



SIDETRACKED

THE *Kerfuffle*

Text and Photography: Bill Dragoo

At 125 horsepower and 125 Nm of torque, the BMW R 1200 GS can sling mud from its Shinko knobby like a snow blower in a Louisiana swamp. My pal Jay Rothstein sits unaware atop his clutchless KLR 650, 12 miles north of Gypsum, CO. Afternoon rains have turned this section of the Colorado Backcountry Discovery Route into the consistency of cold egg drop soup. The stuff is slick below the surface scum and will weld a wheel to a fender in about 100 feet. If speeds aren't kept up (risky business in this stuff), the front wheels on the big GSes and Triumph 800XC just become skis. We had already ripped the fender off the Triumph and spent the last 90 minutes digging the mud from the fenders on our GSes with a tire iron. Tim James, chase rider for our host, Colorado Motorcycle Adventures (CMA), calls the whole debacle a kerfuffle. Sounds like an understatement considering the mess we're in.

With its tall first gear, the KLR's clutch went belly up against the gravelly, concrete-like substance, locking the rear wheel down tight. The bike is idling now—in gear, clutch out. I imagine a bubble caption over Jay's head filled with question marks. The sun will be setting before long and there is little doubt the rains will soon return. A 12-foot tow strap connects our bikes at the footpegs. I look back at Jay with mild compunction for what I know will happen next, when I twist the throttle and dump the clutch on the big GS.

Pickles like this are common to the adventure rider. We don't go looking for them but

we know they're out there and we go anyway. Predictable outcomes of perfectly choreographed rides seem almost mundane by comparison. It's a test of skill and patience to extract ourselves from degrading predicaments without argument or fits of temper. And we love to dust off those tools, unroll the tow strap, fire up the tire pump, and collaborate on engineering options that will get us out of the wilderness and home in time for dinner. Attitude is one of the great cornerstones of adventure riding and when it all hits the fan, temperament is tested. It's a refreshing escape from the trappings of ordinary life—as long as you escape.

Over the years I've seen motorcycles literally held together with duct tape. Bolts robbed from one component are sometimes used to secure a more essential part, such as a subframe or fork mount. Tires have been stuffed with grass to replace torn inner tubes, and a tree limb used as a skid to replace a rear wheel that had lost all its spokes, so the bike could be towed to civilization. Chunks of license plates have been glued to engine cases to patch busted housings. Sticks have been whittled down to replace lost oil caps. Necessity is indeed the mother of invention.

Each successful trial adds to an adventure rider's repertoire. Every failure is a step toward the solution.

Our current quandary is really little more than the natural consequence of riding too late in the day in the Rocky Mountains.

Rains are commonplace in the afternoon here and the roads change quickly from passable to impossible. We are left with the choice to rescue all the bikes we can, leaving the lame Kawasaki for the wolves (Jay would have to ride two-up with someone), or to fight it out with the GS pulling and, when necessary, a couple of dedicated friends pushing and stabilizing the bike.

As anticipated, when I drop the clutch, everything behind me goes brown, including poor Jay. His helpers dodge the slop but he keeps pushing, stopping only briefly to wipe the muck from his face shield so he can see ahead.

A woman and her young daughter roll up on a RZR and inform us we are heading into much worse conditions. Thankfully, they know a better route and offer directions to dry land a half mile on toward Gypsum. We repeat the process of towing and spraying Jay and his skittish helpers. Five miles out of town we meet Scott Lee of CMA driving toward us in the company's Sprinter van. Although he's a welcome sight, I can't help feeling a little thwarted. I'd hoped to tow my charge the whole way.

Now, after dark at the car wash, Jay becomes the subject of more spraying, this time by a high-pressure wand. Through it all, a wide smile borne of his tremendous attitude never left his face. The experience was proof positive, adventure is where you find it—even in a kerfuffle. **RR**