

# Legend of the Motorcycle – A Great Event

By Jonathan Beck #139270, All Photos: Jonathan Beck

By some accounts, the Legend of the Motorcycle show has become one of the premiere events in the world for showcasing vintage and “modern classic” motorcycles. This year marked the third year for the show, and alongside MV Agusta was BMW as co-sponsor. My home in Southern California is only about five hours from where the Legend show took place in Half Moon Bay. Thus I decided to ride to the event on what could very well be considered a “future classic” bike—an R1200 GS.

While Southern California as a location can be very convenient at times, the traffic is anything but convenient. I decided to get in a pre-dawn start so as to get through Los Angeles prior to rush hour. In keeping with the generally accepted theme of motorcycles representing “freedom,” it did not seem at all appropriate to begin this trek either stuck in, or weaving through, traffic flowing

Actor Jason Lee with his Bullet Falcon.

as smoothly as smoggy molasses. Sure enough, the sun started to present itself just as I was leaving the northern end of the urban commuter fray and entering the motorcycle paradise that is Central California.

This first day, the plan was to get



The Bullet Falcon, and owner, Jason Lee.



Actors Jason Lee and Giovanni Ribisi presenting the “Elvis” award at the Legend of the Motorcycle Show.

to the event location as quickly as possible. While the glaringly obvious route toward my destination would be interstate 5, there is a fortunate option that is nearly as fast, and vastly more scenic – Route 101. Tucked between Coast Highway 1 and Interstate 5, the 101 winds its way through the coastal mountains of Central California and offers almost innumerable paved and unpaved side routes for nearly its entire length – truly a GS rider’s paradise. The schedule afforded me some time to explore a few of the back roads on my way north, and this is where the GPS created some unplanned adventure.

Very little thought or planning is required to set out on an exploration ride in our modern “push button adventure” world. Gone for the most part is dependence on maps and compasses—just hit the power and ask the GPS. I’ve learned that while technology is amazing in



The BMWs were everywhere at the show.

this regard, it’s not a perfect solution by any means. Pulling off the highway in a remote stretch between two towns, I plotted a course onto a side road that would take me to a gas station shortly before I hit reserve. Once the GPS had cooked up the route, I thumbed the starter and was off. The ride was amazing! Beginning with an obscure right hand turn onto a dirt road just off the highway, it immediately had me crossing a dramatic bridge over a gorge and following a twisting country road through towns that seemed to defy all odds in their persistence to exist. I was absolutely enthralled with the scene I was whizzing through until the fuel light came on and presented me with other concerns. Just a few miles later I reached the location of the supposed gas station. While there was evidence that a Texaco did exist there at one time, it was long since defunct. How a GPS purchased in 2008

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decided to reference a gas station that probably hasn't seen any fuel since the 1950's is beyond me. Fortunately, there was life in this town and after asking around I was directed to another fuel stop about 12 miles away—which was not on the GPS. Score for this episode: GPS—0, Local Knowledge—1.

Reconnecting with route 101, I wound my way northward until arriving at Half Moon Bay where preparations for the following day's event were still being made. The Legend event itself is a cornucopia of the finest motorcycling has to offer. Judges from around the world and representing various manufacturers converge on this picturesque coastline to rate motorcycles and riders in a variety of categories. In attendance were such legends as Malcom Smith, Mert Lawwill, and Giacomo Agostini, who came from Italy with his family to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award for his status as the greatest Grand Prix racer of all time. Celebrated custom bike builders such as Paul Cox, Billy Lane, Jesse James, and Shinya Kimura from Japan unveiled new creations to the 6,000 people in attendance. Jesse James presented the "Custom Culture" award

*The author takes a break for much-needed sustenance...*



to relative newcomer Ian Barry for his Bullet Falcon bike, built for actor Jason Lee. Bikes such as the Falcon show that classic lines in custom motorcycles are as prevalent as ever in the modern "hyper-bike" world.

The next three days saw awards being presented, a Bonhams & Butterfields motorcycle auction, Charlie Boorman and Ewan McGregor's Long Way Down exhibit (which featured Charlie's well-weathered R1200 GS Adventure), and more than 300 of the best motorcycles in the world. The pristine setting of the Ritz Carlton Half Moon Bay only increased the irony that I was spending the evenings in my suite scouting digital and paper maps for remote locations to pitch a tent in just a few days as I would ride south.

The event concluded on May 4th and I set out the following day—May 5th, Cinco de Mayo. Beginning on a twisty two-lane road through the hills of Half Moon Bay, I arrived at the famous Alice's Restaurant around 8 a.m. While Alice's is far from Mexico, given the date I decided it only appropriate to order Huevos Rancheros for breakfast. Following breakfast, I pulled up Arlo Guthrie on the iPod and began my journey south—packed with everything I'd need (and more) to live off the bike for a few days.

Route 1 along the Pacific Coast is arguably one of the most beautiful roads in the world. The only downside is it can become very overcast, however, except for a few pockets here and there, that was not the case that day. I remained on Highway 1 until just south of

Monterey, from there I would be on and off the pavement all the way to Southern California. A very easy to find (and ride) dirt road in the area starts right at the historic Bixby Bridge—one of the largest single-arch concrete bridges in the world when it was completed in 1932. As one of the most photographed features on the west coast it is easily recognizable, and happens to mark the northern terminus of the Old Coast Road. From the Bixby bridge, this one-lane dirt road winds south to Andrew Molera State Park where it reconnects with the highway. While Andrew Molera offers camping, it is "walk-in" only and I was looking for motorcycle camping, so further south I went.

