

Always fold your own parachute

Show time! Sunday, October 26, 2003, 5:00am and it was raining. The 21st annual running of the 50cc True Grits Fun Run at Two Wheels Only Motorcycle Resort in Suches, GA would take place as planned. I'd already sent in my \$30 entry fee so non-participation on my part was NOT an option.

Driving the car up to the mountains was an excellent idea considering how well I see in the dark. I usually drive by feel and other people are pretty good about blowing their horns when I'm in the wrong lane. OK, so I'm exaggerating a little, but the poor dog has almost shaken off half his stripes because of my driving.

"Da Gritz" is approximately a 70+ mile run for 50cc motorcycles with costumes optional for the riders. A short listing of this year's entrants: Elvis on his spiffy Aprilia 50; a clown who said some clown stole her bike; the cow herd, which has grown to three; a 6'5" piece of cantaloupe in melon-colored FroggToggs and Superman to name just a few.

My costume this year was Joan of Arc and because of the weather conditions, Joan of Ark might have been more appropriate! There was a place on the entry form to create your own category, which I did. When I mailed the form back, I must have had one of those "clairvoyant moments" because the category I picked was, "First to drown, last to know it's raining".



I had been invited to ride with the team whose name is "Methane Mayhem". It's comprised of Mr. Methane and four other young men who refer to themselves as the flatulent five. With my addition they would now be known as the Flatulent 5.1. It's great to be "one of the guys". And guys being guys, I won't strike any matches around them.



The position one assumes readying for takeoff....

50cc motorcycle racing is very popular in Europe on the Grand Prix circuit. These bikes look like midget superbikes and are very fast. Some of the motorcycles entered in the True Grits Fun Run look and perform just like these GP racers. Team Calamari, comes from California every year to participate and always does well with their YSRs and Derbi racers. Susan, the lady who owns the bikes, won't bring the guys with her, only the gals. They are a few of the most "knee-dragging", competitive racers in California. Some of the other True Grits' machines look like they have just emerged from the back of a barn or a 1950 Sears catalog, while others are just stock, miniature, street legal motorcycles that get very little road time. The vast majority is comprised of Honda MB5s and Honda NS50s, capable of top speeds between 45 – 57mph.

Some of the GP racers are late model bikes but the MB5s and NS50s are at least 13 – 20 years old. If you're serious about participating in this non-race and you're a guy, the first thing you must do is tickle up the horsepower to haul around your 200+ pound "boy in a man's" body. With time, knowledge and a few mechanical skills, it's not unrealistic to get 75 – 80mph out of one of these little gems.

If you don't have your own 50 and are among the "chosen" few, (friends of Britt & GT) you might be lucky enough to score a ride. I was ecstatic to just ride last year but when I saw the disparity between the MBs and NSs, I asked for a faster bike. My reasoning was that a fast bike could shine with my "100 pounds soaking wet" on board.

My ride sat in front of the truck and it was designated #1. A pretty little 1990, NS50 in white, pink and turquoise. It was stock with a kick-start and no windshield. Now, not only was this bike being loaned to me, but to pile on a little more pressure, as he hands over the key the guy says to me, "Don't break it – we can't get parts any more!!" Don't worry, in this rain I was going to take it easy. He looked in the gas tank and thought it should go the distance.

We all sat off to the side of the road in rows of three oblivious to the tidal waves being thrown over us by passing suburban assault vehicles. Britt and two of her helpers, (a buxom belly dancer and a benevolent fairy) blessed the gathering and high-fived everyone as we readied for take off.



Festooned with balloons, the fire engines and hearse looked very festive as their smiling crews led the parade down the street and back.

With the entertainment over, everyone took his or her place in line and it was race time! Sorry, that was a slip...it was time for the fun run to begin. To run properly, these little bikes have to be kept at high revs and enough blue smoke enveloped us to gag a maggot. I'd already taken my bike for a short test run to get a feel for her seaworthy-ness. My partner Megan, who is a fine WERA racer, was riding the same type of bike as me; so equipment-wise we were comparable. Even though I have contended that old age and treachery will overcome youth and skill, Mademoiselle d'Arc did not stick her sword in Megan's wheel.

