



For Those About To **GS**, **We Salute You**

For GS owners who don't GS

When the right motorcycle comes along, the most sensible person will throw caution to the wind. In late April 2005, I found a stock 1992 Bumblebee R100GS with only 22,000 miles that had always been garaged and never been off-road. Whatever price I had to pay with my wife for the impulsive decision I was about to make, I had to have the bike. The price was on the high end of fair market value, but as the previous owner explained in justifying his asking price, "The bike is a virgin."

A few months later, my 13-year-old R100GS finally got a chance to see some real riding. I was invited by friends to

explore the unpaved roads of West Virginia. My frequent riding partner, Ranger Rick, had a name for this type of riding: he called it "GSing." It's not a real word, but should Merriam-Webster decide to adopt it in their unabridged dictionary, I think this would be a proper definition:

GSing (gee-ES-ing): A group activity where inappropriately large and cumbersome motorcycles with street-biased tires are repeatedly dropped on their sides and pushed through mud holes. For more on the ritual of picking up and pushing motorcycles see dual-sport.

A seasoned rider we met along the way led us behind his off-road capable KTM

640 Adventure. Together the four of us explored the most forsaken dirt roads of West Virginia. At the end of the day we tallied five scuffed engine guards, one scraped valve cover and a dented pannier that would never again seal properly. Despite our mishaps we returned to camp at the end of a very hard day of riding, covered in mud, smiling ear to ear and pumped up on adrenaline. I captured the end of the day with a digital picture of my once-spotless 1992 R100GS Bumblebee covered from tank bag to tires in mud, leaves and small sticks.

"I'm going to e-mail this picture to the previous owner," I said with a devilish grin, knowing that the bike's original owner was proud of his low-mileage

By J. Mitch Kehn #112150



cream puff.

For me, breaking in my ride was a thoroughly satisfying experience. It caused me to ponder why so many GS riders are averse to riding their bikes as the gods in Munich intended. Why does the typical GS owner guard the "never off-road" status of his or her pricey motorcycle with the diligence of an overprotective father trying to preserve the virginity of his teenage daughter?

The main problem, in my estimation is that the GS is the two-wheeled equivalent of a Land Rover; It is a vehicle too

expensive and exotic to actually be used the way it was intended. During a recent group GS ride at a BMW rally, we encountered a particularly gnarly water crossing. The immediate consensus was that I should be the first to attempt to cross the river because I had the knobby tires and the oldest bike. I crossed the water, which was almost three feet deep in the middle, to a chorus of cheers. When I called out to the rest of the group to attempt the same crossing, they all refused. One rider protested that attempting this sort of foolishness might void his factory warranty.

If this scene describes your thinking, please try to keep things in perspective. Your factory warranty will eventually expire and shortly thereafter you will offer up your motorcycle for resale. The awful truth is that after all your fastidious care, the buyer will be a cash-strapped, thrice-divorced pipe fitter from Pittsburgh who will GS the hell out of it.

Why not turn away from the predictable asphalt road you're on and GS your own GS? That poorly maintained dirt road that doesn't appear on most maps may well lead to a place filled with adventure

Dual Sport Tires (For Those About To GS)

If you are going to take your GS off-road, you will need the right tires. You can spend hours reading tire threads on the Internet in search of the perfect GS tire (it doesn't exist), or read this simple guide and ride.

Tire	Pros	Cons	Verdict
Pirelli Scorpion AT	Very good street performance, durable and moderately priced.	Decent for GSing, but not suitable for muddy conditions.	Use for fair weather GS riding only. Many swear by this tire. 85% street /15% enduro.
Avon Gripsters	Very good street performance, durable and value priced.	Lousy in mud. Not available in all fitments.	An airhead GS favorite. Low price and long wear. 75% street /25% enduro.
Metzler Sahara 3	Good street performance and performs well on dirt roads.	Expensive and not as long lasting as Metzler Tourance fans expect.	Good compromise tire for pavement use and competent on dirt roads. 60% street /40% enduro.
Continental TKC80	Excellent dirt road performance and surprisingly good street performance. Moderate price.	The aggressive tread limits pavement heroics but dirt road performance is amazing.	Weapon of choice on the GS Adventure. Enough said. 50% street /50% enduro.
Dunlop 606	DOT legal dirt tire designed to get you to where the pavement leads. Low-medium price.	A greater street performance tradeoff than most GS riders would be willing to make.	Mount them on your KLR650. 30% street /70% enduro.



