

Let's get dirty.

Pitbull goes to camp

by Debbie Macdonald
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In this world of ever-increasing chrome and custom motorcycles that beg to be polished and shined, bikes that all too often spend less time on the road and more time on the showroom floor, the garage or the back of a trailer on the way to a bike show, Buell has come out with a motorcycle that asks just the opposite. Join me at Buell Adventure Camp, where I get to discover the dirty side of motorcycling on the new adventure sportbike, the Ulysses XB12X.

fact that the Buell Motor Company is letting us take their fleet of bikes on this adventure.

I have to be honest, I am scared for two reasons: Number one, I hate gravel. My husband can testify to the fact that I have no love of the gravel road, regardless of the fact that we have an uphill, rutted gravel driveway that I have had to learn to maneuver in and out of every time I want to ride. Number two, the bike—I have had the chance to ride the Ulysses on the street and although I love the design and the ride, what I don't like is the height of the bike in relation to me. I am not able to stand flat-footed at a stop. I am hoping that I



Day one: A crash course

We arrived at the ranch at 8:30 a.m. for a gourmet breakfast provided by their Cordon Bleu-trained chef, Jeff Gallegos. We were introduced to the training staff, which included owner Jim Hyde; Cheryl Westfall, MSF instructor and dirt bike rider extraordinaire; and Raphael Bertolus, a former trainee turned trainer. Also joining us were H-D/Buell staffers Leslie

90/10 percent street-to-dirt ratio, this could be the bike for the job.

To test that theory, our training team of Jim, Cheryl and Raphael would spend another hour preparing us for our day, starting with the fact that almost all of the skills would be performed in the dirt and gravel, while standing on the footpegs—yes, standing on the footpegs—and also constantly looking ahead, not down at the road, which would prove to be a big challenge for me. The list of skills that we would be trying to learn and master for the day included throttle control, slow riding, braking techniques, and maneuvering techniques.



I will be joining a group of journalists and H-D/Buell staffers for a two-day off-road training course, put together by RawHyde Adventures. We will be learning the skills needed to put this bike through the rigors of off-roading. Everyone along for this ride has little or no off-road experience and little or no experience on the Ulysses. I am going to find out just how dirty I can get.

I like the idea of the Ulysses; I like the fact that riders will be able to go pretty much anywhere they want to go, regardless of the road conditions. This opens up a whole new world of riding experience and adventures that are not limited to pavement. I am very curious to see how the bike measures up to this (and how I measure up). I also like the

will learn some techniques in this course that will assuage the fears that I have.

We start at RawHyde Adventures, owned by Jim Hyde, an avid off-road rider who has turned his 120-acre cattle ranch into an enduro park. He has put together three different programs to train riders, from novice to experienced, in the skills needed to feel more comfortable on dirt roads. The training courses are three days long—two days of training culminating in a ride on the last day to use the skills learned. He has put together a two-day course for us, which will cover the basics on day one and the ride the next day.

Hudson and Jessica Craker from the H-D Communications department and Tony Stefanelli, XB platform director. And I can't forget the support staff, Gene and Thomas from Fleet Services, who would be invaluable in keeping the bikes in good shape for the next two days of training. Or should I say thrashing?

The first order of business was to learn about the Ulysses; the history and design features of the bike were gone over in an hourlong walk-around by Tony Stefanelli. Tony, an accomplished dirt bike rider, knew every facet of every design feature of the bike. You could tell he was very excited about the bike. He went into great detail of what went into the designing and testing of this bike, from handlebar and footpeg placement to tire tread design. The fact that they are touting this as an adventure sportbike really means that the bike is designed to be able to go from the street to the dirt with ease. By merely changing tire pressure and shock preloads, you can go anywhere you want to. This is not to say that it is a dirt bike, but for the

We mounted up to get started on what was looking to be a long hard day of work. We hadn't gone far before I fell over—only a few feet. I hadn't even made it to the first skills test and I was on the ground with a broken clutch lever. I was hoping that this was not how the rest of the day would go, but at least the pressure was off. I had been the first one to fall over; I was now president of the club that almost everyone would soon join.

The ranch is set up with a number of training areas for each skill to be worked on: the road in and out, a paddock pasture and then up the hill to the whoops (more on that later). First on the list was to ride to the bottom of the road and back standing up, experimenting with acceleration and deceleration with throttle control, not using the brakes.

See "Adventure Camp," page 84, column 1



Instructors Cheryl, Jim and Raphael

Adventure Camp

Continued from page 83

The road into the ranch is a hard-packed gravel road with just a few ruts to maneuver over and around, some tight turns and potholes—a fine start for the day. It took a little while to get used to standing on the pegs on the balls of my feet. A few questions were rolling around in my head during this exercise, like how do you brake? I was hoping at some point in the day we would find this out.

We regrouped at the bottom of the road, talked a little about the ride then turned around to ride up the road. Each time we would stop and talk about the experience and/or problems we'd had with each skill. I think my biggest problem was parking the bike in the gravel and getting turned around in the gravel without falling over again. We did keep Gene and Thomas busy, replacing clutch and brake levers mostly, and a mirror or two, but nothing more major than that. With its unique design and "frame pucks" on the gas tank, the bike seemed to be able to handle the slow speed tip-overs that were occurring during the day.

