



Where credit's due:

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INTRODUCTION

The plan was simple enough. Meet Pascal (of [SV650 National racing fame](#)) in St. Jacob's, Ontario, have a few beers whilst getting caught up on the latest gup, and call it an early night so that we would be fresh for an entertaining ride with the KTM Rally Connex crew the next day.

Oh, but this is CMG and you just know it's all going to go horribly wrong...

SO WHAT'S THIS RALLY CONNEX STUFF ABOUT THEN?

The [KTM Rally Connex Adventure Ride Series](#) could be one of Canada's best-kept secrets. Off road specialist and Rally Connex head honcho Warren Thaxter and his crew of dual sport enthusiasts have actually been conducting these adventure rides in Ontario and Québec for years. For 2004 however, KTM has replaced Kawasaki as one of the main sponsors and KTM's timing for doing so is quite fortuitous for them - as the series seems destined for a major growth spurt.

I was thinking about this riding series as I was trying to make our loaner KTM 950 Adventure's seat a little less plank-like for my ride out to our accommodations for the night, [Benjamin's Restaurant and Inn](#) in the historic Mennonite town of St. Jacob's, Ontario. I live in Toronto where riding on a series of entertaining paved roads either means trekking north of Kingston, or simply going to Pennsylvania. However, a dual sport bike opens up a



Now this looks like fun!

whole new world of gravel roads and trails that, if threaded together in an interesting way, can provide a challenging day's ride - generally without having to go too far afield. I was curious see what Warren Thaxter and his Rally Connex team were going to serve up.

Finally, I got the KTM's seat sorted by layering it with a jacket liner and an extra pair of pants and then strapping Flossy the sheepskin over top. I had decided to take the 401 to the Waterloo turnoff and knew this bit of extra work on the seat would be essential to make the hour-plus ride on the slab somewhat more bearable.

PRE-ADVENTURE



"I can't believe the fuel light didn't come on" - Pascal sticks to his story the morning after.

Meanwhile, Pascal had left Montreal on our long-term BMW R1200GS and was blasting westward along the 401. Just east of Kingston, the Beemer sputtered and died. Undaunted, Pascal started stripping the BMW down in order to find the fault, and it wasn't until he removed several large parts that he thought he should check whether there was any gas in the tank ...

Shortly thereafter, Mr. Tate (who lives near Kingston) was on the road with a tank of fuel to rescue Pascal, who, to this date swears that the low fuel light never came on...(That fuel light NEVER came on, dammit!, Pascal)

Pascal finally arrived at our accommodations in St. Jacob's around midnight, and after bringing me up to date on his antics, we called it a night.

GETTING GPSed

Early the next day we arrived at Cycle Improvements in Waterloo (the ride start point) where we were greeted by a parking lot filled with dual sport bikes and riders of all shapes, sizes, and vintages. We figured there must have been more than 40 riders out for this event.

After Pascal and I signed the necessary waivers, Ed, one of the staff members, loaned us a GPS with the day's route downloaded and briefed us on how to use it. If you are not a cheap bastard web publication willing to hit up the Rally Connex people for freebies, the ride will cost you \$40 per rider and the GPS rental would be the same.



Rally Connex crew download the route du jour.

During the meet and greet session following the ride briefing, we met Philippe Devos, who was doing a story for the Globe and Mail. He asked if he could ride with us and we agreed. Foolish man.

OUT ON THE TRAIL



Philippe Devos of the Globe & Mail questions the wisdom of riding with the CMG crew.

Pascal and I have never done a GPS ride and surprisingly, Pascal, who works in the IT industry was very anti- the GPS technology. So, naturally I made him ride the GPS-equipped KTM and do the navigating. After about three missed turns that had Pascal calling the GPS unit and the whole premise a POS, I reminded him that he could zoom in and out of the map to find a map-sizing that would give him enough time to be more prepared for the turns.

After this, things smoothed out for a short while as we soaked in the scenery of the area's Mennonite farms. When we arrived at the first alternate route, Pascal actually said that he was having fun with the GPS navigation.

It is important to note that these GPS tours have two routes: one a more challenging offering, the other a route catered for bigger bikes with dual sport tires (you know, bikes like a BMW R1200GS and a KTM Adventure...). During the morning rider's meeting it was strongly emphasized that the challenging route would be even more challenging due to the large amount of rain that fallen in the area overnight.

TAKE THE CHALLENGE?

So what to do? I think you know the answer. With the cards stacked heavily against us, we threw caution to the wind and hit the challenging route. After all, we were supposed to be testing the limits of these bikes, and who wants to be called a wuss?





The initial so-called "challenging" section didn't prove to be much

of a challenge at all. It was a slightly rougher gravel road - no big whup. Of course, as soon as we were lulled into a comfort zone, we hit it - a muck road the likes not seen since the [2000 CMG Grand Tour](#). A whole array of bikes that had started ahead of us were inching through the mire with their back ends swinging wildly to left and right as their tire treads filled with goo.

We eventually discovered that it was marginally easier to slither along the wet grass than to try to keep some sort of momentum going in the muck. Surprisingly, we all managed to get through without dumping our now not-so-shiny new bikes.

Getting into a groove. With newly found respect for the "challenging" route we soldiered ahead and started to get into a groove. The GPS route led us through a mix of roads and trails, and rarely did we touch pavement. On some of the gravel road sections, Pascal and I managed to put a gap between ourselves and Philippe on his KTM single, as we opened up the big twins up and reached license-losing speeds without the fear of ever seeing another vehicle, let alone the local constabulary. Yes, life was good.

