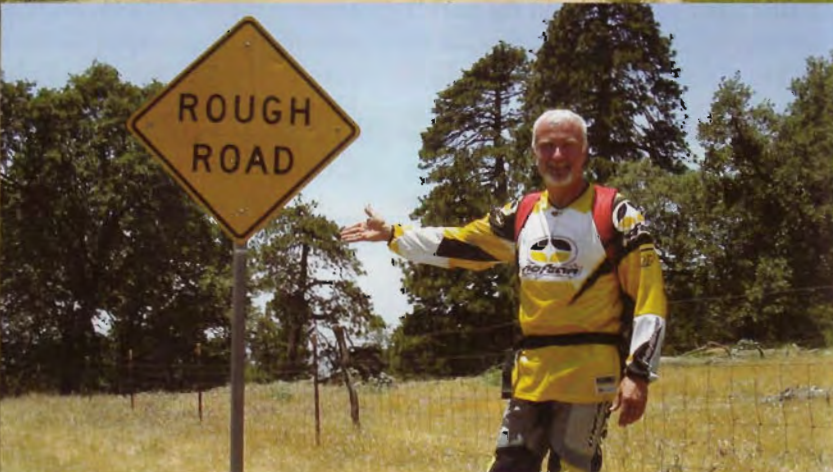


DOING DIRTY DEEDS

By Gary Prickett #29437

and Getting Away With It



“the RawHyde campsite is more like a four-star hotel on wheels, complete with hot showers and gourmet meals.”

It's called an Adventure Camp... a training program at a privately-owned enduro park dedicated to those of us who ride the “Big Enduros” like the BMW GS. And there I was, standing on the foot pegs of BMW's newest motorcycle, index and middle fingers of each hand covering the clutch and brake levers, traveling at a controlled rate of speed on a narrow dirt trail. I was preparing to employ the technique for doing a wheelie, lofting the front wheel over an obstacle such as one frequently encounters in such terrain. When our talented instructor had demonstrated the maneuver on this very bike not more than five minutes ago, he made it look easy. And, although I was having a bit of difficulty with this particular dirt riding technique, it was the ability to acquire just this type of skill that was being offered by this unique training experience.

I was attending the RawHyde Adventure Camp located on a 120-acre ranch in the mountains north of Los Angeles. The Adventure Camp is the brainchild and passion of Jim Hyde, an enthusiastic, gregarious and charismatic motorcyclist who has for several years been operating an adventure-oriented touring company called RawHyde Adventures.

Hyde got into enduro tours when he and Beach's Motorcycle Adventures decided to become partners in 2001.

Facing page (clockwise from top): 1. Executing maneuvers learned. 2. Successfully riding up and down this hill without dumping it was an impromptu part of the graduation ceremony. It resulted in cheers and high-fives all around. 3. From Jim Hyde's perspective, this is where the fun and adventure begins. 4. Holy Downhill, Batman! Can I really go down this sucker without crashing? (I did.) (Photo by Tom Reece)

RawHyde Adventure tours are multi-day, 1,000-mile excursions through the mountains and deserts of California. The clients traverse dirt trails while mounted on company-owned ATK Dual Sport motorcycles. However, what sets RawHyde apart from other adventure tours where the end of the day is pitching a tent and eating beans from a can, is that the RawHyde campsite is more like a four-star hotel on wheels, complete with hot showers and gourmet meals.

The idea for the training course I was attending arose from the fact that Hyde needed a place to evaluate the off-road riding abilities of his clients, and he needed an appropriate facility to conduct some fundamental riding skill classes for those who have signed up for an adventure tour. The 60-acre enduro facility has been designed and built for that specific purpose. It is from this background, and spurred by an article authored by Court Fisher that appeared in the April 2003 issue of *BMW ON*, that Jim began offering training courses to owners of adventure touring motorcycles.

Court Fisher's article featured information on the BMW sponsored off-road training schools located in Germany, England, Italy, South Africa and Argentina, noting that some of the training sites provide training on one's own or rentable BMW Motorcycles. Fisher's article posed the question, *Why not the USA?* Hyde read this article, noted the question and began laying plans to fill this void. What emerged is a multi-day Adventure Riding Training Course divided between skill building exercises designed to develop specific off-road riding techniques and real world practice sessions where students are provided the opportunity to implement the skills they

have been taught.

