



At 10,000 feet, you don't expect much company. If you're working on a communications array, you look forward to the occasional visit from dirt bike guys.

ESCAPE FROM SUMMER

A higher form of trail riding

By Ron Lawson

► At 9000 feet, the air has a certain taste. It carries a thin, sharp tang that fills your head and leaves you hungry for more. The sensation is really quite pleasant—right up until you use up your allotted portion of oxygen. Then, when you pull the front end or wrestle the bars or perform any of the routine demands of motorcycle riding, the wind leaves your body like flattened rubber raft. But that's the beauty of trail riding. You have all the time in the world to re-inflate yourself. There's no pressure, no clock ticking, just you and the pure enjoyment of riding.

Northern Utah and Idaho might just have the best trail riding in the country. I don't mean to throw a gauntlet down in front of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and any number of other trail-friendly states, but for me, there's nothing like the Northwest. That's where I long to go when the heat of a Southern California summer bakes all our usual riding areas to a crispy brown. That's the part of the country that always makes me wonder how I ended up living in such a crowded, harsh part of the world. That's the area that makes me look wistfully at the real estate ads in the local paper.

The Cache National Forest stretches from Utah through Idaho. The nearest population center is Salt Lake City which, frankly, isn't all that populated. And there are miles and miles of trails—it's as if each trail rider gets his own county. If the same riding were open in Southern California, it wouldn't be open long.

Frank White, the man behind ATK, had issued a standing invitation to guide me through his slice of the mountains around Logan, Utah as soon as the snow melted. I started the thermometer watch; 97, 98, 99. When it broke 100 in So Cal, I called Frank. He had no shortage of motorcycles. He has an entire warehouse of former Cannondale bikes and parts. Fuel injection goes well with altitude.



Turn, baby, turn. In the mountains of the Cache National Forest, the first step can be a big one.



Here's what it takes to make a great trail system; a state that's willing to work with the National Forest Service to make access easier and safer. Trail workers were building a new bridge as we rode by.





If a trail isn't ridden enough, it's consumed quickly.



When any single group suddenly decides that it should have the only rights to public land, there will be issues. In northern Utah, archers and other outdoorsmen share the forest with OHVs.



You never know what you'll see on the trail or how it got there.



ESCAPE FROM SUMMER

A few years ago we pictured some test bikes in a field of poppies. We actually got hate mail. How could we encourage the trampling of flowers in this age when we are under constant attack? In the Cache National forest there is no shortage of flowers. You park on them in the campground. You walk on them to get to your bike. You ride through them on endless trails.

"This is the Highline trail," reported Frank halfway through our first day of riding. "It's my favorite." I could see why. The trail itself was narrow, twisty and moist. It offers a staggering assault on all your senses. The surrounding views, the smell of flowers, the taste of pure, clean air and the sounds of tall pines all are overwhelming. It seems strange that some people tell us that we aren't environmentalists because we ride dirt bikes. How can we be anything else? How can someone who *doesn't* ride have a true appreciation of nature? You can't experience a National forest on foot. You can't look at an Ansel Adams calendar and know what it's like. Dirt bike riders are the only real authorities on the subject and should be placed in charge of all outdoors. We'll send pictures to the Sierra Club.

Day one was spent mostly on the trails of southern Idaho, ranging from 4000 to 9000 feet. Day two we rode Utah trails with Al Youngworth and his brother—they're the guys who make the Recluse automatic clutch. A side note here; automatic clutches will

ESCAPE FROM SUMMER



Easy on that throttle, Frank. The ATK with the Recluse automatic clutch was the favorite in the tight stuff.

change everything. They're a little unfair; it's the off-road equivalent of riding a 250F against 125 motocrossers. Al's YZ450 should have been way too brutal to ride on tight trails. But with the Recluse clutch, it was absolutely sweet and mellow. Expect auto clutches to completely change the face of off-road riding in the next few years.

In our two days of riding it was amazing how many people we ran across. There was a sprinkling of ATV riders. There were trail workers who were paid by the state of Utah to build small bridges. There was one ranger who offered us a current trail map. And at a 10,000-foot peak there was an engineer working on a communications array. He was just pleased that his facility wasn't covered in snow anymore. Here's the kicker: everyone was happy to see us. I'm not used to that. Yeah, it's great to go to the Northwest. It would be even better to bring the Northwest back home with me. □