

Tool Time

LAST WEEK, I spent the better part of three days out of the office, road testing. By Friday evening, I felt transformed.

Although some people imagine that riding motorcycles is all we do in this job, the reality is a little less romantic, so you needn't feel so jealous.

Most days, we stay inside, assembling the text and images sent by our contributors into pages on the computer, editing as necessary to make everything fit the space or to read with greater clarity. When we're satisfied, we hand the pages off to each other for more proof-reading before sending them off to Marcy, our professional proofreader, who will still find enough errant typos to make us cringe.

We editors do a lot of the bike evaluations as well, and that's usually a slow process of combining notes and press materials with our testing data and subjective impressions, hoping to create an informative review that's still fun and easy to read. Every issue contains hundreds of details, not all of which are readily available, each of which must be double-checked for accuracy. And we don't stop with the facts; we still break out the dictionary to satisfy our cravings for the best possible word usage in a given sentence.

The images that appear in each issue are culled from literally hundreds of photos. Action photography, as any pro will tell you, is a game of percentages. For every ten you shoot, you're lucky to get one that has the clarity and dramatic style you want. We try to include one upright side view with each test, to help you visualize the ergonomic layout, even though that means leaving out a favorite cornering shot, usually of Danny with his knee down. We spend a lot of time working with Photoshop, too, adjusting all the images for size, format, density and shadow detail, again adjusting more than we need so we can pick the best.

Of course, like many other office workers, we spend hours sorting and answering e-mails of all kinds. Staying ahead of the game and working with our contributors to keep the stories coming is top priority, and answering reader mail and forwarding specific questions to the relevant authors leads to other ideas that can be developed further.

Internal affairs require time, too, keeping the company's supervisors, accountants and administrators satisfied that we're meeting our budgets and on top of things.



Even when I'm not actually riding, I love my job. It's all about motorcycles, motorcyclists and motorcycling, and there is no subject I'm more passionate about.

And to earn a living as journalists without concern for advertising dollars is something we never take for granted—it's extremely rare—priceless in more ways than one. Strangely enough, my freshman year in college, I was given a personality assessment test that said I would be a good editor, writer or diplomat, none of which seemed even remotely likely as future careers at the time, since I'd enrolled in the school of engineering, but somehow they all came together at MCN.

Because we field so many letters from our readers each month (the volume of MCN's reader feedback is exceptional, other motojournalists tell us), we feel as if we know many of you personally. And the sense of shared ownership you have as subscribers is another special relationship that's equally rare. You feel, "It's *Our* magazine," and I understand that my job as caretaker of our grand experiment in non-commercial journalism is a sacred trust.

Which is a long-winded way of saying that when circumstances require that we spend more than half the week road testing, in the solitary pursuit of meaningful impressions and gas mileage checks on our longest and toughest test routes, riding exceptional motorcycles, even *we* notice how it changes you.

This month's bike reviews; the new Multistrada 1200S and the KTM 990 SMT both qualify as exceptional bikes, able to derive the maximum riding pleasure from great roads. Both powered by

potent V-twin engines and close to the same size and weight, the contrast they present is one of electronic rider aids (the Ducati) vs. unassisted but highly refined conventional components (the KTM).

The promise of ABS, "fly-by-wire" fuel injection (in which a computer adjusts engine response and tuning to give a rider a choice of "riding modes"), traction control (to prevent losing the rear end when riding hard enough to inadvertently spin the rear tire) and electrically adjustable suspension are all combined in the Multistrada 1200. And the KTM is the perfect example of a highly sophisticated but fully rider-controlled motorcycle. Riding them both separately and then swapping one for the other over the same course was very interesting and informative. We hope our evaluations provide insights you can use when you shop for your next bike.

But, on a personal note, the amount of saddle time we racked up last week made each ride better than the last. And the reason for this is probably very familiar to most of you.

Controlling a motorcycle requires several skills that are not normally exercised by everyday activity: Chiefly, visuospatial clarity; the ability to accurately locate and remember multiple positions in space and to precisely orient the motorcycle so that you manage the curvature of the road, other traffic, and potential hazards smoothly and with maximum control. Another is a heightened need for quick reaction times, so that there is no lag in your response to perceived needs for adjustments; changes in slowing, turning or accelerating. The third is higher order cognitive functioning; the ability to rapidly calculate and plan your actions in advance of putting them into practice.

The unique human ability to meld with complex tools is what separates us from complex tools is what separates us from the primates. In fact, the brain continually rewires itself to do this more effectively, if given repeated practice.

Sure enough, by Friday, I noticed that my balance had improved, my reaction times were quicker and my interactions with others were more spontaneous and enjoyable on many levels. To a degree that's rare in just about any other activity, motorcycling can literally improve you from the inside out.

How great is that!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DAVE SEARLE". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

—Dave Searle
Editor