At the present time, RawHyde Adventures is not able to offer rentable BMWs, as are the BMW-sponsored schools offered in other countries. So clients are encouraged to use their own motorcycles since the skills being taught will enable the rider to learn the capabilities and limitations of their own bike. However, if the client is not able to ride a personal motorcycle, such as flying in from out of State, the ATKs and Suzukis are available for rent at \$135/day.

Participants of the RawHyde Adventure Camp arrived at the training site on Friday evening, giving everyone a chance to get acquainted over the first of four absolutely spectacular dinners we would be served. Equally enjoyable breakfasts and lunches were of course, also included. At this time, we were assigned our sleeping accommodations and provided with an orientation on the activities for the following four days. There was a variety of GS models ranging from an '81 R80GS to the '05 R1200GS on which I was mounted, with 650, 1100 and 1150 BMWs making up the largest proportion of motorcycles. Models from KTM and Honda were also in the mix.

The 11 riders ranged in age from 28 to 66 with an average age of 48, a reflection of the demographics of the BMW riding community in general. Although many of the riders had done some off-road riding in the past, there were several for whom this type of riding was a whole new experience. The common denominator was a willingness to face new challenges with a sense of having fun.

Personally, the first decade of my riding years was spent on dirt bikes in the deserts and mountains of California, but I had not done any off-road riding

Adventure Camp

The Adventure camp is a program aimed at people who want to go adventure riding and "get off the beaten path". You will learn the skills necessary to conquer the world, and you will learn about all the neat equipment that is available to help you do it.

Where: Adventure Camp takes place once a month at the easily accessible 42Bar Ranch, in Southern California. Located only an hour from Los Angeles International Airport and surrounded by the Angeles National forest, miles of rolling hills and Oak trees make a great setting for the experience. Located at 39950 Golden State Highway, Castaic, CA. 91310

What: A three-day program with arrival and welcome dinner on Friday night, rider training classes Saturday and Sunday. Adventure technology seminars explain things like GPS, Satellite phones, personal emergency beacons, etc. Half-day trail ride Sunday and Monday. Adventure Camp is all inclusive: meals, accommodations and beverages including premium beer and wine. Special dietary needs will be met: vegetarian, kosher, etc. The unique "Safari Camp" will be your home for the time you are with RawHyde Adventures. It provides a combination of luxury camping, gourmet food and all the services you expect from a good hotel.

When: Adventure Camp is scheduled monthly. Call (213) 713-5652 for dates or check the web at www.rawhyde-offroad.com.

How Much: RawHyde Adventures offers Adventure Camp in two formats: Beginner and Advanced. Beginning class is \$1095; Advanced classes with celebrity instructors, (like Jimmy Lewis) \$1295.

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for over 20 years. I learned over the course of Adventure Camp that not only were these big, powerful 4-stroke bikes very different, and generally superior to the *ring-ding-ding* 2-strokes on which I learned to ride (or more appropriately, point, shoot and pray), but that being self-taught I had a knowledge gap along with some bad habits that needed to be resolved.

In any learning experience, it is advantageous to be taught by someone who is tops in that particular field. This was certainly the case for us because our guest instructor for the first two days was none other than Jimmy Lewis. Jimmy was ably assisted in his teaching duties by his charming wife, Heather and teen-age protégé, Ryan Hanna.

Class sessions consisted of a build-up block series of exercises that were first explained in detail, demonstrated by Jimmy or one of his assistants, and then practiced by us, with plenty of coaching and encouragement along the way. Whether we were accomplishing lock-to-lock turns while standing on the pegs, conquering a steep, rutted downhill section while using the front brake and clutch to control speed, or turning the bike around on a hill, we were being instructed to slow down and coordinate the use of the throttle, clutch and brakes while at the same time shifting body position and weight for optimum results.

(*Whew! It got a whole lot more complicated than walking and chewing gum at the same time.*) Fortunately, we were all able to achieve some level of success in each exercise, although yours truly is still working on getting the front wheel of a big GS off the ground in a functional wheelie.

The last half of Day 2 was spent on a trail ride at the nearby Hungry Valley OHV Park. This gave us the opportunity to practice the skills we had acquired thus far. This was also the theme of Days 3 and 4 when we got away from the training facility into *real world* off-road riding. Conditions ranged from smoothly-graded dirt, to rutted jeep trails to single track, gnarly trails as well as hills, sand and gravel challenged all of us but defeated none. We were all having a great time playing in the dirt.

