



CHALLENGE

line between a hard application of the front and not letting it lock up or stay locked up, all the while keeping the rear locked, wasn't easy and I never did do it as well as I'd hoped. Someday I will.

With a clue as to how to stop a bike in our tool belt, we moved on to other exercises: more braking, plus turning in the dirt, tackling a hill, log crossing, balance in loose material, and so on. The laughter and banter amongst the riders lost more and more of its nervous edge with each pass as our confidence grew. This was harder work but it was also very fun.

Almost like a biscuit for a dog that rolled over, after a few new exercises we'd get the treat of a few "enduro laps" where an instructor leads the students around the off road course. As more and more is learned through the day, the lap gets longer and with more difficult obstacles. But, again, it's "challenge by choice." If a hill seems like too much work or a trail too uncertain, you can skip it. The day is long and with as much work as you're doing, there's no reason to over do it. You're there to learn but mostly to have fun.

At some point I realized that I was relaxed, something my busy life hadn't let me do in too long. Riding a motorcycle hadn't been this good, this right and enjoyable in even longer. After nearly 15 years, with other pursuits more pressing or more enticing, I had been losing interest in it. When a friend, after hitting a deer at 65 mph, told me of his decision to never ride again, there was a pang of envy. It had reached the point where the bike felt like an obligation. I even -gasp- considered selling the BMW and getting something else.

But there I was, riding a beautiful BMW motorcycle over a small wooden bridge, crossing a stream that promised to be cooler than the sweat running down my face. We weren't deep in the jungles of Panama on some rutted trail, or pushing across the muddy expanse of some Russian fictional road, but I didn't care and couldn't have been smiling any more than I was. More deftly than any elephant through an Asian jungle, I moved the big GS through the trees. Feathering the clutch, shifting my weight left then right, it was all about managing momentum.