Within a mile I had passed quite a few bikes and was feeling pretty comfortable with those skinny tires on the wet pavement. Wet leaves, skinny tires and diminished traction is a recipe for disaster. I took the corners gingerly to be on the safe side; that is until Megan passed me like I was sitting still. Obviously she was used to racing in the rain because she looked smooth and relaxed. Sanity went out the window – the throttle got wrapped all the way around and we started passing a lot more bikes. It took about 5 miles before I finally caught her again and we two girls were passing the guys left and right together. One could only imagine what they were thinking. Then I got my advantage, my ace in the hole – a steep, long, uphill! She saw me inching up on her in her mirror and in a ladylike manner, high-fived me by.

After about 40 miles, the rain turned to on/off sprinkles and my spirits soared. The scenery, even from my contorted pretzel position was really great. (Example of position: toes on pegs; elbows jammed firmly in tops of knees; chin over handlebars; chest on tank; right hand holding throttle in "w.f.o." position; and head held up so far that helmet sat on top of my shoulders.)

Suddenly my bike made this horrible gasping sound you'd expect out of an asthmatic grandmother going into cardiac arrest. Cranking hard on the throttle made absolutely no difference and we started slowing down to a complete stop. One minute you've got gas and the next minute... I switched to reserve and tried kicking her over - nothing. (Later I found out some of the bikes only get about 35 - 40 miles to the gallon and the gas

tanks hold approximately 2-1/2 gallons. Miles to be covered in the course were anywhere from 70 to 90.)

So the rule of thumb here is “Always fold your own parachute and check your own gas.”

While my bike was taking a rest, I stripped down to Joan of Arc’s tunic made out of scarlet velvet with chain mail sleeves and bearing a shield and cross on the front, complemented by a matching velvet hat with chain mail hanging to my shoulders. No telling what the locals thought when they saw this “vision” of loveliness climbing up a rock wall to get a better view of approaching motorcycles. They didn’t think enough to stop that was for sure.

Wound up 50cc engines sound like irate bumblebees on the attack and the noise could be heard penetrating the countryside for at least 2 miles. As each one went by, their riders recognized one of their own and waved at me. You pass some and they pass you back; that’s the name of the game. Eventually someone would come looking for me when they realized one of THEIR motorcycles was missing. It might just take a while.

The bike finally cranked on reserve and I ran her as far as she would go on the off chance of finding a gas station along the route, but it was not my lucky day. I parked the bike at the side of the road and shot the bull with some real cows to pass the time. When I realized one of them was a bull, I kept my riding jacket pulled tightly across the bright red tunic. I don’t know if it’s true about bulls and red but I wasn’t taking any chances. It wasn’t long until 5 guys who were having a really great time running sweep arrived with a gallon booze bottle full of gasoline.

They poured some in my bike and took off to find their next mechanically or otherwise challenged participant. About 4 miles down the road I filled up at a gas station and headed back to T.W.O. Even the little bikes at the back of the pack had passed me so I settled in for a solitary scoot back.

Amusement along the way was trying to pass vehicles at 50mph, praying they wouldn’t suddenly decide to give me a run for my money. It’s always good to be aware that deer and other wildlife can pop out at anytime, but more so during the fall. The squirrels up there must have been watching



too much TV; they appeared to be emulating what they've seen. You know the commercial where the little critters wait for a car and then shoot out in front of it and high five each other when they get the desired effect? That's the one! This happened to me several times before I finally locked up the brakes to avoid one determined rodent. It seemed as though he had a "senior moment" in the middle of the road because he kept changing directions unable to decide which way to go. Then at the last minute when it looked like he'd settled on a route changed his mind and ran right in front of me again.

I locked it up, fishtailing the back tire, wondering if I'd have to cure his indecisiveness once and for all. But at that moment a thought flashed through my mind, "Don't break it - we can't get parts!" I let off the brakes and through gritted teeth hissed, "OK squirrel, once more and it's hasta la vista baby!" Luckily, my furry nemesis made like Carl Lewis, grew wings on his little Nikes and with a Herculean effort, catapulted across the road. The bike straightened up and the squirrel will get to tie up his track shoes one more time.

The rest of the ride was enjoyably uneventful and I made it back to the lodge in time for the awards ceremony, where everyone in the galaxy got one. As I went up to receive my "First to drown, last to know it raining" award, someone added "...and first to run out of gas". After recounting my adventure to Ben Cheatwood, promoter, awards master and owner of my bike, he said, "Did you realize those were 13 year-old tires?" I'm really happy that thought never even entered my head.