

Bob & Patti's Bike

THIS STORY IS for all you old-timers out there, who remember the *Road Rider* days, with Bob and Patti Carpenter, and who, like me, followed their adventures for over 20 years.

In late 1970, as *Road Rider* was first getting started, Bob and Patti decided they needed a bike for long-distance touring. Like so many riders back then who were attracted to the rather-new craze of "motorcycle touring," they opted for a BMW, which was considered the icon of long-distance motorcycle travel. The particular model they chose was the 1971 R75/5, a 750cc Boxer twin. This model would become known among Beemer aficionados as a "toaster tank," because of the chromed panels attached to the side of the gas tank. As near as I can determine, back then it was a term of derision, used primarily by detractors of the model, but as the years passed, it actually became a term of fond endearment to its many owners and fans. Still, in the early '70s, most BMW enthusiasts found the chrome sidings much too gaudy for their tastes, and removed them immediately upon purchasing the bike. Bob was no different.

In addition to removing the flashy chrome, the Carpenters immediately called upon accessory-maker Ken Craven to make them a set of color-matched (blue) fiberglass saddlebags. I recall from my own experiences over 30 years ago that locking, hard bags for your bike were pretty hard to come by, and I had yet to even hear about such a thing as having them color-matched. I tried to get a set from Krauser, in Germany, who supposedly made the best in the world at the time, but they would have cost me about half as much as I paid for my bike!

Anyway, Bob also had a custom saddle made for the slash-five, but neither he nor Patti remembers who the craftsman was that made it. And with that, they were ready to tour. Patti says, "Our first 'big ride' was to San Diego and back, a total of about 175 miles, and we thought we'd ridden to the end of the world and back!"

Only a year later, they would take the longest ride they would ever take on the Beemer, to the first-ever Aspencade in Ruidoso, New Mexico. Fans will recall that within the next decade, Bob and Patti would take off for as much as a year at a time, traveling all the way around the world and sending their stories from the road back to be printed in *Road Rider*. It was these stories that inspired my wife and myself to take up long-distance touring, and probably did the same for thousands of other motorcyclists. In a very real sense, the Carpenters were probably largely responsible for the growth

of the touring motorcycle market in the '70s and '80s. They were, in fact, commissioned by Yamaha as test riders/consultants on the production of that company's first dedicated luxury touring bike, the Venture. Patti even named the bike the "Royale," after their ride to Monaco and a visit to Casino Royale.

But, it wasn't long before Patti learned to ride on her own, and, at around the same time, the Beemer broke down. Bob never was much of a wrench, so rather than trying to fix it, he pushed the bike into the back of



Carpenter/Hough 1971 BMW R75/5 "toaster" at the top of Rainy Pass in the Washington Cascade Mountains.

the garage, and bought two new Kawasakis: A 750 triple for himself, and a 350 Avenger for Patti. Patti still recalls the Avenger as, "My favorite bike, ever."

From there, the Carpenters moved into the era that Bob would later call, "The days of OPB," meaning, "Other People's Bikes." By now, their articles in *Road Rider* had gained enough attention from the manufacturers that there was a never-ending supply of loaner bikes available to them.

The old slash-five languished in the back of the garage, slowly corroding away as the years passed. Until one day in 1992, when David Hough came to visit. David couldn't stand to see the venerable old Boxer just rotting away, and he immediately arranged to buy it from Bob (for what both term as "a pittance," though neither seems able to remember the actual price), and trucked it north to the Hough garage in Port Angeles.

For the next 12 years, David slowly and meticulously restored the Beemer. His first major stumbling block was replacing the old toaster tank covers Bob had removed. Dave says it took nearly three years before he found a set, badly corroded, in a small parts shop. He took them home, and spent many a long evening hand-polishing them back to their old glory. When they were finished and reattached, he admired them for a few minutes before noticing that the reinforcing strips on the saddlebags had suffered the same fate, and so pulled the left

saddlebag off to begin once again his long, arduous polishing ritual. But as he removed the bag, it rattled loudly. Fearing something had broken apart inside, he opened it up (the first time it had been opened in nearly 30 years), and found...the original "toaster tank" covers, wrapped carefully, and in showroom-new condition!

Despite that psychological setback, David went on about his work, eventually bringing the old Beemer completely back to life, in only about 12 years.

Fast-forward to 2004, and the BMW MOA National Rally, in Spokane, Washington. David e-mailed me and suggested that I fly up to Washington, borrow his new R1150 GS, and ride to the rally together. After I arrived, he took me out to the garage to load up the bikes, and of course, I immediately spied the old R75 sitting in the corner. "Wow. Is that Bob's old Beemer? Is it actually running again?"

"Yep. All done."

"I'm impressed," I said. "It looks great. Have you ridden it?"

"Just a couple of short hops," said David. "I haven't tried it for a long trip yet, but I don't see any reason it couldn't handle one."

Well, naturally, I imposed upon him to let me take the bike to the rally instead of the new GS, and for a three-day tour of the Cascade Mountains afterward. I didn't keep track of the miles, but I suppose I rode the old toaster about 1500 miles total. And I loved every minute of it. Even though my half-dozen riding companions were all on state-of-the-art GS and RS models, I didn't have too much of a problem staying with them, though I will admit to having to work a bit harder at it than I might have on a modern bike. But I think that was a good thing, as I really believe it helped hone my riding skills somewhat. Especially in terms of braking, as those old drum brakes require considerably more forethought when you're pushing the performance envelope.

But, of course, the greatest thing wasn't riding a 33-year-old bike, or even the many nice looks and comments from the Beemerphiles (Wow! Nice toaster, man!), but knowing I was riding the same bike that I had read about so many years before, and that had, in so many ways, been largely responsible for me being where I am today, and doing what I love so much.

—Fred Rau
Senior Editor