

embedded in the clay stick up like knives, and your tires can't avoid all of them. I was encouraged that young Perry had accomplished the ride on a bike practically identical to mine, and with only a busted fender to show for it.

My tires now had 8,000 miles on them, but the front tread still looked surprisingly good. The rear was getting bald. Since all assured me I would be plugging tires whether new or old, I made the rash decision to do the Haul Road on these old tires, and save the good ones for the 4,500 mile ride home from Fairbanks. Also, it was too late in the evening for a tire swap.

I heard more horror stories from these riders about the dust and rocks kicked up by the trucks in dry weather. You usually have to slow down or stop and look away as they pass, but you can't get off the road or even onto the steep shoulder in most cases. When it's muddy these trucks go hurtling by a few feet away while you are negotiating the muddy tracks, hoping not to fall. Above all, these riders and George advised me not to try to ride in the rain, but to hole up somewhere until the road dried out. I agreed completely, I didn't think I had much of a chance in mud with my RT.

In Fairbanks and northward it doesn't get dark at night this time of year, so they say. So I suddenly got the brash idea of leaving immediately on Wednesday evening and riding through the night the 280 miles to Coldfoot, the last refuge before Deadhorse. I had already just finished a tough 600-mile ride this day through



*The rear wheel bearing failed on this GS, stranding the rider 80 miles north of Coldfoot.*

Yukon Territory and Alaska, and I was a little tired. There was a break in the rain, and there was daylight at night and fewer trucks to contend with. My bike was as ready as it was going to be. So off I rode, north into the twilight.

This was not a brilliant idea. I was actually very tired now but filled with adrenaline and excitement to see the Haul Road.

Before I got out of town it began to pour, with lightning and dark clouds in the hills before me. I put on my rain suit and hoped it was a passing shower, not knowing it was going to rain most of this lonely night.

I knew it wasn't likely I could make the 280 mile trip to Coldfoot on one tank of gas in these conditions, though I often

get this range on the highway. But there are two gas stations near the halfway point, at Yukon Crossing. Surely one of them would be open 24 hours, at least for credit card sales?

After 80 miles of fairly good pavement with rain showers off and on I arrived at the real start of the Dalton Highway, the unpaved Haul Road, at a place called Livengood. It was wet and slick for a few miles but seemed ride-able. Then I reached the first steep downhill section, a sea of mud. The bike started sliding right and left. I didn't think I could make it 100 feet without crashing.

It was drizzling, under a gloomy twilight of thick low clouds. I could hardly see the tire tracks. My visor was too foggy to close. So I raised my visor halfway and raised the windshield also, which left a narrow gap of visibility between the two.

The hill was steep enough that I could not even walk down it in this mud. There was no good traction anywhere. A smooth section near the shoulder turned out to have the slimiest muck, so you had to stay near the center and hope for no oncoming traffic. But I had not seen a vehicle for over an hour, and I wondered what sort of animals were around.

I could not touch my brakes since the R1150RT has linked front and rear. Either brake pedal or handle would apply too much front wheel braking for this situation, where I believe only rear wheel braking is safe. So I relied on engine braking only. Even at idle in first gear I was going too fast on this hill, with sickening side-sliding every few seconds. I used a trick I learned before: pull in the clutch, hit the



*The bridge at Yukon Crossing is decked with planks, now wet and slippery.*