



Adventure Rider Challenge 2009

By Gary Prickett #29437

FOR THE THIRD YEAR IN A ROW, RIDERS gathered to participate in one of the most unique and entertaining events in the world of recreational motorcycling, The Adventure Rider Challenge. This event is the brainchild of Jim Hyde, founder and owner-operator of RawHyde Adventures, a company whose mission is to train riders to get the most out of their big adventure touring bikes, be they on the industry leading BMW GS series or other brands of the same ilk.

Since its beginning in 2002, RawHyde has trained hundreds of riders of adventure touring motorcycles. Quite a few graduates have gone on to fulfill their personal dreams of riding long distances through many of the countries that most of us experience only by watching the Discovery Channel or reading National Geographic. The stories that these riders bring back with them are potent reminders of the legend that adorned one of a series of BMW T-shirts a few years back: "98.9% of the world is not paved."

RawHyde has been so successful in training and empowering people who embody the adventure riding lifestyle that BMW

Motorrad USA has designated RawHyde Adventures as one of only nine official BMW off road training facilities in the world. Two of these facilities are owned and operated by BMW corporate. A key factor behind BMW's decision was the establishment of RawHyde's Adventure Rider Challenge which began in 2007, and by coincidence embodies many of the elements of The Great African GS Challenge held in South Africa since 2004, which attracts 600 GS riders annually.

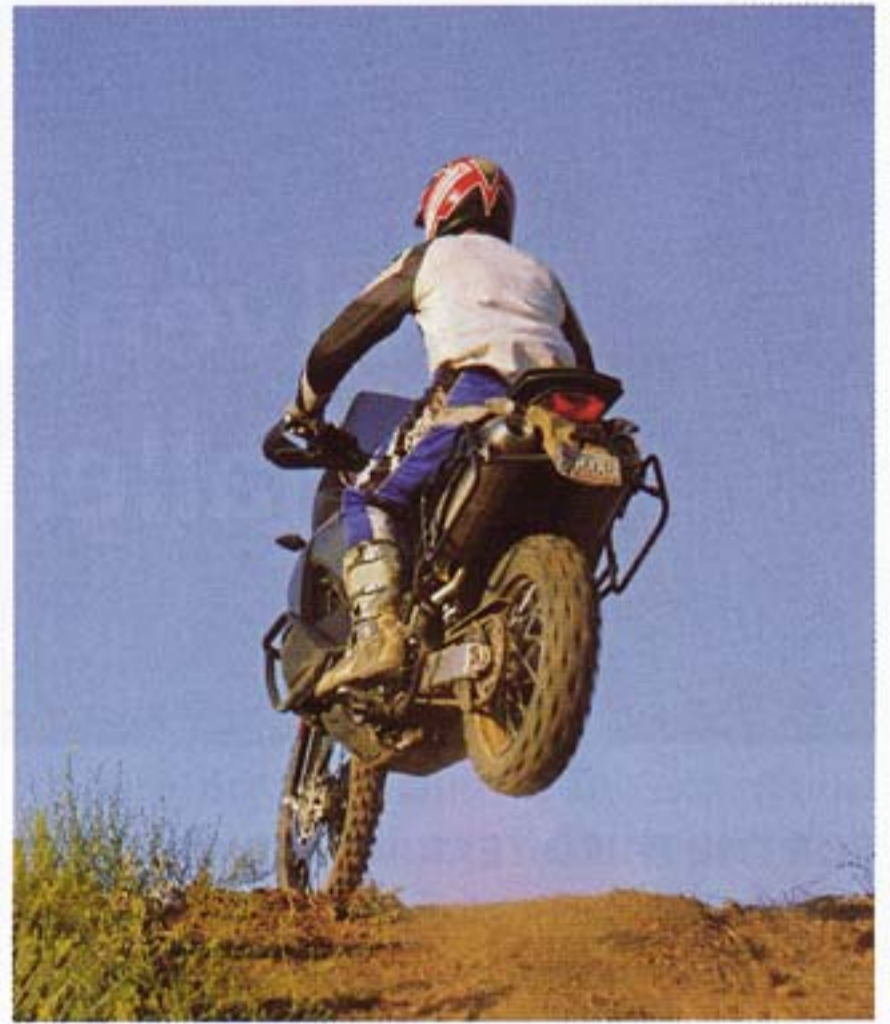
Before assuming the top job of Vice President in charge of BMW Motorcycles for North America, Pieter de Wall had been instrumental in the establishment of The Great African GS Challenge in his home country. It was this commitment to the adventure riding lifestyle that fueled de Wall's decision to add the RawHyde operation to BMW's store of adventure riding and training resources. In a demonstration of support, and most likely as a means of getting away from the corporate office for a few days of fun, de Wall and BMW colleagues Mac McMath, Sales Manager and

Todd Andersen, Marketing Manager were on hand to enthusiastically participate in the entire event.

The affiliation between BMW and RawHyde brings benefits to all members of the supply chain from the manufacturer to the customer. It has provided BMW the opportunity to provide their North American dealers with the GS Advocates Program, wherein designated members of dealer staffs are given the opportunity to attend a RawHyde training session. This means that customers of those dealers that have received such training will be able to learn first hand about this instructional experience and how it can benefit riders of the BMW GS line-up of bikes.

and nearby Mojave Desert. This year's event featured a series of routes offering opportunities to explore the beauty of the coastal mountains on one day, and the vastness of the desert on the other, along with a scheduled lunch stop in the living ghost town of Randsburg.

