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### BRINGING HOME THE BMW MOTORRAD INTERNATIONAL GS TROPHY Team USA Reflects on Sand, Scorpions and Star Wars in the Tunisian Desert

December 1, 2008

Photos: BMW NA &amp; Jonathan Beck

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Like desert warriors...they came, they rode and they conquered. After a strong overall performance and victories in both of the final two challenges, Team USA emerged victorious in the inaugural BMW Motorrad International GS Trophy in Tunisia, October 15-24. Teams from Spain and Germany tied for second; while the Italian team captured third place and the Japanese team took fourth.

BMW GS owners Brad Hendry (Thornton, CO), Jim Stoddard (Middlegrove, NY), and Jason Adams (Rosendale, NY) along with journalists Jimmy Lewis (Dirt Rider), Ryan Dudek (Cycle World), and writer/photographer Jonathan Beck represented the United States in the 1,900-kilometer desert rally, involving 30 participants from five nations, seeking to demonstrate their skills over challenging terrain on identically prepared BMW F 800 GS motorcycles.

"This was by far the best motorcycle ride or event that I have ever been part of," said Stoddard. "It was really sad to have it end."

"This was an incredible experience," added Hendry. "I don't think anyone from our team wouldn't do it again."

- About the MOA
- Chartered Clubs
- Membership
- News & Features
- 08 International Rally
- 07 International Rally
- 06 International Rally
- Camping
- Global Touring
- BMW Owners News
- Flea Market
- Happenings
- Service Awards
- MOA Foundation
- Country Store
- Mileage Contest
- Mileage Awards
- Secure Services

"I am terrifically proud to have been chosen and to have done this," commented Adams. "I was a BMW fan before; that's obvious! But an all-expense paid trip to ride my butt off on these excellent bikes is almost too much!"

The ambitious enduro amateurs from the USA, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Spain qualified for the first international GS Trophy just weeks in advance in independently organized national challenges. In the U.S., the "Tunisia Three" were selected after a day of "Survivor-Style" motorcycle competition at the BMW Performance Center, in Spartanburg, SC, on August 28.

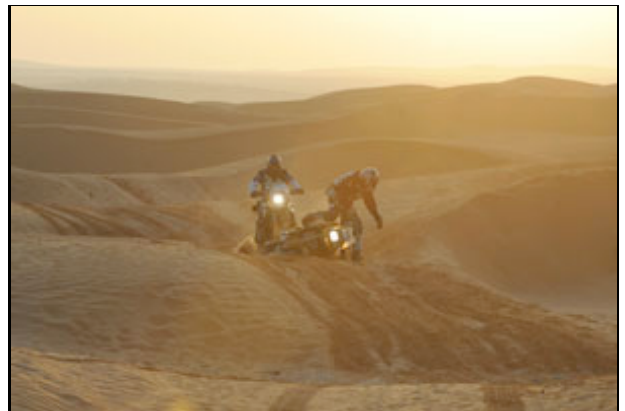


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A total of 14 media representatives from the participating countries accompanied the national teams, riding and competing alongside the GS owners to obtain an up-close and personal experience with the event. The premier tour, organized by BMW Motorrad, began in Milan, where teams assembled and rode to Genoa and then travelled by ship to Tunis. In North Africa, the riders set out on a long circuit from Kairouan via Ksar Ghilane, Tembain, Zaafrane and Port el Kantaoui and back to Tunis. From there, the GS Trophy returned to Genoa by sea and back to the starting point in Milan.

BMW Motorrad provided each rider with an equipment bag, tent, sleeping bag, camping mat, headlamp, hydration pack, compass and Rallye Pro Suit. Competitors were asked to bring helmets, gloves, boots, goggles, sport shoes, tracksuit, fleece jacket, swim suits, sandals, suntan lotion, sunglasses, energy bars and mineral drinks, camping utensils, travel pillow, towels and personal hygiene items.

In a series of six challenges in Tunisia, the teams not only had to tackle orienteering tasks but also had to cope with massive sand dunes.



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"The dunes proved to be a filter of riding ability," observed Beck. "Attrition on other teams was mainly due to fatigue from riding in the sand and dropping bikes. It was amazing to watch the ease with which Jimmy rode through the sand."

