

BALLOONING ADVENTURES OF A CHAIN GANGER

During August, 2005, I was peed on by cows in Nebraska, chased by amorous middle-aged women in Minnesota, watched my bike do a back flip in Georgia and pursued college coeds across multiple states. I escaped from forest fires in Idaho, skipped out of New Orleans only hours before Katrina hit the mainland and stayed in all sorts of accommodations from cornfields to well-to-do houses in Southern California and even in backwoods shacks in the bayou. Overall, I had the greatest adventure of my young life!

With only 10,000 motorcycle miles under my belt I decided that my '03 Dakar would be the perfect machine to trek across the country. Learning all that I could from www.F650.com, its legendary FAQs and from Flash's maintenance DVD's, I started an online blog on F650.com and headed out on a solo trip across the country with my laptop and digital camera on board. My trip took me from Columbus, Ohio, to Seattle, to San Diego and home again via New Orleans. Where possible, I would stop and write about my trip on the blog and download photos that I took along the way.

Oh, did I mention that I gallivant around as "Matt the Balloon Guy" (www.protwister.com) twisting balloons? For the past nine years I have worked as an entertainer creating fabulous balloon art for children of all ages (did anyone check out my seminar at Lima rally or notice the life-sized F650 Dakar in the vendor pavilion?).

With my work experience I was convinced that people would accept me as being harmless and would help me



The first sighting of the Pacific Ocean.

00 Dual sporting in Tennessee.

during my journey across the nation. So I decided that I would try not to stay in any hotels during my month of traveling – I would camp or room with friendly folks who would hopefully invite me into their homes for a night of rest.

As balloon twisting is a marketable skill in restaurants and high traffic areas I put my thirty pounds of balloons and pump on the back of my bike and was determined to work anywhere I could. Hopefully I would find restaurants and national landmarks throughout the nation where I could work to financially support my travels.

Reactions to my plan were varied. "Someone is going to see you riding a



BMW motorcycle alone, kill you and steal your bike” was the response of my mother. Others on F650.com were supportive, but skeptical of my plan and ability to make money to support myself. The tone on my blog soon changed as friends and family following my journey realized that I easily found nightly accommodations and made profits from ballooning.

Worrying less about survival, I focused more on making my trip more adventurous. After traveling 600 miles from Colorado Springs to Salt Lake City one morning and ballooning at a Joe’s Crab Shack in the evening, I promptly side-swiped a three-inch-tall divider in the median. With the Anonymous Book to the rescue I found an Orem resident worked with me late into the night to fix the many damaged portions of my bike (thanks Matt from Orem!).

As I was in search of dirt riding, too, I decided to travel from Phoenix to Las Vegas off road as much as possible. I soon found that these roads change into sandy paths that ended in a newly formed lake due to unusually large amounts of summer rain. Not wanting to backtrack 50+ miles of terrible desert terrain with a fully loaded bike, I headed towards a ranger station that was about 10 miles

Ballooning across the nation.



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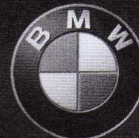
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"It's not broken, I'm just making it better!"

away through some of the most treacherous terrain I have ever experienced, let alone with a fully laden motorcycle.

Needless to say I spent most of the next hour dropping, unloading, standing the bike up, reloading and riding the bike across the terrain. On my last fall the bike barely started as the battery released all of its liquid contents onto my cylinder head cover. Without water for myself or the battery I luckily ran into the only ranger (who looked exactly like the Unabomber!) who was leaving to make the 40-mile run into town for mail. We were able to service my battery and reattach the side bag that broke off the bike during the most violent fall.

Ultimately the trip had many suc-

cesses. Leaving Las Vegas, I rode the 1,562 miles straight through Oklahoma City to Houston in 23 hours and 52 minutes earning an Iron Butt Bun Burner Gold award. I was able to dual-sport in the Rocky Mountains in Idaho, desert ride in Arizona, trail ride in Georgia and blast down the Tail of the Dragon.

My plans were confirmed as I never had to sleep in a hotel and I was able to finance the entire \$1,430 cost of the trip just by twisting balloons. Heck, I even earned a \$24 overall profit from my 11,882 miles on the road! And I learned NOT to drive too closely behind pickups and trailers loaded with anxious cows with full bladders and to be wary of female 30-some things who want to buy you a drink!



Full loaded over the road less traveled – Phoenix to Las Vegas.



Matt making proper preparations for his best friend's wedding on his 110 race bike.



Matt with his Suzuki DRZ440SM on the track.

I made many life long friends and have fond memories to savor from this trip of a lifetime and I would like to take this opportunity as a way to say thank you to all the Chain Gang and BMW MOA members who helped me during August 2005. In the words of a wise and good friend, "adventure is discomfort recounted at leisure" – now that I am back at college, what an adventure I enjoyed!

Matt Tyson (Chain Gang #1645, AKA Matttys) recently graduated from The Ohio State University with a major in Mechanical Engineering. Currently, Matt is enrolled in the MBA program at OSU with a focus on Marketing and is actively perusing an internship for the summer of 2007 in the motorcycle industry (Hint: BMW Motorrad). Expect to see Matt at the National in Wisconsin next summer helping with Camp Gears and harassing the old folk of the Chain Gang.

Would you like to write a My Turn column? If so send an e-mail to Mandy Langston, mandy@bmwmoa.org. Her number is 636-394-7277.