventures, an easy 45-minute ride north from the airport and into the Los Padres National Forest.





Upon arrival, my things were stowed in the bunkhouse - aptly renamed for this weekend the 'hen-house' - and introduced to Jim, wife Stephanie and daughter Jamie Lee. Helping them out this weekend were Darryl, a native Tasmanian temporarily transplanted to California, Jamie, a Cordon



Before actually getting on the bikes, Cheryl and Jeff wanted us to stretch. Since we'd be using muscles not normally used and moving in different positions, stretching and being more limber was very important. In addition to this was keeping hydrated, as muscles, especially the brain, tend

Bleu trained chef to ensure we were well-fed, and Jeff and Cheryl, the instructors who would put us through our paces. The other participants were Linda Masson from NYC, Judy Macaluso from Washington, D.C., Miranda Arens from Colorado, Kristi Martell, another journalist from California and Rachel



Westfall from Kawasaki and the daughter of Cheryl. All these women had varying degrees of off-road experience and were eager to expand that knowledge. Rounding out the group was Mark Kariya, photographer, to capture our experience.

That evening was spent getting to know one another and learning what would be thrown at us over the next two days. Jim gave us his background and how he started RawHyde Adventures - in short he began in the late '90s with adventure tours and in 2003 teamed up with BMW Motorcycles for the off-road training center, which exists today. The camp resides on 120 acres comprised of all types of terrain and there is 'Base Camp Alpha', about 200 miles away in the desert.

to fatigue easily in the heat, making concentrating and learning much more difficult. To this end, when signing in for the class you are given a personal water bottle which can be refilled from the many large water containers around the camp.

(Next Page)



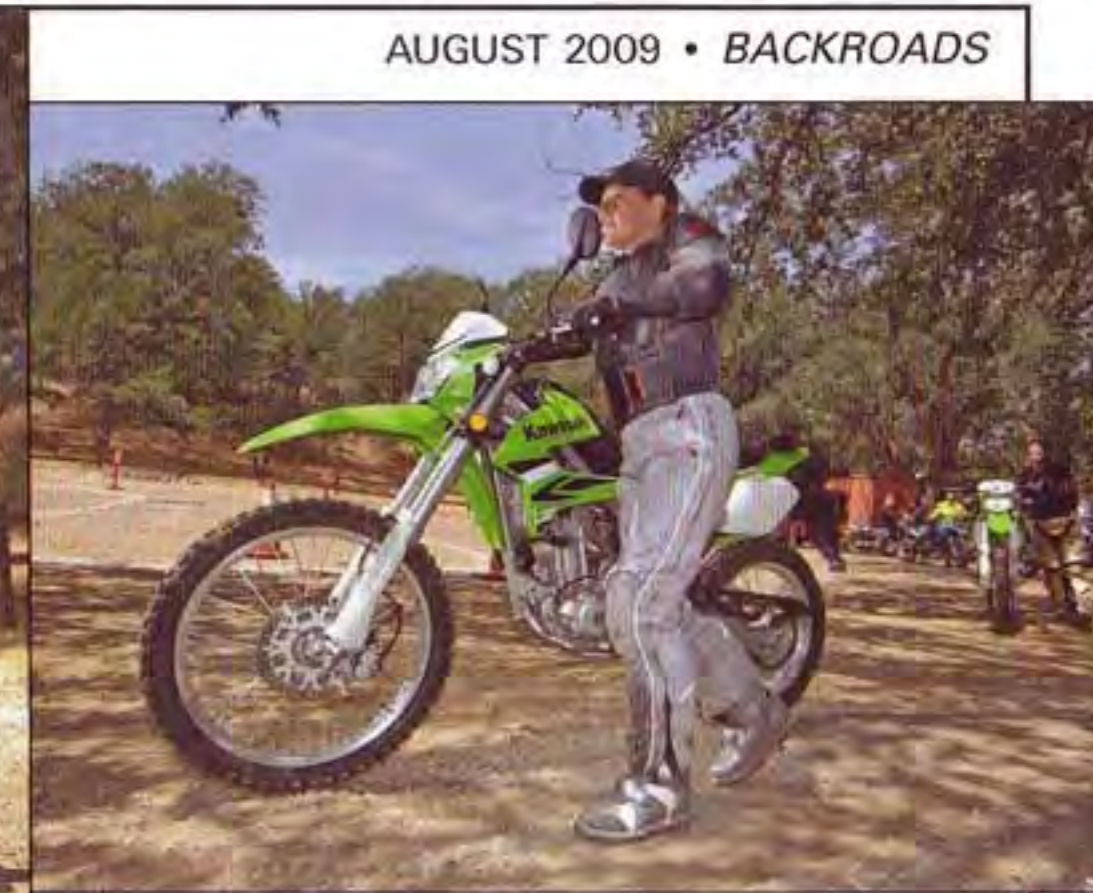
Up and fed, making sure the camelpak was fully stocked as it promised to be a hot day, we headed over to the bikes and Jim's introduction to the training. Although he is the chief instructor, he would be handing the reins to Cheryl and Jeff for this weekend. In his talk, he touched on seven points that beginner off-road riders might encounter - Uncertainty and not being used to the bike slipping on the surface; tension and proper positioning on the bike - stand on the balls of your feet, have knees almost locked, elbows out and don't have a death grip; adjusting to the bike's movement; standing and center of gravity; overcoming target fixation; controlling use of front brake and use of ABS (BMW-specific). He covered the set-up of the motorcycle and what to expect from the different movements on the bike.



