



Sidetracked

ADVENTURE RIDING: What's It to YOU?

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Adventure: *A bold, unusually risky undertaking or hazardous action of uncertain outcome.*

“Where’s Kurt?” I ask, as Disco pulls his bike up beside mine.

“I passed him a couple miles back. He won’t be riding that KTM anytime soon. His rear wheel spun clean off the hub.”

This is supposed to be a 50-mile backcountry trail ride near Dover, AR. Just before Disco showed up, Devro said we were two hours ahead of schedule. I wish he had kept that thought to himself. I turn my Beta 525 RS back into the dense woods and hit the gas. This could be a long day.

My mind is busy engineering a plan as I scamper over rocks, ruts, a few fallen logs, and a couple of creek crossings. How will we get Kurt and what remains of his bike back to civilization? This trail is no place for a pickup, and the bike won’t move. Or will it? What began as a typical “good ol’ boys” dual sport event appears to have the makings of an adventure ride.

The concept, under different names, is as old as the 1885 Daimler. In its current form, “adventure riding” has been argued, defined, cussed, and discussed since Charley Boorman and Ewan McGregor rode their BMW R 1150 GSs around the world along with fixers and a film crew back in 2004. Call it what you want, but they started an avalanche among the dual sport community. Suddenly, hoards of those stubby, knobby tired two-wheeled behemoths, with saddle heights more suitable to an NBA power forward than an average Joe, were being outfitted for world travel.

Motorcycle manufacturers chimed in with various renditions of the adventure bike, and they grew taller, more powerful, and more complex. These new machines were hastily accessorized or “farkled” (a contraction of function and sparkle), which surfaced about the time adventure riding emerged. Aftermarket providers have evolved from metal benders stamping out skid plates and ammo-can boxes to creative geniuses building finely molded, laser-cut works of art that protect every conceivable component against mud and rocks. And let us not forget the frustrated mechanics needing to service them.

These machines are often found on eBay or Craigslist with the comments “never off-road” or “never down,” suggesting that nobody really used them for their intended purpose. And there is often a list of extras totaling a quarter of the bike’s formidable cost.

Sadly, fearful ownership is as close as some riders get to the sweet unknown lying beyond a conservative trip’s careful planning and perfect execution. All too often, once the farm is hocked and the bike purchased, all spousal chips have been cashed and any thought of scratching those farkles brings on a cold sweat. “It cost too much. I couldn’t bear to damage it; besides, the wife would kill me.”

Those riders will never know the joy of sitting beside the tent after a day of hard-won miles and watching their campfire reflecting off the few remaining shiny parts of the machine.

But adventure riding is not about displacement, miles, or border crossings. It is a state of mind, a gut sensation, the hint of fear when you’ve strayed beyond the box, or

discovered “no service” on the cell. It can also be a bunch of hillbillies exploring the backroads of Arkansas on race-bred dual sports or a woman riding solo across the U.S. on a Triumph Bonneville. It’s that culmination of stretching boundaries, finding you’ve gone too far, and then coming back again safely, stronger, smarter, and more courageous because you did it for a day, a week, or a year. It’s personal.

When I come upon the group, everyone is scratching their heads and somebody says something about a helicopter. Kurt is off by himself in deep thought.

Offering my questionable solution, I speak up. “Kurt, here’s an axle wrench and vise grips. Why don’t you pull that wheel and chain. We’re going to make a skid.”

Devro whips out a dull folding tree saw and commences to hack his way through a log. As we finish strapping the contraption into place, somebody asks, “Will this work?”

“I dunno,” I reply. “But it will keep us busy until someone comes up with a better idea.”

With my Beta tied to Kurt’s bike, and Josh, the lightest of our crew, astride the broken machine, I twist the throttle. Halfway to the highway, the Beta begins to smoke ... it is overheating and the clutch is almost gone. I stop to let it cool, and it occurs to me that Devro definitely jinxed us when he said we were ahead of schedule. I pray the Beta will hold out ‘til we reach the highway.

Tonight, by the campfire, we will tell our story. Lord knows we couldn’t have planned this. We are adventure riders. **RR**