By now daylight was already a factor, and while the GS has ample lighting for nighttime exploration of the backroads, I was looking to get a few photos in of the campsite before sunset. Having some of the most popular campgrounds in California, much of Big Sur camping is reserved weeks or months in advance, so finding a spot here last-minute can be a dicey proposition. Fortunately, most of the reservations are arranged around weekends and I was traveling on a weekday, so pulling over at Kirk Creek campground, I quickly found a spot.

It was about 15 minutes or so into setting up camp when the irony of the past few days hit me. Just yesterday I was staying in one of the nicest hotel suites that the west coast has to offer, and yet camping off the GS was far more convenient. Gone was the need to detach luggage, carry items in and out, up and down elevators, go to a restaurant or some



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other place for meals ... once I turned off the key, everything I needed was literally within an arm's reach. Throw the bike up on the center stand and pop open the side cases—right away you've got two shelves, all your food, lodging, and in my case, entertainment system (in the form of a Martin Backpacker guitar). Once camp was set up, there was still ample daylight to hike down some of the footpaths that led to the beach. Literally hundreds of these footpaths are scattered throughout the California coastline, and like snowflakes, no two are exactly alike. As the sun started to set and dinner was prepped, out came the maps and laptop computer to start looking at possible routes for the following day.

Directly across the highway from Kirk Creek is the western entrance to Nacimiento-Ferguson road. Once dirt, this entire stretch of highway is now paved, however it is not for the faint of heart. Often one-lane, this road is comprised of what seems like a nearly infinite number of hairpin curves and steep cliffs lacking any sort of guardrail. Couple that with the fact that gravel buildup and mudslides are an issue and you've got a paved road that will keep you on your toes for its entire length. Rather than connecting through the entire length of Nacimiento-Ferguson, I opted to take it to the summit and peel off on one of the many dirt road options that are manifold in these coastal mountains.

While the subject of bike setup, tire preference/pressure, and riding style offroad will typically touch off a firestorm of debate, for this author the fully-laden R1200 GS Standard with Battlewings at full highway pressure couldn't have been happier off-road. The bike would have a tendency to slide a bit more through the turns and on steep climbs than the Adventure model with its TKC knobbies and more precise suspension adjustments, but so long as you rode the Standard GS within it's performance thresholds, it responded with plenty of power, cornering, and braking—just be sure to remember to turn off the ABS!

Stopping to consult the map a few times, I connected several dirt roads until reaching the San Simeon area. Just out of view of Hearst Castle to the south, I met a local who advised me of a back road that would connect me with the 46.

While Route 46 in itself is a fun road, the back road option I was presented with was otherworldly. Nearly every hairpin opened up into a postcard vista, making it difficult not to stop every other mile for yet another jaw-dropping photo opportunity. Via the auspices of the internet, I found some GPS tracks of several dirt & paved back roads that linked back and forth from Route 46, crossed the 101, and eventually linked up with the Carrizo Plain National Monument! It is there that another one of California's truly unique features appears as a low mountain on the horizon of an otherwise pan-flat dry plain—the San Andreas Fault.

The dirt roads around the fault itself are fast and flat. They were a beautiful contrast having just come from the twisty mountainous roads near the Pacific. It was here that I again encountered what may have been a GPS error, or possibly navigator inattention, but at some point I zigged when I should have zagged and found myself climbing an unusually steep hill that only seemed to get rougher the further up I went.

Stopping to get a photo of the amazing desolate vista, I realized at some point I had indeed made a wrong turn and was riding over a mountain I was supposed to have gone around. Therein is the beauty of adventure bikes – no longer a “wrong” turn, such a misstep in navigation is easily redefined as “curiosity” about what’s over the ridge. A twist of the throttle and the 1200 willingly scaled the mountain, myself and luggage aboard.

It was at this point yet another GPS-related fuel issue occurred. The fuel light popped on and this time it was a bit more consequential. I was on a Standard GS—limited range compared to my older 1150 Adventure I’m accustomed to. It was somewhere on this mountain that I realized I’m alone, no sat phone, and I’m really not sure how far this thing will go on reserve. This is a good reason to carry food and water; if nothing else, I had enough stuff with me to hang around here for a couple days and formulate a game plan. Pulling up the GPS I looked for fuel and, sure enough, found a couple of stations within 20 miles! As I crested the mountain and started the descent the road smooths out within five miles and begins a rapid descent all the way to the valley floor. I tried to drift through the corners as cleanly as possible while keeping the RPMs at a fuel-conserving

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purr. Reaching the base of the hill, the road turns to a long-neglected single lane strip of asphalt. Five miles later I encounter the “fuel station” as indicated by the GPS—an oil field. It was so ironic that here I was surrounded by more petroleum than I could ever hope to see, and yet all of it was useless to my situation. The “Chevron” I was guided to turned out to be an office in the middle of this oil field. Fortunately, about the same time I realized this location was useless, I saw that Taft was only a few miles away and

there would be tanks containing actual refined fuel.

Shortly after Taft I would jump on to the pavement and follow back roads all the way back to northern Los Angeles County. Just outside of L.A. I discovered a few dirt roads that wove across flowing rivers toward unimproved primitive camping. Proximity to L.A. seemed to correlate directly to the amount of graffiti on the rocks. In spite of the “urban art” there were several hidden gems to be found here for quick camping escapes from the bustle of L.A.—the subject of a future article, I’m sure. 



*The author rarely travels without his laptop.*