

## Sidetracked

FLY AND  
RIDE

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The ad read, “2007 BMW R 1200 GS Adventure, low miles, pristine mechanically and cosmetically.” I can’t resist the allure of an older bike in good condition. Many of these machines hit the sweet spot in technology and reliability and, armed with a little knowledge and a few mileage points from my United Airlines Visa, I can be dangerous. The price seemed fair enough and the seller was willing to negotiate a bit to help with travel costs. My eye caught the glimmer and I turned toward the bait ...

Years ago, I would occasionally fly across the country, checking out airplanes for prospective buyers, usually after detailed communication intended to determine their true condition. As a licensed aircraft mechanic (A&P), I was supposedly qualified to ascertain the airworthiness of flying machines. There are, however, many nuances to such an interaction and it could be more challenging to discover the honesty and competency of a seller than to find hidden corrosion in a wing or fuselage. It was my job to sort out both. Sometimes undisclosed issues would crop up, requiring me to further negotiate price or pass, and press the seller for my time and travel expenses. My questions were choreographed to anticipate most variables and to set the stage in case of surprises. There were times when, in light of the fact that the airplane was not as represented, negotiations went strongly in my favor once on site. I recall purchasing an old Taylorcraft BL-65, priced at \$3,500, for \$1,500 and flying it home with duct tape on a wingtip and a jury-rigged



landing gear because a recent ground loop had slipped the mind of the seller.

But I am a glass-half-full kind of guy so I prefer to look for the good in people, which in fact is usually there; and motorcycles are generally easier to evaluate than the internal workings of a tube and fabric airplane.

Besides, what is motorcycling about if not adventure? The idea of flying halfway across the continent to bring home a new-to-me bike definitely has the makings. But what to ask? How does one set the stage for a successful purchase? With a relatively new bike, it’s fairly straightforward. A simple understanding of remaining warranty, a few photos, and logistical navigation of title and lien status may be sufficient. In a burst of enthusiasm, people often buy the wrong bike or situations change, forcing an early parting with their dream machine. Sometimes the seller is willing to take that initial hit in order to relieve debt, especially at the end of riding season, and the cost savings may allow room for an airline ticket. Even if return expenses put the buyer in the negative cost realm, it can be worth it to find the right motorcycle and to experience the ride.

Then there are the older machines—low mileage ones that might have been garage queens, or those that may have been wrecked and hastily rebuilt. If you know you are buying a restored bike, so be it, but regardless of age and mileage, carefully view quality photos, ask detailed questions about such things

as drivetrain condition, wear marks on the frame, visible corrosion on bolts or aluminum parts, and, of course, crash history. You might consider asking a mechanic to help prepare your query. Maintenance records are a plus, and be sure to check recall status where applicable, which can be verified by submitting the VIN to an authorized dealer. Your questions for the seller will vary, but one common to any fly and ride should be, “If there are any surprises upon my inspection, will you take those into consideration, and compensate accordingly?” If the answer is no, or you sense discomfort or hesitation, pass. The seller could be hiding something or may be unsure of the real condition of the machine. And of course, there is always the option of having the bike inspected by a qualified individual before sending your deposit.

... The Beemer was in fact very nice in appearance. A brief test ride disclosed a front brake pulsation, which the seller said he had not noticed, but the price was still reasonable so I didn’t make a fuss. A leaky rear shock cropped up on the way home, but otherwise the bike was as advertised. I could have pressed the seller harder, as I had during my fly and fly days, but it wasn’t worth the effort.

My trip home was magical. With the miracle of social media I was able to couch surf more than 1,700 miles across the nation. Old friends came out of the woodwork to put me up and new ones stepped up to provide a bed. And I ended up with an *almost* pristine machine for my trouble. **RR**