Although the purpose of Adventure Camp is to acquire and hone off-road riding skills, there were other aspects that added to enjoyment of the experience. As already mentioned, the food and accommodations were first class and the camaraderie among everyone was a significant factor in providing such a memorable time. Mealtimes always offered the opportunity to swap stories and get to know each other. Among the more memorable conversations were those shared with Jimmy and Heather Lewis.

From Jimmy we learned that the Paris



The author being coached on the finer points of body and hand position by Jimmy Lewis.

to Dakar Race is as much about team strategy and mind games as high speed endurance riding. For example, since Jimmy had better navigation skills than many of the riders on competitive teams, he would often find himself being followed by his rivals. This led to a tactic in which Jimmy along with one or more of his similarly outfitted teammates would speed off into the desert in a direction other than the correct one with a string of competitors in hot pursuit. As some predetermined point and obstructed from his competitor's view by the dust cloud he and his teammates were leaving in their wake, Jimmy would peel off in the correct direction while one or more of his teammates continued laying a false trail. By the time his competitors realized that they had been duped, Jimmy had picked up valuable time, and his competitors had to contend with getting back on course.

Heather told the story of Jimmy riding for days with torn tendons in both forearms as well as a broken collar bone. When he finally finished the race, he asked an official to verify that he had indeed crossed the finish line, and upon being assured that he had said, "Good. Now, please take me to the hospital."

Other leisure and mealtime conversations often centered on what we had learned during the progression of Adventure Camp. A few of the comments were: "Got rid of some bad habits," "Acquired braking skills," "Learned to slide the rear wheel to make a sharp turn," "Increased skills on multiple levels," "Learned more about the limits of my motorcycle," "Lost my fear of riding in the dirt," "Learned to use the clutch to control engine speed," "Gained confidence through technique," "Learned counter weighting," "Learned coordinated clutch and brake control" and "Every dealer of an adventure touring motorcycle should be selling this training course just as they sell accessories."

The MSF has a saying related to their basic and experienced riding courses: "The more you know, the better it gets." This certainly applies to my experience at the RawHyde Adventure Camp, having learned skills that provide far greater proficiency and confidence in off-road riding than I had when I entered the gate on Friday evening. Yup! I definitely think I could get to like this Adventure Motorcycle Touring stuff.



Definitely not roughing it. Air conditioned rooms with queen size beds on top – showers, toilets and wash basins below. Camping just doesn't get much better than this.



Not quite roughing it. Tents on top – stowage below.



First morning of instructions.

DOWN and DIRTY with the R1200GS

It's always fun and exciting to experience a new motorcycle and contributing to my enjoyment of the RawHyde Adventure Camp was the opportunity to ride the new 2005 R1200GS in a variety of on-road and off-road conditions. Since my personal ride is a 2004 R1150GS, I was mentally comparing these two models during the week in which I had the 1200 in my possession.

Power-to-weight characteristics seemed nearly perfect. After all, what's *not* to like about more power and less weight than previous models? Throttle response, braking manners, gear shifting, riding position and absence of engine vibration were all to my enthusiastic liking. Because of the new frame and body work, the bike feels substantially smaller than my 1150GS. In addition, I could almost plant both feet flat on the ground, a condition accomplished on my R1150GS only by installing aftermarket



The author, ready to embark on his first off-road adventure in more than 20 years.

shocks equipped with shafts one inch shorter than stock.

Fortunately, the wheels of the 1200 were shod with Continental Twinduro knobby tires which provided much improved traction in the dirt compared with the pavement-oriented dual purpose tires that come standard on the GS. I was also impressed with the performance of these tires on paved roads. They had little of the squirminess I have heard is typical when operating on pave-

ment with knobby tires.

As expected, the added power and lower weight of the new 1200 compared with the earlier 1100 and 1150 GS models, only added to the bike's capability in both on-road and off-road conditions. Although additional horsepower is always welcomed, it is the smoothness with which this power is delivered that makes the real difference, especially in off-road riding conditions. The precise, incremental throttle control, as taught by Jimmy Lewis, was easily executed on the 1200. Noticeably absent, compared with my 1150, was the rather abrupt transition from a fully *off* to slightly *on* throttle position, so characteristic of electronic fuel injection systems. The redesigned engine management system that includes among other things, individual throttle position and oxygen sensors for each cylinder has apparently made this possible.

