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Bitten By the GS Bug

Or How I Discovered Riding Off-Road on a Honda Trail 125

Moshe K Levy · RA 46013

Photos by Moshe K Levy, Chris Brinkley and Aubrey Lynn Cavazos



If there's one thing even rarer than bipartisan consensus in the US Congress, it's BMW RTs in Texas. In my three months here, I've only seen two of them, besides my own. Indeed, it seems everyone in my San Antonio Euro-bike orbit has some variation of the GS as the main steed, and it's getting easier to see why: there are oodles of unpaved roads in the Hill Country region outside of city limits, all begging to be discovered. It is in these remote and rural areas where one can truly appreciate Texas' unparalleled natural splendor.

I landed here in November 2022, and immediately began exploring. Using the superb Scenic Motorcycle Navigation app, I ventured further and further outward from home, eventually knocking out some elaborate day trips that even the locals praised for the diversity of terrain. Weeks went by, and

I continued to resist the relentless peer pressure of my new GS-riding Texan friends as I reconnoitered Hill Country solo on my 2015 R 1200 RT. "My RT can do anything!" I thought. After over 17 years riding successive generations of RTs, I can tell you this: One very rarely encounters a situation that this model can't handle with aplomb. I traversed over the gravel and the packed dirt at conservative speeds, and even plunged the legendary sport-tourer into some fairly deep water crossings. I've never even thought of owning another motorcycle type as my main ride, but this rural environment was starting to put chinks in that armor.

The difference between Could and Should

It was becoming apparent that although my faithful RT

could do what I was asking of her, she clearly wasn't in her element, nor was she happy with me for taking her out of it. "You idiot! A smart man wouldn't ask a fish to climb a ladder!" she snapped at me after wading out of yet another swampy pond. The RT's vociferous objections aside, the prospect of taking out a second mortgage to pay for busted San Marino Blue Tupperware in the event of an off-road spill wasn't very appealing to me, either.

So, after 25 years of pavement riding, I submitted to the obvious change in my environmental circumstances and signed up for a Level 1 Beginner off-road course, taught by veteran instructor Wesley Ely of Adventures Tejas. There was a catch: A dual-sport motorcycle was required to complete the course, and the only off-roader in my stable is my 2021 Honda Trail

125. This "Hunter Cub," as it is affectionally called by its adoring fans, is one of the most primitive motorcycles on the market today. Simple, light weight, and slower than a tranquilized sloth, it's got an air-cooled thumper which has been in use in some configuration or another for over 60 years. The microscopic engine cranks out 9 frenzied horses, all stampeding through a centrifugal clutch to a 4 speed manual transmission. It's twist and go, but you still have to shift gears with your foot, so it's still a motorcycle! There was no choice in the matter – if I wanted to take this course, I had to do it on the Trail 125.*

The Adventure Tejas Level 1 Course was a full weekend affair, and I rolled up to the training grounds in Kerrville bright and early on Saturday morning. I was greeted by a bevy of serious looking blokes, most straddling boxer GSes that were

PERSPECTIVE

outfitted to the gills with enough accessories to weigh down a cargo ship. There were crash bars, auxiliary lights, and bash plates galore, all very much on display. In fact, besides my humble Trail, the only other bike less than 1200 cc on the scene that day was a Royal Enfield Himalayan. Everyone else was immersed in an unspoken contest to determine who could best outshine Ewan and Charlie.

Wes did a marvelous job introducing course concepts to us as we diligently worked through various exercises. We began with proper body positioning and finding the friction zone, and then dove into building skill sets in slow races, weighting the foot pegs through slaloms, full lock circles and figure eights in tight quarters, emergency braking, descending steep hills, and then climbing back up them again. His coaching was pulling the best out of all of us, but I felt like I was “cheating” by utilizing such a petite bike.

Bring on the GSA

Then my friend generously offered me his 1250 GSA for a few of the exercises, and things got interesting. Marty’s 1250 GSA was ergonomically set up for his gargantuan pro wrestler’s stature, while my proportions are more akin to Pee Wee Herman on a diet. To say the least, I felt intimidated jumping on such a colossal, foreign machine and immediately having to perform technical maneuvers “cold.” It wasn’t just the sheer mass of the GSA that terrified me—it was also the mass of Marty himself that was top of mind, as I pondered the potential consequences of inadvertently dropping his beloved ADV bike into the dirt.

But there was nothing to fear! Aside from climbing aboard the damned thing (GSA seat height is measured in miles,) it was a breeze to control the big brute. Once it got rolling, the 1250 was perfectly balanced even at walking speed, allowing me to turn in a reasonable performance despite having never piloted something so massive in my life. Now, the aforementioned RT-only armor was not just getting chinked, but was

getting blown open with nuclear warheads.

Day Two of the course consisted of a guided tour through Hill Country, where we students all put our newfound skills to the test. Wes was out in front, expertly leading us past the region’s famous vast ranches, stunning vistas, and open wild-life. It was one of those joyous moments that only motorcycles can provide – you know that feeling! I was perched back on the Trail 125 again, thinking deeply about how these majestic scenes weren’t visible from the pavement. All these years, I’ve been missing out! And wouldn’t it be nice to be able to go on

a longer journey, undeterred if the pavement happened to disappear? My mind continued to wrestle with these novel issues as I attempted to stay focused on task at hand: tearing through the gravel on the Honda, watching out for hazards, trying to do everything the GSes could do – even passing a few of the “Pavement Princesses” in the process!

Then more thinking: I’d been resisting this urge successfully for months now, but it was dawning on me that to truly experience this rural area competently, I would need a full-size dual sport. Something that could balance the on-road comfort I’m used to on my RT, with the capability to venture off the beaten path if the opportunity arises. Something like a Swiss Army knife on two wheels. There’s got to be a motorcycle out there with these elusive qualities, but I just can’t put my finger on what it’s

called... Anyhow, I want one!

*I bought this little MiniMoto in August of 2021, after being afflicted with a terrible case of COVID that rendered me with no sense of balance, extreme vertigo, roiling migraines, brain fog, memory loss, and other miscellaneous debilitating symptoms. If you’re interested in the long version of how the Honda Trail 125 nursed me from the depths of COVID back to health, I refer you to *Rider Magazine’s* March 2022 issue, available at [mklsportster.com/wp-content/uploads/Rider-March-22-HondaTrail.pdf](https://www.mklsportster.com/wp-content/uploads/Rider-March-22-HondaTrail.pdf).



Top: My RT crossed over Seco Creek



Above: Locking up the rear wheel for emergency braking exercises



Left: Wes demonstrating proper technique for standing on the pegs

Below: Wes presents me with my Level 1 Off-Road Certificate

Bottom: Yep, I did a thing. My new to me 2020 R 1250 GS Exclusive

