

# DOUBLE THE FUN



## THE "A" HILL ON THE "B" ROUTE

I was waiting my turn in line to attempt the long steep rocky hill before us. The line was getting deeper by the minute as we waited for the last person to clear the hill before making our own attempt. Of course the progress was regularly delayed as riders wiped out at two different sections on the hill right in the path of the preferred line going up. About every third person crashed at the base of the hill where we faced an almost sheer sided 3 foot tall boulder that had to be cleared before attempting the long uphill. That boulder had been my fate. When my son Dillon and I approached the hill the line was only three people deep and only one person was crashed on the hill half way up but seemingly not in the way if I attempted the climb. The three bikes in front of me seemed to be waiting for the rider to clear the whole hill before they would attempt it. I was feeling "in the groove" so decided to pass the bikes at the bottom and go for it. The boulder was rapidly approaching. I had to quickly decide on either that boulder or an even more unseemly crevice to the right. I opted for the boulder. At first look and at speed, the rock seemed a foot taller and much more flat than it really was. In the split second I analyzed the best way to handle the beast I had slowed down. That was a mistake. I unweighted the front end as my tire hit the boulder and I nimbly bumped myself and my 1998 XR400 to the top of the rock with just enough momentum to bring

my rear tire to the top but not quite enough momentum to go further. I stalled. Then I fell to the right and I and my bike fell to the bottom of the boulder with absolutely no grace and no pride. I'm sure my dirt biker comrades would have laughed and pointed except for the fact they knew their turn would soon be up and with the evidence of all the fallen riders their fate could very well be the same.

My son Dillon, had already taken his place as fourth in line and I humbly slipped in behind him. Fortunately (for me) he had slid off of his bike on a previous hill (not quite as bad but formidable) and I had helped him make it up. So no smart ass comments were given. We sat on our bikes and watched as the next rider cleared the boulder (ah, so that's how you do it), made it two thirds of the way up, then spun his bike on some loose stuff and fell over. About 5 bikes that had made it were waiting at the top. One guy came down and helped the crashed bike get up and going again. It was going to be a long wait. Dillon and I enjoyed watching the other riders crash on the boulder, slide around on the hill, and finally clear the top. One more rider and it would be Dillon's turn.

Among the grumbles and complaints and swearing within our group at the bottom I heard someone shout, "Move over! Here comes Kevin and Michele!" The waiting line

was now 9 deep, and here came an XR650R down the shorter hill behind us with 2 riders aboard! "What the blank are these two doing 2-up on a treacherous trail like this?" I soon found out.



Everyone else seemed to know the two riders. We quickly cleared the path in the wash and Kevin and Michele zoomed past us, hit the boulder neatly, Michele on the back bumping off the seat a foot in the air and held on to her husband tightly like a rodeo rider. As her bottom struck the seat she simultaneously “stuck the landing” of the rear tire and they were off in a fury attacking the hill with guts and glory, the back end fish tailing all the way and Michele screaming in her normal high pitched yell “YAHOOOOO”! As they climbed the hill they went around the “hard way” past the last poor soul that had fallen and quickly cleared the top and were gone.

Man what a performance! That was the first time I had seen Kevin and Michele in action and it was a beautiful sight to the dirt loving, dirt biking, adventuresome kind ... like myself and the other participants at the 2013 Arizona Trail Riders “Howlin’ at the Moon” dual sport in Prescott Arizona. My new friends and associates at the bottom of the hill, newly humbled (and a bit humiliated), resumed our attack on the hill with no more grumbling and maybe a bit of renewed vigor. Dillon let me go before him and I made it this time with a lot of effort. Dillon then easily cleared the boulder but slid out at the second favorite crash spot and I offered to ride it the rest of the way up which he graciously accepted.

That night at the banquet at the Elk’s lodge I got to talk to this dynamic duo. It wasn’t hard to meet them. Michele is a lively extrovert whose paradigm seems to be “Include everyone, live loud, and be happy!” Not a bad philosophy but a difficult one for most people to follow. Her husband for example is a much more laid back easy going person. His paradigm may be more like “Chill out, live peacefully, and be happy”. They make the perfect pair. Some of that is due to the common theme of “be happy” which they strive for and achieve despite the problems they have both faced in their lives.

Back to the banquet for a moment. Michele was dressed in her “Robin” costume. That’s right, as in Batman and Robin. It was only weeks away from Halloween which Michele later told me was her excuse to don the costume. But, Kevin assured me she never needs an excuse to wear a costume to a party. I had verified this fact while cruising through their Facebook photos one time. Once she was dressed as a fairy, another time as a princess. The only costume she doesn’t wear is her dirt bike gear. To her the gear is part of who she is so it isn’t a costume. She eventually made her way to our table.

She was selling homemade preserves at a gourmet price that people didn’t seem to mind paying seeing that it goes to a good cause ... “gas money” according to Michele, so they can drive from their home in Colorado to ride 2-up Dual Sport events throughout the South West. I bought some Jalapeno jelly that was mighty tasty on my toast back home.

#### ENCOURAGING WORDS

Michele was stuffed under a pile of leaves, dead branches, mud and gravel. She couldn’t seem to get her breath. She blinked her eyes inside her twisted goggles and tried hard to comprehend the situation. She had been gripping Kevin’s chest protector as they ripped through the forest, dodging trees, launching off rocks, whipping back and forth on single track. Their spinning rear tire broke traction while they climbed hills then dropped into gullies before climbing again. They raced along slightly faster than an Enduro pace (25 mph) and attacked the trail with enthusiasm; eyes keen and mind clear from the rush of adrenaline. Suddenly the bike was sliding on its side and the pair were slung recklessly away into the brush, Kevin rolling onto his back, Michele careening face down into the ground. The muddy trail had given away under them as they dug into a sharp corner.