The reduced weight not only makes the bike easier to handle, but noticeably easier to pick up from a fallen position. Yes, there were a number of times during the four days of riding in the dirt that the bike and I got up close and personal with terra firma. Fortunately for both bike and body, all these incidences were under low speed or no speed circumstances.

There are two aspects of laying the bike down that seem worth mention-



PHOTO BY MALINCE

ing. The first is the absence of valve cover guards, enabling the valve covers to come into direct contact with the ground thereby looking the worse for wear after a few tumbles. In addition, I have been informed that in the quest for lowered weight, the thickness of the valve covers are less than on previous models, making them slightly more prone to breaking on impact. Fortunately, I did not experience this potentially disabling condition, however knowing that it is an imminent possibility convinces me that valve cover guards will be among the first accessories I purchase for the R1200GS that looms in my future.

The second aspect of dropping the bike has to do with the lack of a conventional gas tank such as is present on earlier boxer GS models, and this is a good thing. If one drops a bike with a conventional tank, and that tank comes into contact with an object such as a rock, tree stump, etc., it will end up being at least scratched if not also dented. The gas tank of the 1200GS is hidden by plastic panels, a design and styling touch introduced on the later F650 models. On the 1200 I was riding, the finish of these side panels was flat black. Not only did they look good in contrast to the yellow color of the top cover and front wheel beak but I can imagine being able to do a respectable touch-up repair with a spray can of flat black paint. In addition, the cost to repair or replace one of these side panels has to be less expensive than would be the case with a conventional gas tank.

Also worth noting is that the 1200 I was riding was fitted with the alloy wheels. Although good looking, less expensive, lighter and easier to clean than spoke wheels, they are not up to the challenge of riding off-road, especially when operating with the lowered air pressures recommended for such riding. While traveling down a dirt trail that had an estimated 10-degree slope, I encountered a series of transverse, sharp edged ruts, the unavoidable one in my path being about eight inches wide. With a forward speed less than 15 mph, I blipped the throttle, shifted my weight rearward at the same time giving the handlebars a tug in an effort to lighten the front end. Both wheels smacked into the edge of the rut, the

bike remaining upright as I continued to the bottom of the hill. Inspection revealed that the front wheel had acquired a flat spot, not enough to cause a loss of tire pressure, but noticeable none-the-less.

The cost to change from alloy to spoke wheels at the time of new bike purchase is \$135. I feel this is a worthwhile expense if one has any intention at all of venturing onto the dirt, or if one simply wants to reduce the chances of denting a rim while encountering one of the teeth-jarring potholes that are often present on paved roads. Naturally, this rim denting might not have happened had the tires been inflated to street riding pressures but I was riding in the dirt and had inflation pressures adjusted for that riding condition.

Other than as noted, I liked every aspect of the bike except the seat, which begins to cause discomfort after 1-1/2 hours of continuous riding. However, that has been the case with every stock seat on every motorcycle I have owned during the past 20 years. I have gotten into the habit of adding the cost of a custom seat to my motorcycle buying budget and that will obviously continue to be the case.

I am certain I would have benefited from the Rawhide Adventure Camp just as much, even if I had not been able to play on the R1200GS. However, having BMW's newest model to ride for 800 miles under varied conditions certainly heightened my enjoyment of the experience, as well as confirming what will be replacing my R1150GS somewhere down the road.



Heather Lewis presents me with my diploma from the Jimmy Lewis University of Off-Road Riding. I didn't exactly graduate Magna Cum Laude...

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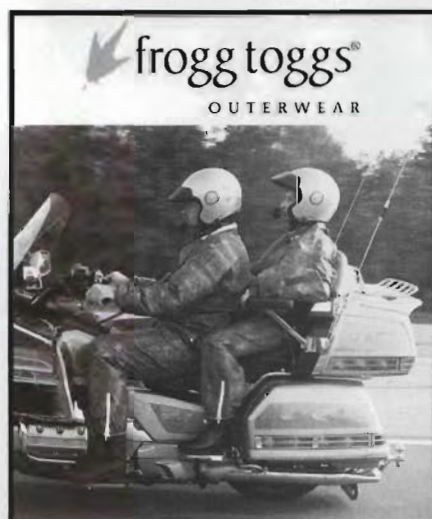
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