



Sidetracked

# TURKEY SCOUT

Text and Photography: Bill Dragoo

*“Be Prepared!” The Boy Scout motto is a good mantra to live by. Unfortunately, even as a bona fide Eagle Scout my adherence to the wisdom often undulates.*

“Flat again! Come get me.” These words, texted to the rescue team (my wife), articulate a reluctant tossing-in of the towel after a completely unnecessary ordeal. Three days earlier I was on top of my game, dancing through the creeks and hollers of Arkansas astride my BMW R 1200 GS. I’ve always said that an adventure rider makes a thousand important decisions every day and they must all be right. Now, here I sit beside the interstate with trucks flying past at warp speed, staring at a lumpy string of patches that was once a 21-inch inner tube. A discarded grandfather clock lies broken in the ditch beside me, as if to say, “Not your day either, huh?”

Neither of us belongs here. If you know a little about BMWs, you might ask why I have an inner tube in my wheel at all, let alone a 21-inch. The R 1200 GS uses tubeless tires in a 19-inch front and 17-inch rear combination. Please, grab a cup and allow me to explain.

Remember those aforementioned correct decisions? On pavement, even among other road users, we are blessed with a lot of flexibility. Evidence of this exists all around us. Daily we see folks talking, texting, eating, and entertaining children, all while piloting multi-ton padded projectiles to and fro. Aside from the occasional inadvertent crunch and subsequent airbag deployment-induced breakage of sunglasses, most make it home without incident.

There is no disrespect intended here, but very few give much thought to the opposing projectile, the concrete curb, or the tools, if any, in their trunk. Preparation seldom stretches beyond the reach of a AAA card.

Contrast that to those whose primal instincts more often than not drive the decision-making process, influencing not only how far off the grid they might stray, but the degree of security they are willing to forfeit in the name of adventure. People have long sought to find themselves by becoming lost among the depths of the wilderness, carrying only the bare necessities and their favorite flavor of emergency preparedness. For them, those essential decisions begin before leaving home, as the weather is considered and Forest Service or local experts are queried for water levels, mud slides, hunting activity, and other factors that might affect successful route planning.

Once on the bike, speed is moderated according to skill, depth of ruts, gauge of roots, size, frequency and fluidity of rocks, and consistency of sand, not speed limit signs. Successful navigation of these and other obstacles largely depends upon how adept we are at missing them or knowing just how to strike them. I always fancied myself as pretty good at stringing together great decisions. The fall often lurks in the shadow of one’s pride.

I never saw the rock that hammered a bead-breaking dent in my rim. I had briefly considered adding a touch of air to my soft front tire, but instead neglected the prudent policy of carrying 30 psi in rocky terrain to protect

my rims against an errant strike. It’s always the other guy who sits by the trail while I or a capable friend pound his rim back into shape, sew up his torn sidewall with safety wire, or install an inner tube so his “tubeless” tire can be reinflated and ridden home.

Being the good Boy Scout I am, I “always” carry an inner tube just in case.

Imagine my surprise when, after my front tire went flat, I discovered I had left my spare tube at home. My friend Jim Devereux, however, happily produced a used 21-inch from his kit and stifled a chuckle as I crammed it into the cavity of my front tire. The chuckle became audible when the used tube hissed out its air as I torqued the axle nut. I tore it all down again and patched the tube, which lasted until I hit the interstate, alone. I patched it again and, refusing to give up, yet again a few miles later as the sun slid below the horizon. Each subsequent patch rolled off the tube with the beating of an out-of-balance wheel assembly, so I stacked the patches over and over, each time going through the process of remove, scrub, glue, and reassemble, strap-on headlight aglow. Each time I would make it five to 50 miles before wrestling the squirming bike back to the roadside.

Enough is enough. Now I sit waiting in the dark, two hours from home watching truck lights slash by like photon torpedoes. In response to my text, my wife replies, “I’m already halfway there. I have a box full of tubes. Surely one of them won’t leak.”

She knows her Turkey Scout so well. **RR**