



Bill Dragoo sits at home in Norman with his BMW R1200 S adventure bike. Dragoo plans to travel to South Africa to ride in an adventure motorcycle competition.

PHOTO BY STEVE GOOCH, THE OKLAHOMAN

African adventure ahead

SKILL THRILLS | NORMAN RIDER WINS SPOT ON AMERICAN TEAM AT ADVENTURE MOTORCYCLING EVENT

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Alone on a mountain pass in Colorado, his 800-pound motorcycle stuck in a snow drift as sleet began to fall, Bill Dragoo decided it was time to push the button on his emergency satellite transmitter — the one that told everyone he was just fine.

As one of America's top adventure motorcycle riders, Dragoo had been in such predicaments before. In the coming days, the Norman man might find himself in more of them.

On Thursday, Dragoo will head to Africa as a member of a three-man team that will represent America in the BMW International GS Trophy in South Africa. The weeklong event will pit 10 teams from different countries, all riding identical BMW-supplied adventure motorcycles, against each other on a loop through the wilds of South Afri-



Bill Dragoo competes in an adventure riding challenge in California last spring. His second-place finish landed him a spot on a U.S. team that will compete in Africa.

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ca, Swaziland and Mozambique. Dragoo, at 55 one of the event's oldest riders, expects to face rugged mountain trails, dense jungles, rivers, deserts and more. "There are all kinds of terrain

down there that we will be dealing with," he said. "How well we work together as a team will be scored."

Adventure riding combines elements of all types of riding,

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from motocross and racing to slow-speed skills and off-road navigation across diverse landscapes.

"It's the culmination of everything any motorcyclist could ever learn," Dragoo said. "We don't always know what we're going to get into."

Dragoo, who often writes about his adventures for motorcycle magazines, won his spot on

SEE RIDER, PAGE 3C

Rider: Lifetime of riding will help

FROM PAGE 1C

the U.S. team by placing second among more than 50 riders at a qualifying event last spring in California.

For the Africa trek, Dragoo will draw from a lifetime of riding. It began when, as a boy, Dragoo got his first close-up look at a Honda 350. "When the motor started, the die was cast," he recalled.

He went on to all kinds of motorcycling, including amateur motocross racing, road cruising, enduro riding and about any other travel on two wheels with an engine — or without, for that matter. Dragoo has won Oklahoma mountain biking championships in the beginner and sport classes.

His other interests have helped, arming him with self-reliance and a knack for working with all things mechanical. He spent most of his professional career running service and parts departments for auto dealerships. He also worked as an aircraft mechanic and a flight instructor. Now semiretired, Dragoo enjoys woodworking and construction at his home in Norman. He has



Bill Dragoo stops by the ocean along California's Highway 1 on his adventure bike.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY BILL DRAGOO

built several rooms there using Old World craftsmanship, including an office with a polyurethane floor he embedded with 25,000 pennies, a retreat he calls "Walden."

But his passion is his mechanic's shop, which has a wooden plank floor, exposed beams and metal truss braces featuring the Harley logo he fashioned with a plasma cutter. "It was done to look like a 1930s-era Harley Davidson shop," he explained.

This is where he keeps his machines — a KLR 650

dual sport, a BMW R1200S adventure bike and a Harley Dyna Sport road bike that Dragoo used to take his 72-year-old mother to Canada and back a couple of years ago. It's also where Susan Dragoo, Bill's wife, keeps her BMW 650 GS for when she wants to hang with the guys or her biker girlfriends.

For Bill Dragoo, there's nothing better than when the two-wheeling experience, the mechanical stuff, the determination and the effort of running steps in

Oklahoma Memorial Stadium to keep in shape come together. And for that, whether it's alone on a mountain pass or with a team in the jungle, there's nothing better than adventure riding, he said.

"It's beyond-belief fun. It's beyond-explanation fun," he said. "There's something about developing skills that take you places you couldn't or wouldn't go otherwise, then accurately applying those skills to go those places, that is indescribable."