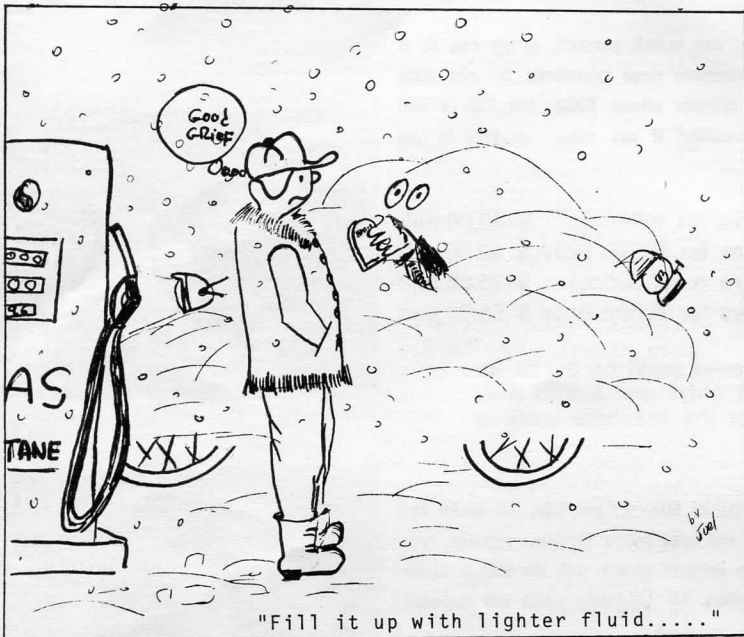


Ducati Touring Cont'd. . . .

dirt that was so good before took on most of the characteristics of fresh pigeon droppings. I would prefer to ride on an ice-covered third rail. Needless to say, unless one gets some sort of a lift out of spilling, rain makes the ride a nerve-wracking, first-gear affair.



I found loose gravel about the same, whether it was wet or dry, unless it was used to camouflage foot-deep mud, as it was on the shoulders. When on gravel, I found the bike would not follow a straight course. Both wheels would move sideways, first one way, then the other. Instinctively I tried to correct this with steering but only worsened the effect. I finally had to unlearn my road reflexes, steer with balance alone and increase my speed. This is a situation where a little bravado pays off.

The country was wild and beautiful and totally devoid of people. The towns along the way, never more than 50 miles apart, contained at least one gas station-eatery-general store-motel, and catered fairly well to the needs of man and machine. But there was nothing more than regular and premium gas up to 65¢ per gallon, all weights of oil, grease, and welding service available.

The loose dirt and gravel took about half the tread off the brand-new oversize rear tire, and the bike took a terrific pounding. When the road was clear and dry, and I was blissfully gliding along at 50, a bottomless pothole would throw itself in front of me. It would feel as if I had driven off a cliff and into a stone wall at the same time.

Where on paved roads I had been doing up to 400 miles a day, bad weather on the Alaska Highway would limit an entire days running to 50 to 100. When it was dry passing cars and trucks would sprinkle me with a shower of rocks the size of pingpong balls and an endless cloud of dust. My bike has a gravel-strainer type of an air cleaner that, as someone once put it, keeps the engine from aspirating large rocks and small animals, but lets everything else through. Since this debris usually ends up in the crankcase, I found it necessary to change the oil at least every 200 miles under dusty conditions.

To return to thrown rocks again, I saw many cases

where these had gone right through car windshields. Such a missile would have taken quite of chunk out of my face--a windshield on the bike would have been a good rock-stopper.

For the most part I camped out along the road, but the cold and the dirt forced me into motels on a couple of occasions to clean up and thaw out. Temperatures ranged from 40 to 55 and the hand-warmers were going continuously. Finally the end came in Alaska, and after a thousand miles of dirt, paved road never looked so good; but it wasn't all roses. The road to Anchorage was full of ruts, heaves, bumps, and hollows that gave me the wildest rollercoaster ride I had even had. The excellent motorcycle suspension enabled me to negotiate these heaves without becoming airborne or breaking anything. I'm afraid a car wouldn't have fared as well.

While I was in Anchorage, a Weather system went through that spelled rain for the greater part of the Alaska Highway. Having no great desire to battle with 1,000 miles of mud, and wanting to see some new country, I did something you can only do on a motorcycle. For \$48 I had it wheeled into the belly of a jet and flown the 1,500 miles to Seattle. All I had to do was drain the gas from the tank and pay the money. I flew to Juneau with my gear, rode the Alaska State Ferry to Ketchikan, flew to Seattle, walked over to the air-freight terminal, gassed up the bike and took off.

Over Desert and Mountain

The remainder of the trip was all pleasure. I went south to Los Angeles, then east across the Mojave Desert at night. The temperature ranged from 90 to 110 degrees, so I rode at a moderate speed to save the engine from overheating damage. Because the heat was dry I was comfortable enough with my jacket on.

The 10,000-foot pass through the Rockies taught me that unsupercharged engines don't like to operate at high altitudes. Adjusting the carburetor to the leanest mixture possible helped matters considerable. The dirt road up Pike's Peak was like an old friend after the Alaska Highway. Because of the sharp turns, poor traction grade, and altitude, this was a first-gear affair. That morning it was 70 degrees at the bottom, but 20 at the over-14,000 foot summit.

The return across the country was as pleasant as it was uneventful, punctuated only by the people I met and talked with along the way.

Cooking the chain in boiling grease failed to save it. But aside from having to replace this and fix a broken clutch cable I had no repairs to make. I returned home fresh instead of tired, looking forward to the next summer's tour. The bike after an oil change and much-needed cleaning went back to the business of carrying me the 25 miles to my office and back each day.

Final Two-Cents Worth Comments by Joel

psst. Psst. Hey Joel
wake upyou gotta say something at the end o
this....Pssst..... hey somebody wake Joel..

"Oh, uh huh? Oh, yeah yeah Okay

Mmmrrph. Well there you have it gang, and you thought that BMWs were the only bikes good for touring. Hell, if this guy can go that far on a lit'l ole 250 you guys out there afraid to go touring on yer Duke oughta take heart. Just load up the Darmah, or 860 GT, or 750 or whatever you got and step out of your drive way and into the wild blue yonders.

"whats that..where's Wild Blue Yonders..?... How th hell should I know....I think it's just north or Colorado Springs, or 40 miles west of Wichita Kansas its not in Hoboken New Jersey, thats for sure. I lived there once and that is nothing but the P I T S.