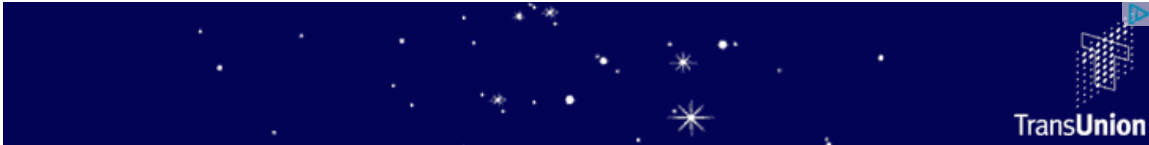


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# Pittsburgh Rides: No, I ride old BMWs

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February 12, 2009 12:00 am



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Garry A. Nelson savors a glass of wine after a road trip on his BMW. "Beverages stay corked," he says, "until the machine is parked and I am erecting my tent or possess a key to a hotel room."

By Garry A. Nelson

When co-workers discover that I ride motorcycles, they question "Harley?" Their disappointment is evident with my negative response: "I ride old BMWs." I explain that my BMWs are 30-year-old, two-cylinder, German motorcycles designed for high speed tours on the European autobahns.

The first and oldest of my two BMWs is a 1977 R100/7 I found languishing in a Millvale garage. Its owner had moved up to a larger bike and a \$1,000 exchange found the bike on a trailer headed to my garage. After a few pleasant weekends of tinkering this machine was on the road.

My second BMW is a 1978 R100RS that friends had discovered in a garden shed south of Butler. This purchase was the classic basket case that was left in pieces by the prior owner after he had either lost interest or forgotten how to reassemble all of the loose parts. I collected this machine in buckets, boxes and loosely assembled sections. Major engine and paint work was necessary before it could be made ready for the highway.

A BMW engine looks different than most motorcycles, with the cylinders jutting out of the

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sides of the engine block in front of the rider's shins. This allows the air cooling fins to reside in the unobstructed airflow of a moving bike. The pistons move in and out of the cylinder bores opposite to each other creating a natural balance that provides for a very smooth running motor. When the engine is running the overhead valves make relaxing mechanical ticks that communicate to the rider that all is fine.

These German machines are also known for the drive-shaft that transmits the engine power to the rear wheel. No chain removes the question of having a drive train problem that would ruin a long trip.

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#### Ride and write

Welcome to Pittsburgh Rides, our regular feature on motorcycling. Here we bring you the latest in rides, trends and events, but we need your input. We're looking for voices from the local biking community willing to share (in roughly 500 words) your experiences on the road and what you think is hot on wheels.

- Send your story or pitch to Weekend editor Scott Mervis at [smervis@post-gazette.com](mailto:smervis@post-gazette.com).
- Want to answer our Burning Questions? Send to the same address and include your name and neighborhood.

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A smooth running engine, driveshaft and Teutonic engineering combine to make BMW the perfect high-speed touring motorcycle. These German machines also come equipped with an efficient and quiet exhaust system that BMW riders prefer. The BMW's exhaust noise will not affront your sleeping neighbors when you depart on a Sunday morning ride or rile the occupants of a car sitting next to you at a traffic signal.

I have ridden these two motorcycles just over 100,000 miles, from Georgia in the South to Sudbury, Ontario, Canada, in the north and from Tennessee's Natchez Trace parkway to Maine's Cadillac Mountain. My total 14-year investment in both bikes, including purchase price, parts, tires, restoration and maintenance, amounts to just over \$8,000. I will bet my grin per motorcycle dollar against any other motorcycle on the highway. For these reasons BMW motorcycles will reside in my garage for a very long time.

Garry Nelson is an attorney in Pittsburgh.

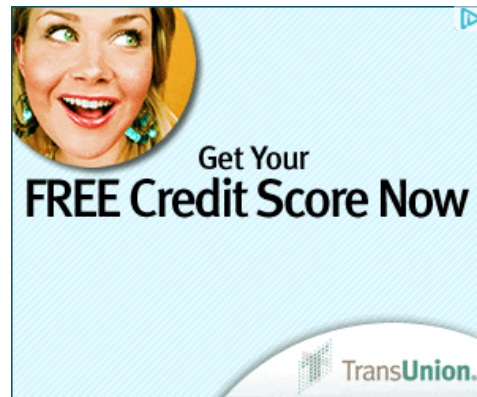
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