IT WAS JUST STARTING TO GO TOO WELL...

When we finally hit a nice stretch of twisty pavement, I started to wonder what happened to racer-Pascal, as he fumbled through some gorgeous curves. I discovered what the problem was when he pulled over on the next gravel section and revealed a near-flat front tire on the KTM.

It's times like these that you can be grateful that you're riding with friends on an organized group ride. Philippe called Warren to let him know that we needed some help with a flat, while Pascal rigged a stand for the KTM with a log found in the ditch, while I documented the goings on. Before Pascal could get the wheel off, the next group of riders were passing through and asking if we needed help. A 21" tube was offered from a better-prepared dual sport rider, and before you can say, "just hammer it back in with a rock" we were back on the road to Creemore for a lunch break. Thank God for BMW CO2 tire repair cartridges and friendly co-riders.



Friendly bikers pitch in to help with the repair.

We opted for a small pizza joint in Creemore and it was great to get inside to warm up. The +14 degree temperatures that were promised in the morning never happened, and of course Pascal and I had gambled that we'd be warm enough without jacket liners. Who'da thunk we'd guess wrong?

MELDING WITH THE DIGITAL WORLD - CMG STYLE



The aftermath of Mr. Seck's inability to be as one with the GPS.

Photo: Pascal Antcil

Soon after stuffing ourselves we were back on the road belching up pizza and pasta. At the end of the first section after lunch, Pascal and I decided to switch bikes, which meant that I would now have to navigate.

It didn't seem that complicated, the GPS shows you where you are and draws a sketch of what to expect on the road ahead, it even gives you the distance to the next waypoint. No problem, it looked like a straight line ahead so I decided to keep things interesting for the guys and wick it up. It was at this point that I realized that digital GPS maps display their interpretation of reality a little different than one might originally think. In my head, based on the information presented, I was looking for a right turn off a straight road, but what the GPS was actually telling me was that the road ahead was about to kink at 90 degrees to the right. It was a mind-bending shock when the tight right-hander arrived. Feck, evasive action required!

It almost worked, as I managed to brake and then steer the KTM wide through the corner. The only problem was that this outside section of the road was essentially one big mud puddle. A bit too much lean angle quickly resulted in the bike slipping out from under me and low-siding. On the plus side, it was a rather soft spot to crash and the only damage to the bike were a few scrapes on the lower part on the low slung gas tank. I was fine, other than being covered in muck, with the guys having a good laugh.



Back up to speed.

I took it down a few notches after this until the GPS and I melded a bit better. Before too long we were back up to speed and I was having a blast on the KTM. The post-lunch ride was proving even more entertaining than the morning, with more trails and technical bits.

PHOTO OP



It was during a particularly soggy section where I thought it would be a good idea to get a "splash" photo. At what looked like a likely spot I informed Pascal of what was required and told him I'd go ahead and wave him through when I was ready.

The section I was sending him through looked pretty



Make up your own caption...

nasty, so I opted to try and avoid going through the muddy water myself. The KTM had other ideas and eventually directed me into what must have been the deepest section of this puddle. I was a bit stunned when both wheels were almost submerged in this hole. Quickly,

I decided that this was the shot that the KTM wanted, so I simply got off the bike mid-puddle and started photographing- once again with the peanut gallery having a good laugh.

IT'S ALL OVER

We did eventually get that splash shot before the KTM managed yet another flat, this time on the rear. At this point Philippe had had enough of the CMG chaos and rode ahead while we waited for the Rally Connex sweep bikes to help us out.

Where the first flat was kind of entertaining, this one proved to be a real pain in the butt. We had used up all the BMW's CO2 cartridges and were left with a small hand pump to try and bead the tire to the rim. It didn't work.

This ended our fun for the day and with an unbeaded rear tire we took the shortest route that we could back towards Cycle Improvements. The last hour of the ride was the most painful, as the sun was setting and the temperatures dropped even further. The KTM with the unbeaded, over-inflated rear would try to shake itself apart at anything over 60 km/h. We did a chilling 120 km/h just to get the last stretch over with and find a warm place with warm food and cold beer.



Oy Vey.

EPILOGUE



Maybe next time we should take the easy route, and stick to stuff like this?

Now you'd think with all the chaos and such a sad ending to this tale, my enthusiasm would be dampened towards this type of motorcycling activity. Truth be told though, I find myself scanning the CMG Buy & Sell for a cheap dual sport bike, just so that I can do stuff like this more often. Warren Thaxter and his Rally Connex crew truly put together a fun day of non-stop adventure (especially if you are part of CMG) and the rides are a bargain for the support and route that is provided.

As for Pascal, at \$40 for a pre-routed day of bliss with sweep riders, he is a convert to GPS adventure rides and thinks that for the price, the rides are an absolute steal. He's even more than ready to spend his hard-earned cash to go on another ride, but next time he'd chose Algonquin or one in the mountains in Quebec so there's more twisty roads.

See you on the trails!

Mr. Seck

THANKS & INFO

Many thanks to Warren Thaxter and the gang at [Rally Connex](#) for fun day. Warren, thanks for the tube as well...

Thank you [BMW](#) and [KTM](#) for the use of the bikes.

And finally, a big thank you to [Benjamin's Restaurant and Inn](#) for the accommodation for the night.



Warren Thaxter helps the CMG knuckleheads so that he can finally call it a day...



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