



always an adventure

by Ian Schmeisser

As an ardent reader of one of the greatest on-line forum threads of all time: *Striking Viking Bumming the World*, which has now run for three years on ADVrider.com and received more than 1.1 million page views, I'd very much like to thank Moshe Levy for writing this story and interviewing the rider, Glen Heggstad. The forum thread provided a near daily dose of adventure from amazing places around the world in near real-time. And now this article sheds some light into the personality of this amazing earth rider. This spring and into the fall, Heggstad is adventuring to a number of BMW dealers throughout the USA to tell... and show... his story. To learn more about his scheduled presentations, please visit the BMW MOA web site's Heard on the Road section.—Ian

Travels of the Striking Viking

by Moshe K. Levy #108259

Imagine a lone American motorcyclist venturing into some of the most dangerous regions in the world, and finding universal hospitality. Envision the ride of a lifetime, the course of which transforms one's entire philosophical outlook, and shatters many long-held convictions with every passing mile. For Glen Heggstad, such an implausible fantasy recently became a reality.

Heggstad, also known as the "Striking Viking," has already amassed more roles than a boatful of Hollywood's finest in his madcap fifty-four years. From former Hell's Angel to formidable martial arts instructor, from international hostage to triumphant motorcycle adventurer, from poignant author to stirring lecturer, and now... a goodwill ambassador to those at home.

For those who don't yet know him, Heggstad initially gained notoriety amongst adventure motorcyclists for his 2001-2002 sojourn from Palm Springs, California, to the southernmost tip of South America, and back. Barely five weeks after departing California, while traveling through the poverty-stricken regions outside Medellin, Colombia, Heggstad was stopped at a roadside blockade by the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)*. The gang of violent Marxist guerrillas ripped Glen off of his Kawasaki KLR650 and kept him hostage

at gunpoint for the next 33 days, during which time he would endure an array of physical and mental torture that would break lesser men in mere hours. The ELN doled out vicious daily beatings, agonizing mock executions, slow starvation, dehydration, and long marches through the jungle.

Glen was released to the International Red Cross on December 10, 2001, 50 pounds lighter and barely functional. Still, he refused hospitalization and continued southward on his journey as planned on another motorcycle supplied by his Judo students. The poignant experience of this tour culminated in his book *Two Wheels Through Terror*, now a staple amongst motorcycle adventure literature.

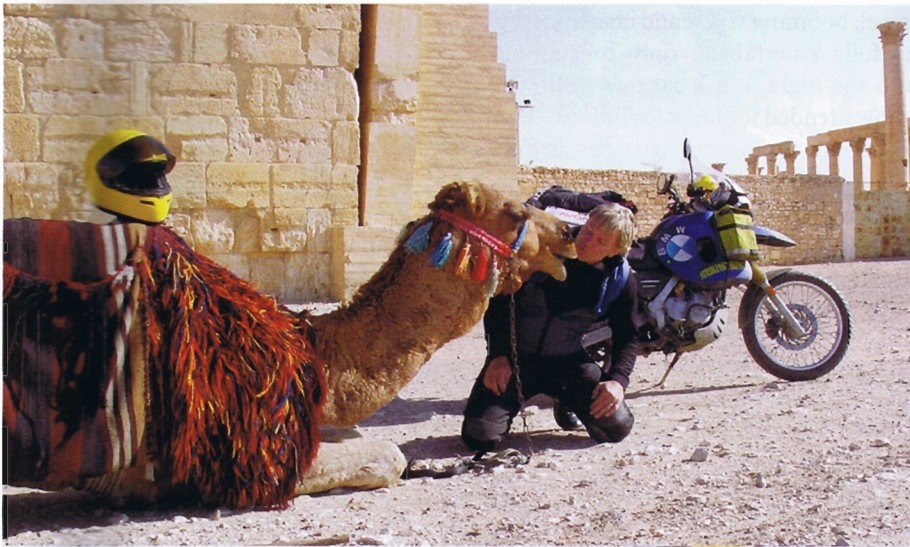
In 2003, while attempting to adjust to life back home, Glen found himself still trying to reconcile the complicated geopolitical events unfolding in the post 9/11 world. Terrorism, which he had already experienced firsthand, was a festering fear among Americans. Each day, it seemed fresh lines were being drawn in the sand, and resulting perceptions of new enemies in foreign lands were being formed in the minds of the timorous

The desolation of the desert can provide for a lonely ride, but affords the rider much time to think and enjoy the scenery.