Riders were provided with GPS tracks that contained combinations of pavement and off road riding sections that varied from mild to wild in terms of the degree of technical competence required to negotiate the unpaved sections. For the vast majority of riders who were graduates of one or more of the RawHyde training classes, even the most technical of the off road sections were well within their competence levels. For those who were new to the concept of continuing to ride when the pavement ends, there were



The majority of the challenges that riders at RawHyde's facility experience mimic the challenges they would face in various off-road riding situations. Riders get the chance to learn to ride on natural terrain, as well as human-enhanced challenges.

Because RawHyde has been provided with a fleet of GS models, these can be offered as rentals to prospective rider-trainees who elect to travel to RawHyde's facility by means other than their own motorcycle, to participate in one of the training courses. Truly, it's a win-win situation for all concerned.

This year's Adventure Rider Challenge was held May 15th -17th at RawHyde Adventure's training facility located in the coastal mountains of Southern California, just north of Los Angeles. Nearly 200 people took advantage of the spacious camping area or bunkhouse facilities available on the tree covered property. An abundance of off road riding is available on RawHyde's 120 acres of land as well as in the adjacent Angeles National Forest, Hungry Valley OHV Park

enough easily manageable dirt roads to give them a taste of the nature, enjoyment and satisfaction of adventure riding.

Exploring the areas surrounding the RawHyde Ranch occupied only the mornings and early afternoons of The Adventure Rider Challenge. The truly unique and thoroughly entertaining aspect of this annual celebration was the RawHyde Rodeo. As the name implies, this competitive event consisted of a series of challenges based on the natural terrain, often supplemented by human enhancement and/or man-made objects. As in the past, the majority of challenges replicate what adventure touring motorcyclists would be likely to encounter in their travels, be it washed out roads in Baja California, water crossings in

Cambodia or trails down the sides of mountains in The Andes Mountains.

The Challenge course was arranged in a series of individual elements, and judgment of the skill with which bike and rider were able to travel through each element was determined by criteria such as elapsed time or the ability to keep both feet on the pegs while negotiating the element. Points were awarded based on the demonstrated skill level of each competitor. The 46 men and one woman that competed were vying for

and the Temple of Doom, but without the film's one-thousand foot drop into a crocodile infested river. There was also a giant teeter-totter over which contestants piloted their bikes, verifying the old adage that what goes up, must come down. For this year, the featured challenges were The Pit and The Pendulums. The Pit, which was the object of Friday afternoon's competition, consisted of a ½ mile long trail through a deep twisting gorge beginning with a steep entry path down which bike and rider were belayed by

THIS YEAR'S EVENT FEATURED A SERIES OF ROUTES OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE THE BEAUTY OF THE COASTAL MOUNTAINS ON ONE DAY, AND THE VASTNESS OF THE DESERT ON THE OTHER



individual and team prizes provided by sponsoring companies and having a total value of \$8,000. However, the other beneficiaries were the remaining event attendees that served as judges, score keepers and spectators and were continually awed and entertained by the various levels of skill, luck, determination and innovation demonstrated by the competitors. It was difficult to determine who was having the most fun; the competitors or the spectators.

Each year's Adventure Challenge features one or more special sections that are particularly mind boggling and therefore crowd pleasing. Last year there was the Zambezi Bridge, a rope and wood slat suspension bridge reminiscent of the one featured in the climatic scenes at the end of *Indiana Jones*

rope to the bottom, rock climbing style.

The trail at the bottom then followed the contours of the terrain over rocks, through water and mud and around natural obstacles, finishing with a large fallen log which bikes and riders had to cross. This was a timed event for each team of three people and two motorcycles. It was billed as a "no holds barred" event ride, push or carry, whatever worked best to get bikes and riders across the finish line in the shortest possible time. Just to keep things interesting, handicap penalties were assessed for bikes smaller and lighter than the BMW GS and KTM 990 Adventure.

On Saturday afternoon, The Pendulums were but one of a series of eleven tasks being confronted by individual bikes and riders.

Although some of the tasks, bearing such names as "Pucker Up, Tree Skiing, Climax Climb" and "Launch Point" were technically more challenging, none was more visually daunting than The Pendulums. Consisting of four consecutively aligned wood framed "tunnels," the entrance and exit of each "tunnel" was impeded by a rhythmically swinging pendulum. If you saw the movie, *First Knight*, you may recall the festival scene in which Lancelot ran the gauntlet consisting of a series of swords and battle axes swinging asynchronously across the designated pathway. This was the same idea except in place of sharp metal swords and axes, the RawHyde pendulums consisted of ten-foot long wooden poles with the business ends wrapped in six-inch thick sponge-rubber secured by duct tape.

With the pendulums being positioned at ten-foot intervals, the possibility of moving a 7½ foot long BMW GS through the gauntlet without being touched by a pendulum was physically possible given the appropriate implementation of balance and timing. However, mental perception was often at odds with physical reality, the results being enormously entertaining.

Key ingredients of any gathering of like-minded people are the facilities and amenities available to enhance the opportunity for reconnecting with old friends and making new ones. These elements have always been and continue to be key factors in the continuing growth and development of RawHyde Adventures with the gastronomic experience topping the list of amenities. This is no biscuit and beans operation. A covered, open air dining area was located next to a well equipped indoor kitchen, which churned out sumptuous meals that were different for each sitting. Within the same area was the Dakar Bar, amply stocked with all of the fluids necessary to supplement the meals and enhance the conviviality of the gathering. Saturday night's agenda included entertainment by a live band followed by an awards ceremony and tribute to sponsors and participants.

Motorcycling is about having fun and sharing the experience with friends and family. This year's Adventure Rider Challenge provided an apt opportunity to revel in the joy and excitement of adventure touring with friends old and new. If you want to be part of the fun at next year's Adventure Rider Challenge, mark your calendar for May 2010, and keep checking the RawHyde Adventure Web site at www.rawhyde-offroad.com for updated information. ●