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DUAL-SPORTING IN ARIZONA

Dual-Sport Riding, Monster Trucks And Roller Derby **By Chris Dodds**

Thirty years of dirt biking did not prepare me for this race. I have ridden bikes of many different brands and sizes. I have ridden challenging single track in Gunnison, Colo., steep slickrock in Moab, Utah, and sandy beaches and desert single track in Baja, Mexico. But this was like nothing I had seen before.

There were three of us—all very competitive and all wanting to win. The signal was given. The bikes lurched forward, and we were off. Within seconds we were in the first turn when my bike started skidding sideways. Someone in back was yelling to me to stay on the inside of the turn. But the bike was tilting over and I couldn't control it. They yelled at me to lean my body over more. Had I really forgotten such a basic element of riding a bike?

I leaned further and was able to steer hard into the turn and momentarily block my closest opponent going into the straightaway. Our speed accelerated as we approached the next turn. This time I remembered to lean hard but so did the other racers.

We were neck and neck, bumping against each other's handlebars and shoulders. It was only a matter of time before the inevitable happened and one of us would crash.

On the second lap, that is exactly what happened to Frank. His tires were underinflated, the bike was grossly undersized for someone of his bulk, and coupled with the high speed he finally went careening in one direction while the bike went another.

The crash was fantastic and the crowd of spectators and friends fell out of their seats from laughter and excitement. Undeterred, Frank scrambled to his bike, picked it up with one hand, held it over his head, and began running around the track. However, this was against the rules (although I wasn't sure there were any rules) and he was disqualified.

Half a lap later, I suffered the

same fate. The last man remaining triumphantly crossed the finish line while the crowd cheered and cameras flashed.

I didn't really volunteer for this race, nor did my two friends. We were handpicked from the crowd during half time of a Roller Derby match. It was held exclusively at our banquet and party for our first Tucson Dual Sport event, an AMA-sanctioned dual sport held Sept. 21-22, 2013.

The bikes were children's bicycles with training wheels — except for mine, which was a tricycle so small my legs wouldn't fit. I had to hang my legs over the handlebars to steer. Each of our bikes was powered by a roller girl pushing from behind. Needless to say, the race was like no enduro or hare scrambles I had ever raced.

The journey to this point started in May when I became an AMA-chartered promoter to hold dual-sport rides in southern Arizona. I had been kicking around the idea for years, and with the encouragement of my partner, Aimee, I decided to take the plunge.

I had six days of riding already in my head and selected two of them for our first event. By the time I got approval from the AMA, it was too late to be included in the AMA Husqvarna National Dual Sport calendar, but I was still able to sanction as a local dual-sport in September. It turned out to be a blast for participants and volunteers alike.

This was our first event, but it definitely won't be our last. Our plan is to take advantage of the excellent riding that Tucson offers from September through April. The weather is perfect. Riders from colder areas may be socked in by snow and cold during the winter, and the spring would be an excellent time to get rid of cabin fever by riding in Tucson.

We had a large crew of volunteers help make our event a success. A friend from work created a monster truck for the sand dunes from a military vehicle.



He and another friend hauled roller derby girls and other volunteers out to the desert both days to hand out lunches to the dual-sport riders.

We also had pre-run riders, mid-sweep riders and final sweep riders. Aimee, her daughter and our dog Portnoy ran registration and check-out from our staging area at Ride Now in Tucson. Ten vehicles from a radio club were spread out along the 100-mile courses each day to provide communication support in case of an emergency.

Being a promoter is a lot of work. We had to get permits from the Forest Service, permission from a rancher to cross his property along the San Pedro River, prepare routes with GPS tracks,

organize food and volunteers, get insurance, acquire sponsors and plan a banquet. After the event, we sent a survey to all the participants. We got some good criticism and some encouraging responses.

The roller derby tie-in is one aspect of our ride that makes it a bit different. Aimee and I are both fans of roller derby, and dirt bikers like adventure and competition and socializing, so what could be better than roller derby and dirt

bikes? It worked out great. The Saturday night banquet was complete with raffles, food, crazy fun, and a legitimate roller derby game exclusive to our event.

I have been riding in the desert, mountains, canyons and washes around Tucson for almost 20 years. I love the desert, the solitude, the scenery and even the rocks and sand. There is a lot of rideable public land within minutes from my home and with a street-legal dual sport, I can access all the riding I could want without even having to trailer my bike.

I am fortunate enough to have a son who enjoys riding dirtbikes with me. We have ridden all

around the state of Arizona and especially enjoyed the experience of riding with groups of dirt bikers in AMA-sanctioned dual-sport events. Dual-sport rides are great. They are similar to an enduro. You ride with large groups of people on preselected routes, following GPS coordinates or roll charts. You hang out after the ride to relive the day's excitement and challenges. The only difference is there's no pressure to compete—unless, of course, you are selected to race tricycles at the roller derby.

Chris Dodds is an AMA member in Tucson, Ariz. He runs Tucson Dual Sport, an AMA-chartered promoter. For more info, see www.tucsondualsport.com.