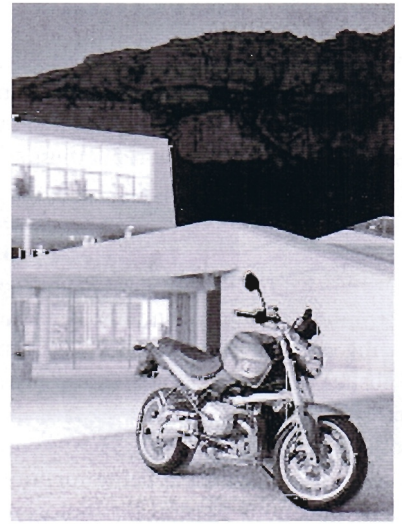


Glen Heggstad at the Earth Ride presentation in November.





Top: Does one need a helmet to ride a camel?
Middle: Native Africans enjoyed the site of Glen's bike and got a little closer to sit in on the action. **Above:** A bathtub-sized puddle presented a challenge for even the most experienced of GS riders.



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tives of everything he encountered. Since returning, he's toured the US presenting a dramatic two-hour multimedia show, which has cemented his reputation as a true moto-adventurer.

I was lucky enough to secure a seat at Heggstad's only east coast show last November at Cliff's Cycle Revolution in Danbury, Connecticut, and after following his travel blogs on adventure Websites (such as advrider.com), was anxious to meet Glen face to face. Not only did the presentation exceed expectations, it created an appetite for more. Glen's infectious passion for motorcycle

travel, booming voice, and charisma kept us fully entertained, only to continue into the night at a local pub. Although some attended for logistical information, most came for the voyeuristic pleasure of absorbing images gathered from around the developing world. Each picture had its own compelling story to complement the whole of the adventure.

A particularly moving slide was pic-

ture of a young Mongolian girl offering Glen a pail of goat's milk, even though she was obviously scared of the hulking blonde motorcyclist. Nearing hypothermia in Siberia, Russian Buryats insisted that Heggstad scoff down the last of their meager food supply, while later on, Bedouin Arabs provided him with late-night sanctuary while crossing Middle East deserts. Time and again, in differ-



Things got a little sticky for Glen in Borneo.

Ancient architecture, archeological treasures, and captivating scenery were certainly expected on such a voyage, but more powerful still were tales of unbelievable kindness from strangers in foreign lands.



Glen takes a moment to reflect on the amazing structures he passes, even the pyramids of Egypt.



Above: An Indian stops to pose with Glen's bike.



An Arabian woman shields her face.

ent countries and cultures, Glen Heggstad learned compassion from people our media often portrays as uncivilized adversaries. His axiom was ringing true!

Ancient architecture, archeological treasures, and captivating scenery were certainly expected on such a voyage, but more powerful still were tales of unbelievable kindness from strangers in foreign lands. The unassuming hospitality bestowed upon him by those of the developing world, Heggstad contended, was indicative of populations which remembered that benevolence towards strangers requires no expectations.

Indeed, the presentation was Glen's visually compelling and emotionally sincere awakening to the pulse of humanity. With well-honed skill, he drew his audience in, giving each an intimate connection to those people and places

he experienced. As he spoke, he made us feel as if we were there ourselves: Sensing the thick tension in the air during Palestinian Parliamentary elections in Gaza, toiling in the lush jungles of Borneo as the bike got stuck in deep mud, gazing through tears on the former killing fields of Cambodia, and fixing the 15th flat tire of the day in Ethiopia. For the two hours Glen spoke, the mundane aspects of our daily lives were suspended. We were there, too, riding alongside Glen, rooting him further onward. It was an unforgettable experience.