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and lifelong memories.

The best way to get started is to participate in a group GS ride at a BMW rally led by a local rider. The ride leader probably knows the back roads, or at least has painstakingly planned the route in advance with novice riders in mind.

Let's assume you enjoyed your first taste of GSing on your guided ride and now you are ready for a real adventure. It's time to buy appropriate tires. You reason that since at least 90% of your riding will be on pavement, you need a 90/10 tire. The most committed GS rider still does 90% of his riding on pavement. The question is how successful you will be the other 10% of the time. A 90/10 tire means there is a 90% chance you will fall, have to push your bike through the mud or turn back because you got in way over your head.

While these popular street-biased tires work fine on light gravel and dry, hard packed dirt, it only takes a tablespoon of mud to send 500+ lbs of Germany's finest into a tailspin. I use the Continental TKC80, which are the most aggressive tire most GS riders would be willing to live with, although the Metzler Sahara 3 would be a more agreeable compromise for most riders. Yes, they are knobby, but you wouldn't hike the Appalachian Trail in a pair of patent leather loafers and you shouldn't GS your bike with street-biased tires.

Next, you want to protect your machine from the minor spills and road hazards. Get a real set of engine guards and a robust skid plate. For heaven's sake, remove your panniers for the day if you don't need them.

The GS has been affectionately nicknamed the "rubber cow" because of its substantial weight and soft suspension. Replace your OEM shocks with a quality aftermarket brand. This one upgrade (albeit an expensive one) will turn your rubber cow into a raging bull.

Getting Your Mind Right

While the challenge of riding a heavy motorcycle on technical dirt roads can be physically demanding, GS riding requires even greater mental exercise. Every experienced rider knows to keep his or her upper body loose and use lower body

english to keep the bike in trim. On rough terrain where serious obstacles abound, relaxing the upper body is counterintuitive to say the least. I found it helpful to repeat a mantra to retrain my instincts: "keep your arms loose."

Riding a GS is much like riding a horse; you don't ride a horse as much as you point it, and the horse does the heavy lifting. All you have to do as the rider is not push the horse into doing something beyond its capabilities. Another good mantra might be: "my motorcycle knows what to do." Confidence is everything; once you are scared, you are in trouble.

Push out your mental gremlins. GS owners tend to obsess over the expense of their machines. Just get it out of your head. I have earmarked a few hundred dollars in my savings account for repairs so I don't have to worry about a dent on my bike putting a dent in my wallet. It is built into my budget.

Whatever talisman you must rub to get your head on straight, do it before you hit the dirt road. Remember to keep your rpm count higher than you usually would. On my Airhead, I ride in the 4,000 to 5,500rpm range because that's where I find the most torque.

Once you gain enough confidence on dirt or gravel roads to shift into third gear, your concentration will be intense. There will be no time to think of the things you neglected to do before you left home or the project that will be due at work on Monday. The white noise in your head gets pushed aside and suddenly you understand the meaning of *now*.

Sportbike riders experience this feeling as they approach three digit speeds, but the GS rider can taste this before he or she ever shifts out of second gear, all the while enjoying a more bucolic environment. This is GS nirvana.

Mitch Kehn has been riding BMWs exclusively for 11 years with over 100,000 miles in the saddle of Germany's finest. He is currently the General Manager of the New Heritage BMW in Monroeville, PA and is serving his 2nd term as President of the Four Winds BMW Riders of Western PA.

Update on the GS: I totaled my beloved 1992 R100GS in a high speed crash (I'm okay) and I replaced it with a K1200RS. I'm in the market for a low-mileage, garage kept 2005 or newer R1200GS that has never been off-road or dropped. If you have such a bike, please contact me in 2015.