



# MOTO MOUTH MOSHE

Moshe K. Levy

RA 43605

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## The Making of a Modern-Day Quasi-Luddite

In 1999, my mother brought home our family's first-ever BMW product, an E39-Series 528i sedan. I've been thinking a great deal about what that car represented lately. Joji Nagashima's evolutionary mid-90s exterior design, a masterpiece of perfect midsize proportions and understated feminine grace, is still elegant some 30 years later. Likewise, the interior was a magnum opus, blending excellent ergonomics with supreme comfort. Every driver interface was exactly where it should be, and every switch, stalk, and lever operated with pleasing tactile detents. Beyond the aesthetics, the 5's dynamics were impeccable as well. From the silky-smooth straight six engine to the velvety transmission, from the heft of the power steering to the sophisticated aluminum suspension that struck the perfect balance between supple ride and responsive handling, the feeling of driving that car could be summarized in one word: control. This was a true driver's car, with a very short and very direct line from the driver's inputs to the car's behavior.

Fast forward 24 years, and mom just took delivery of 2022 G30-Series 530i sedan, which I promptly took out for a test drive. Within a mile of departure,

I encountered a bicyclist traveling properly in the same lane as me. There was no oncoming traffic, so I crossed left over the road's center divider line to give him a wide berth as I passed him in the car. The BMW, thinking I had crossed over the lane by mistake, reacted by violently jerking the wheel back towards the right, almost directly into the startled bicyclist. I missed him by mere inches. Shaken by the experience of the car overriding me so dangerously, I apologized profusely to the bicyclist and drove on another mile to an intersection. As I slowed down, I could sense the brake pedal was pushing itself down at a rate completely divorced from how much pressure I was applying with my foot. As the 530i came to a stop, the brake pedal fully depressed itself, locked the car into position, and the engine shut itself off. When I pulled my foot from the pedal completely, the engine restarted and the car jerked roughly forward again, now freed from the brake calipers' death grip (which nobody had asked for in the first place.) On and on it went like this, *ad nauseam*, for the rest of the trip. Every input I made to the car felt like it was being endlessly debated by 10,000 digital politburos before the damned

thing finally decided to do what I was asking of it. (Note: Yes, I know that digging into the sub-sub-sub menus behind the submenus behind the main menus on the distracting control screen might partially bypass some of these nannies - at least for now).

The juxtaposition between the old 5-Series and the new couldn't be more depressing, and it's why as a gearhead I'm steamed about the direction we're headed. The same company that once built "The Ultimate Driving Machine" now offers us this soulless automaton as its heir, where digital overlords reign and the driver is relegated to mere existence as a numb, passive entity going along for the ride. How long before this relentless push toward further automation and overbearing "safetyism" negatively affects our motorcycles? The answer is: Not long at all.

This summer, I've been on a two-month cross country trip on my new-to-me 2020 R 1250 GS, which superseded an old 2015 R 1200 RT as my main steed. I've clocked almost 10k miles in six weeks so far on this GS, and at this point I would commando crawl naked over broken glass shards just to get my old RT back, primarily because of the interface. The GS replaced my RT's former traditional tach and speedo gauges with the much-vaunted TFT screen. Now, instead of being able to gather tons of valuable information at a glance, I'm forced to toggle through a labyrinth of menus and submenus

to see the same stats that used to be continuously visible. I had to consult the owner's manual to figure out the *multiple steps* required to simply reset my trip odometer, which not long ago used to be the single push of a single button. I have to guess at what any of the display says at high noon on sunny days because the whole damned thing totally washes out with glare, requiring me to try to cast shade on it with my left hand while trying to control the motorcycle with only my right. Oh, and the whole TFT assembly is easily stolen, too. I ask you, dear reader: Is any of this genuine progress, or is this "feature" borne of a desperate appeal to younger generations that apparently can't go one nanosecond without staring mindlessly into a screen, lest they lapse into withdrawal symptoms like the jonesing addicts that they are?

Take a look at the newer BMW offerings—the multiple ride modes, and clutchless gear changes, and adaptive cruise control, and... all this whiz-bang techno-automation is eroding rider agency. Years spent practicing how to shift smoothly, apply throttle and brakes judiciously based on current circumstances, heighten situational awareness, maintain proper following distances, etc. are all perishable skills. Our human control is slipping away, along inevitably with our collective competence, and we are obviously all worse off for it!

Before you dismiss all of this as the unhinged rantings of a middle-aged knuckle-dragger, tell me: are there now controls on your bike that are digitized solely for the purpose of digitizing them, with no apparent functional benefit whatsoever? I've been around the motorcycle scene long enough to re-

member the howls of indignation when oilheads supplanted airheads. "Oh my God! No carburetors! How will we fix the bikes by the side of the road using only a paperclip?" Then there was the time when wetheads supplanted camheads. "Oh my God! Radiators! What happens when they leak?" But, my friends, this is not that. This is not me naively standing against the great march of technological progress because I'm afraid of it. Rather, this is me saying I've drawn a line in the sand for the types of bikes I as a BMW customer am willing to buy. If the technology advances functionality (ABS, fuel injection, higher performance, etc.), I'm all in. However, if the technology is just transforming formerly simple tasks into pedantic exercises in mind-bending frustration, I'm out!

So, hear me, BMW - *bring back the gauges!*