After our discussion of the road exercise, we moved into the pasture area of the ranch, which had an oval dirt track that went up into an orchard area and back down into a fenced off pasture. This is where most of the skills training took place. We would each go around the pasture a number of times for each skill, with Jim, Cheryl and Raphael directing us at different points in the process.

I felt more and more comfortable on the bike with each skill exercise—riding real slow, using throttle control over braking, and trail stops, which essentially allow you to stop long enough to look at something without putting your feet down and then continue on your ride. We practiced acceleration and braking without falling over, braking exercises without losing control, applying the rear brake from 15 mph, and keeping one foot on the brake and one foot on the ground. Rear brake skids had us zooming up to a set of cones and braking in the allotted space without falling over. "Panic stops" was another fun exercise for when that deer jumps out in front of you. I was doing it and keeping in control and keeping the bike upright, while keeping my eyes ahead, not looking down at the ground, and standing on the footpegs.

I was feeling fairly good about myself and the skills we had been mastering that morning. Almost everyone had joined my club—even the riders with some off-road experience were hitting the dirt at some point. The bikes were holding up better than I had imagined, with only minor scrapes. Then one of the riders came around the course a little too fast, grabbed a handful of front brake and slammed to the ground. I am sorry to say that he hit a little too hard and off to the hospital he went. We found out later that he had broken his collarbone in two places. This put a slight damper on the rest of the day but did not deter the rest of us from soldiering on.

By now we were ready for lunch, another gourmet meal that would indeed get us through the rest of the day, which consisted of a skill I was hoping

to master even on my street bike: 180-degree turns. This is not a skill I can do with ease on the street and it turned out to be even harder in the dirt. I did fairly well, but I went down pretty hard at one point, mainly because I did not trust that the bike would indeed follow where I was looking through the turn. I instead looked down and that is exactly where I went. Initially I thought I had broken my ankle as the bike landed on my foot and leg pretty hard, but I got up, shook myself off and continued with the exercise.

Next we headed up the hill to what they called the whoops, a series of humps that we would ride over in succession in a variety of ways, all the while looking up and forward to where we were going. We first rode the whoops sitting down, stopping at the top of each hump and putting our feet down to get the feel of it. The next test would be to ride up and over two of them, stopping on the third to put our feet down, then



continuing on. The third and final exercise would be to ride over all of them while standing on the pegs, keeping in control and not stopping. I have to tell you this exercise was exciting to say the least. I managed to do it without falling over. This was one of the highlights of the day; it was both fun and challenging.

When we were done with this we were able to do a little dirt riding on one of the trails that looped around the whoops. This gave us the chance to use all the skills we had spent all day trying to master. I felt free and easy; I was able to do what I thought I would never be able to do and it was so much fun. I was starting to look forward to our ride the next day. But we still had one more skill to master today and I could tell I was tired and worn out. Could I master the one skill I was really not good at, 180 off-camber turns?

We took a break and reconvened back at the orchard area, where they have a series of tight 180-degree off-camber uphill turns that twist through the trees. I knew at this point I was taking the biggest chance of the day, being tired and afraid of this course, but I gave it a shot anyway. We walked the course following Jim through the turns talking about how to use our legs and body weight to maneuver through these turns to keep the

bike from tipping the way gravity wants it to go on off-camber turns.

I did not make the first turn and went off the bike. I'd learned enough from my last fall to jump away from the bike, which sent me running across the field trying to catch myself, but I ended up falling over onto the ground. I only bruised my hand on that one, but I knew enough at that point to be done for the day. I sat the rest of the exercise out, watching some of our group make it to the top and some doing what I had just done, crashing into the ground. It was a fine way to end the day: a little battered and bruised but in great shape nonetheless. I had survived the day and learned a great deal.

We were treated to some great hors d'oeuvres and drinks before heading back to the hotel for a much-needed shower and dinner with the whole group. I went to bed with great anticipation for our ride the next day.

Day two: reaping the rewards

I had great expectations for the second half of the course. I was tired and bruised from the day before but I was also ready for the ride. I wanted to use the skills I had learned on some real off-road riding. I was not to be disappointed. We did a total of 150 miles that day. We started with some freeway riding at high speeds, and some great twisty mountain roads. This bike can handle it all. The other half of the day's riding was on a mostly hard-packed gravel road that had some challenging deep sandy areas.

I was glad that most of the second day was spent on a nice flat road; I knew I was not yet ready for the challenges of real dirt bike riding. No spills this day, and I was amazed that I could spend the whole time standing on the pegs—I could use my body weight on the footpegs to guide the bike around turns and get some speed up in the heaviest of sand and not feel out of control. I do still have tight-radius turning issues that I need to work on, but I never felt that the bike could not go where I wanted it to go. The only limitations this bike has are the limitations of the rider.

This was one of the best experiences I have had in my riding career. I have learned so many skills that will continue to make my riding better and better. I no longer have a fear of gravel and I have a better feel for riding taller bikes. I owe all of this to the great training staff at RawHyde Adventures and the folks at Buell. If you would like to check out RawHyde for an adventure of your own, visit www.rawhyde-offroad.com. For more information on the Buell Ulysses XB12X, visit www.buell.com. ♦