Time to mount up and head down the driveway. This was the first test, as is stated on the sign at the entrance to the camp. The driveway is made up of broken asphalt, gravel, sand and dirt, with some twists and bumps thrown in for good measure. Standing while riding was not completely new to me, but maneuvering these was and we rode up and down several times until we felt comfortable with the bikes and the proper stance and positioning.

Next exercise was throwing a leg over the seat while riding-WHAT! Well, not as difficult as it sounds, though I had issues with actually getting my boot over the seat, not the action of doing it (note to self - don't wear BRAND NEW BOOTS on a training class before breaking in). This was to illustrate the importance of putting the weight to one side or another in a turn. For a street rider, this was quite counter-intuitive as we (street riders) lean into the turn and they (off-road riders) counterbalance the bike in a turn. Good fun!

Back to basics and practicing the friction zone of the clutch while walk-



ing the bike around the flat course in first gear. Here the Kawasaki KLX250S was at a definite advantage over the BMW650s, being much lighter in weight and less torquey. Progressing from walking to slow riding, we hit the course and cones and made our way up the hill to the



upper meadow area. Riding on the trail and putting the last few hours of information to use, I could see how riders became enamoured with this type of riding. Slowing things down and using completely different techniques was very exciting.

After a much needed lunch break, both to digest a very tasty offering of chili bowls, salad and homemade desserts and the also delectable information from the morning, I was able to take a 10 minute power nap to ensure I'd be fresh for the afternoon session. A couple of laps up and down the driveway and back to the compound for some braking exercises while standing - rear, controlled skid, front slow to stop and

front and rear without skidding. Not difficult, but I was having trouble finding my rear brake, as I rarely use it when street riding, and I wasn't used to the bulkiness of the off-road boots. As always, practice makes perfect, or in this case at least 3 out of 10 ain't bad.

Cone weave and body control was next on the agenda. The concept of turning your head to look where you want to go is used in all forms of riding, but combining this with counterbalancing and slow turns was something new. The cumulative exercises and repetitions paid off, as we were making our way through the course smoothly. Again, the KLX was a great vehicle for this, as it was nimble and responsive in addition to its light weight of only 277 lbs.



and leaning the body far to the right to counterbalance the motorcycle. In theory quite simple - in practice I really had to think about it. We headed down to an open meadow, cones in hand, to practice our figure eights and I found that lefts were pretty good while rights were my downfall, literally. Continuing with these exercises, we moved onto unlevel ground and different patterns.



Up to the top of the hill to concentrate on steep climb and decent. For anyone familiar with Adventure riding, riders and their eccentricities, you may have heard of the Adventure Challenge held at the RawHyde compound each year. We were able to see some of their obstacles, such as the teeter-totter. I was quite relieved to learn that was not

part of our training. Up here we were to concern ourselves with slow decents down steep hills, making our way up steep hills after a stall and just basically practicing all we'd learned so far on the trail set up. Jeff, once



again, did an excellent job of showing us how it was to be done, while we tried to emulate the best we could. With a small group of six, the training was very intimate and hands-on, and the exercises could be done as many times as needed to feel comfortable. Having reached our brain's limits, it was time to head back down

(Next Page)



Calling it a day, we retired to the much-needed showers and some cold beverages. Relaxing under the setting California sunshine in this beautifully serene setting while dining on another delicious meal, we discussed the day and I made it an early evening, as I was still on east coast time and wanted to be fresh for the next day's adventures.

Morning stretching and refreshing and it was on to turns. Cheryl and Jeff, using Rachel as a model, demonstrated the correct technique for turning. With bars and head turned to the left and, initially, weight on the left peg, one then shifts weight to the right while hooking the left knee on the seat for grip, to the point of lifting the left foot completely off the peg,



and, for me, hop off the bike for the last time. For Linda and Judy, the adventure would continue as they were heading out to Base Camp Alpha for a 200-mile ride



and overnight camping experience.

The facility is well set up and I truly appreciated the outdoor showers, even with the cold water, at the end of the day (Yes, there are indoor showers for the less adven-



turous). You would not expect to be fed so well at what is billed as an 'adventure camp'. From tasty appetizers to homemade desserts, one will not go away hungry, even after burning all those calories while riding and learning. Jim prides himself on his wine knowledge and has



quite a selection for when the bikes are parked. I was very impressed with the wine cellar on the property and certainly do have cellar envy.

Cheryl and Jeff did an admirable job dealing with the different levels of experience and making sure that everyone felt comfortable before moving on to the next lesson. While some had issues with different techniques, more time was spent with them while the others continued their own practice. Their attitudes were always up, even when Jeff was picking up my bike for the fourth time, and there was always encouragement.



I'm not a big one for 'ladies only' anything, but I have to say that I was happy to be a part of this group. As stated on their website, the ladies only rider training course is based on the "Intro to Adventure" rider training program, but has been mildly modified to suit the female rider. Our group was very supportive and there were no attitudes to deal with at all. The weekend starts with Friday evening and includes two days of instruction, with a two-day optional trail ride to Base Camp Alpha, all meals and drinks, three nights accommodations and a great experience, all for \$1295 (based on riding your own bike; Base Camp Alpha additional). There are, of course, other sessions with mixed gender ranging from entry to advanced training.

While I don't think I'll be making my way around the world on dirt like



other adventure riders, I do know that I now have a good foundation for the lighter side of adventure riding. While some things brought up made my eyes go wide, I was never expected to do anything that I didn't want to, but at the end of the day I was glad that I accepted the challenges and felt proud of my accomplishments. I am sorry that I couldn't experience Base Camp Alpha, but I look forward to a return visit and the next level of learning.

If this sounds like too much fun and you just can't believe that you haven't done it yet, go to www.rawhyde-offroad.com or call 213-713-5652.