I recently caught up with Mr. Heggstad while he was putting the finishing touches on his new book in Mazatlan, and had a chance to query him on the highlights of his tour:

Why did you choose a BMW F650 Dakar for your Earth Ride?

Reliability, weight, ruggedness, versatility, and availability of parts were primary concerns, so that pointed me to a 650cc class dual sport. A careful study on www.horizonsunlimited.com revealed that most international riders were using BMW, specifically the 650 Dakar. Although I had used a KLR 650 in South America, the BMW offered a superior highway ride, ABS brakes, and electronic fuel injection, so it was my top choice. My brother and I narrowed it down to BMW, Honda, and KTM and with a checklist of pros and cons. We

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considered the Honda Africa Twin, but it was out of production and not available in the US. KTM had superb performance but questionable long-term reliability. With the standard two-year, unlimited-mileage warranty and worldwide service availability, selecting BMW turned out to be one of the best decisions of the entire adventure.

The only negative was the weight issue, and that's since been resolved with the new, much lighter X-Series. But as I learned in a Jimmy Lewis off-road riding school, with proper training, one can handle *any* bike.

As you set out to travel the developing world, what were the biggest differences between your expectations going in and your actual experiences once there?

It was the overwhelming friendliness and hospitality of the poorest of people that baffled and pleased me most. From Siberian Russians to Bedouin Arabs, along with the indigenous tribes of Borneo, it was those with the least who shared the most. As an American traveling through tumultuous regions, personal safety was also a concern. But the biggest surprise became the startling generosity in the Islamic world from the West Bank to Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The most important lesson learned on the journey was simple—to share. This is why book royalties and revenues gen-

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erated from my projects are donated to international aid organizations.

What advice can you give people who have been inspired by your journey, and who now want to plan their own extended trip?

You'll seldom get a second shot at a world ride so take your time. Plenty will go wrong during a long absence, so if necessary, travel in multi-month segments and return home in between to maintain your financial status and social relationships. Then you can stay focused on what's ahead of your front tire instead of worrying about work or family.

What can we expect next from Glen Heggstad?

Plenty! First, this spring, I am touring BMW dealerships across the USA to present the Earth Ride show. The schedule isn't finalized yet, but I will post it online when available. Once that tour concludes, I'll be in full bore planning mode for an upcoming expedition through China, and I'll be riding to Nicaragua in order to road-test some new equipment. Since language is critical to experiencing and writing about other



A Russian portico offers an ideal place to hydrate and rest.



A small Mongolian girl offers Glen goat's milk.

cultures, I'll be off to East Malaysia for a few months for a total-immersion study of Mandarin.

I've received offers from film crews who want to follow and record what happens along the way in China, but my journeys are about what a lone American rider encounters in the Third World. To keep the experience genuine, I'm developing bike-mounted video capabilities that go beyond a simple helmet camera. There will be no massive filming and support team following me around. I will be alone as usual, though we are negotiating for a professional team to meet up with me at designated spots to create a more polished documentary. As of now, my time is booked through 2009!

There you have it – so much accomplished thus far, and so much more in store from one of the brightest stars in modern motorcycle adventure travel. Keep your eyes peeled for the new Earth Ride book, updated tour schedule, the latest blogs, and fresh pictures on Glen's site www.strikingviking.net. And by all means, if you get a chance to catch the Earth Ride show anywhere near your area, jump on your bike and just go! As a motorcyclist, as a traveler, or even as a citizen of the world, you will be profoundly moved.

Would you like to contribute to our adventure touring & camping section? If so just contact Ian Schmeisser, 1350 Middleburg Hunt, Lawrenceville, GA 30043. Ian's e-mail is ians@bellsouth.net, or call him at 770-995-9003.



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