

## Confessions of a BMW Addict

well over 200,000 combined miles on them, traveling all over the U.S. and Canada. All of them have been

**AS A YOUNG MOTORCYCLIST**, I discovered BMW by accident. In the summer of 2003, I was cruising along the Blue Ridge Parkway on my 1998 Harley-Davidson Sportster 1200 Custom, a violent jackhammer of a bike that was crude, loud, and spectacularly uncomfortable. The sun was about to set as I pulled into a motorcycle-friendly campground. After parking my bike, I saw a large crowd gathered around a blazing fire, listening intently to a presentation. I approached curiously and was soon in rapt attention myself.

The speakers were Chris and Erin Ratay, who were wrapping up a four-year, 101,322-mile circumnavigation of the planet aboard a pair of BMW F 650s, a trip that earned a Guinness World Record for the longest distance traveled by a couple on two motorcycles. I had stumbled upon the last stop on the Ratays' "ultimate journey" before they returned home to New York.

Of course, the globetrotting couple shared interesting tales of adventure travel, but the theme they kept coming back to was the indestructibility of their BMWs. Their bikes were on display, and everyone at camp scrutinized them carefully. After four years traversing 50 countries on six continents, both F 650s looked as though they had been dropped from an aircraft at 30,000 feet, crash-landed on jagged rockface, set on fire with napalm, and then run over by a battalion of Abrams tanks. Yet both started instantly and ran with the precision of a fine Swiss watch.

Juxtaposed against my primitive Sportster, the contrast in terms of modern engineering and stout reliability couldn't be clearer. I began studying BMWs and fell in love with the R 75/5 that Clement Salvadori wrote about in the pages of *Rider* (Retrospective, April 1991). I soon had a 1973 long-wheelbase Monza Blue R 75/5 Toaster in my garage, and it was a revelation. Despite its age, it was so quiet, so smooth, and so stable at speed. That motorcycle, with its quirky air-cooled flat-Twin "boxer" motor and bizarre but practical styling, was my gateway drug into the wonderful world of BMW motorcycles. And what a journey it's been!

Over the past 20 years, I've owned or co-owned 11 BMWs ranging in age from a 1971 R 60/5 to a 2020 R 1250 GS. I've put

supremely functional, which isn't surprising given the company's storied history of engineering innovations. BMW has given us hydraulically damped forks as well as the first production versions of a nose fairing, a full fairing, a single-sided swingarm, anti-lock brakes, and of course, BMW's proprietary Paralever and Telelever suspension systems, among many other innovations.


BMWs are generally overengineered, sometimes to a fault, but the company's rabid fan base of high-mileage riders has come to respect the brand as representative of some of the finest motorcycles available at any price.

However, what I appreciate more than the motorcycles themselves is the BMW community of riders. They're a wildly diverse group of mostly professionals, skewing heavily toward the intellectual and analytical gearheads that I feel most at home with. Every BMW group I've spent time with emphasizes riding competence and safety. BMW is a marque that appeals to serious riders, as reflected by the odometers one sees at any of the brand's big rallies: 100,000-plus miles on bikes that are only a few years old is a common sight.

One hundred years of continuous production is a stellar accomplishment for any company, especially for a brand that has been considered a niche manufacturer for much of its history. But in recent years, BMW Motorrad has branched out beyond its traditional touring and adventure bikes to produce models such as high-performance sportbikes and electric scooters, which would have been unthinkable when I started riding BMWs 20 years ago. It's going to be fascinating to see where the next 100 years take us!



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The author with his 2004 BMW R 1150 RT in Yellowstone National Park during his first cross-country trip in 2007.