"The hardest moments were the first day of hard sand, in and before Tsar Guilane when I was cramping up and learning the hard way," commented Adams. "I was worried that I was going to let my team down." "Sand is easy as soon as you relax," remarked Lewis. "Just ask Jason. Relaxing is hard. Just ask Jason. He is actually a really good sand rider now."

Asked if there were any particularly challenging moments when they were ready to throw in the towel, Hendry responded, "The toughest moment was actually the day on the beach coming back. I didn't sleep well, and helped as



many riders as I could, and completely wore myself out. Even the sweep riders rode past the last fallen guys, so I ended up picking up everyone at the back and getting pretty tired. I never felt like throwing in the towel, though. Hell, the journey through the swamp in SC was tougher!"

Team USA members all responded with similar observations when asked to reveal the key to their success. "At no time did anyone on our team become injured," said Stoddard. "Our motto was to ride today so we can ride tomorrow."

"Since we had to finish each challenge as a team, we rode slow and methodically," observed Beck. "We allowed riders to take off individually to avoid clogged air filters. We also rode the bikes within their design limits and didn't push too hard. As a result, we had no mechanical problems and no attrition. In fact, members of the Spanish team commented that we were going so slow, yet we were going to win!"

"The taste of victory was addicting and our teamwork was really strong too," added Lewis. "We were successful mostly because we rode during the day within our means and the capabilities of the bike, not using up a lot of energy and not breaking stuff or hurting our bodies."

The rally entourage, which included 35 BMW motorcycles and several support vehicles, drew the attention of local Tunisians wherever it went. The event gave the participants an opportunity to absorb the local culture as well as make new friends.

"It afforded us time to absorb the area, the culture, tour towns, and see the architecture," commented Beck. "One of my most memorable experiences was having tea and discussing politics with Ryan Dudek and a local Berber in the middle of the Sahara."

What were the best moments of the trip for Team USA? "Meeting the other teams. Viva Espana!," said Hendry, "and pulling countless wheelies including a tandem standup with Jimmy past a grinning police officer. Classic!"

"The best moments of the trip for me were the two nights that we camped in the dunes," recalled Stoddard. "The riding every day was a challenge once we arrived in the desert, but thanks to the camaraderie of our team we were able to learn from the more experienced riders and make every day enjoyable."



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"Visiting the Star Wars movie set was like being in a time warp," said Beck. "I had seen photos of the set when I was younger and it was just like I imagined it to be, right in the middle of the desert."

"At night, the stars were amazing, Beck added. "Jason was a bit of an astronomer and taught us about the constellations. It was like being in a million acre planetarium."

Any advice for next year's aspiring GS Trophy participants? "Training is important, and we showed that," remarked Hendry. "We were all fit and attrition never stepped into our game." "Get in shape and practice," advised Stoddard. "Take your GS into places that you believe you cannot achieve and overcome that obstacle. Find riding partners that have the motivation even if they are not as capable of a rider as you think you are and practice together as a team."

"Shelve your ego, and be prepared for anything and everything," suggested Adams. "Maintain a positive attitude no matter what. Maintain a situational awareness. Get as fit as possible beforehand, and save as much energy during the day as possible. Don't crash hard. Listen well to your fellows. In the desert, drink more water than you think you need, and eat a lot of salt. If you don't have to pee all the time, you are not drinking enough."

"Do a lot of cardio training and practice riding and running in the sand," said Beck.



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Team USA members were asked whether they encountered any scorpions during the adventure.

"I saw three, and it was incredible to see their little tracks around the camp each morning," recalled Hendry. "We were introduced to scorpions, big white spiders, lizards and many camels," said Stoddard. "I really enjoyed seeing the camel caravans in the distance across the dunes."

Organizers of the inaugural BMW Motorrad event plan to increase the number of participants next year to include teams from other nations and make the GS Trophy a popular, annual enduro event.

"I was waiting for them to do some challenge where we had to eat something strange or communicate with some of the locals, where I can only speak English, and then I would have suffered," commented Lewis. "I'd like to be in charge of hosting one of these in the U.S. I have some crazy ideas."



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