This was the 2011 Nutcracker 200 AMA National Dual Sport event in Ohio. And this was the first major crash they had experienced. Michele was dazed and fighting to catch her breath. She had hit the ground hard and the wind was knocked out of her but she was awake and taking account of her physical and mental condition. She didn’t feel any broken bones although she wondered why it was so dark; probably due to the debris piled on top of her. She slowly pulled herself together and began to roll onto her back.

Kevin was already up. A lifetime of riding and crashing had made him an expert at both falling safely and recovering quickly. In a few moments he assessed the whole scene: he was OK, the bike was off the trail and out of the way of their fellow riders, and his devoted riding partner and loving wife lay face down under some debris. He could see she was moving, albeit barely. He felt somewhat responsible for her current



situation, after all he was the pilot. With concern and compassion he offered these encouraging words, “Get up Dammit!”

His words did not evoke the response he had anticipated.

I hesitate to quote Michele’s exact reply due to the strong language. But it was something like this:

“Just who in the world do you think you are ... how dare you speak to me like that after you darn near killed us both ... I’ll get up at whatever rate I please, if it ain’t fast enough for you, you can just take this stick and ... etc., etc.”

Apparently she had regained her breath (while Kevin held his).

Eventually she gathered herself together and in a few minutes they had cleaned themselves off, adjusted their gear, climbed aboard their 2001 XR650R and continued their ride. Fortunately, the only thing that was hurt was Kevin’s ego. But his attitude was freshly calibrated (thanks to Michele) and they enjoyed the rest of the day.

Retelling the story to me they both smiled and even laughed a bit.

That 3 word encouragement would make a cool t-shirt. Maybe even a good ice-breaker at a couples retreat; something to get both sides (husband and wife) talking about what is acceptable behavior and what is not.



### HIPPIE MEETS CONSERVATIVE

Kevin is quiet, easy going, methodical, logical, and steady. A conservative personality.

Michele is colorful, talkative, high strung, loud, people pleasing, and somewhat manic but in a good way. She is red-headed and feisty. At the 2 Sun Adventure 2015 banquet in Tucson Arizona, she made her way to every table and tried to get everyone included in conversation, drawing people out of their shell, and trying to elevate them to her level of happiness. In her own words and Kevin's she is a hippie.

During the summer she runs a fly fishing camp for Disabled Vets in cooperation with "Rivers of Recovery". She takes them fishing on the Arkansas River near their house in Salida, Colorado. It is peaceful, while also exciting, and ultimately rejuvenating. Michele orchestrates the experience for these veterans. She is compassionate, sympathetic, and caring and is striving to make the world a better place; an enjoyable place for everyone if she can.

Her first husband died of a brain aneurism. Her three children were young at the time, but old enough to remember their father. Michele was heartbroken; she loved her husband deeply and they believed in each other and depended on each other.

Kevin had been riding dirt bikes since he was 6. When they met he was working in Denver at a wreck shop repairing damaged car bodies and restoring them to new. He had never been married but was not dodging the condition; the right one had just not come his way. As fate would have it Michele's

husband's best friend worked with Kevin. He was a big Mexican biker type and Kevin and he were friends as well. Apparently it occurred to him that Kevin and Michele were made for each other: hippie and conservative. He set up a blind date.

Kevin let Michele do most of the talking cause that's what they do best: she talks, he listens. They both felt a physical attraction

for the other and genuinely enjoyed the others company. Clearly Michele was (and still is) in love with her late husband. Kevin accepted this; he is both self-confident and sympathetic and learned over time that Michele could love him too. After a short period of time Michele and her three children (2 girls and 1 boy) moved in with him. The relationship worked; they have been married for over 11 years now.

### DIRT BIKE FAMILY FUN

Kevin accepted the kids as his own and raised them with Michele.

When their daughter Bevin was 15 she was full of angst: sullen, bored, cynical, bucking authority, and challenging the world and everyone in it. Kevin and Michele took the family to visit his uncle for a weekend, camp out, enjoy nature, and ride some bikes. Kevin's uncle Eugene had a farm and a barn full of dirt bikes. For a rebellious teenager this meant there was nothing to do. The rest of the family was enjoying the break from everyday work, chores, and scenery but Bevin just sat and scowled; condescending half closed eyes staring away at nothing, avoiding anyone else's eyes. The message was clear, "Leave me alone you bunch of losers."

Michele didn't know what to do for her. Kevin didn't either but he couldn't just let her sulk like that without at least trying to help her wake up and smell the roses. He walked over to where she was sitting by herself under a tree.

"Look, you can sit here and sit alone and be miserable all weekend long or you can make the most of it and enjoy yourself."

"This place sucks, there's nothing to do." She murmured.

"You could learn to ride a dirt bike and go exploring. All by yourself if you want. If you just let me teach you and give it a chance, I won't bother you again for the rest of the weekend." He countered.

She glanced at him and pondered. She could accept his challenge, show him that dirt bikes also had no interest for her, and then go back to her favorite hobby of looking down on the vanity of the human race, off by herself. "Fine. Show me."

Kevin rolled out an easy to handle Gas Gas 270 trail bike from the barn. Over the next half hour he patiently worked with an impatient student on the controls and techniques of riding the bike. He methodically worked through operating a clutch with the throttle, the location of the front brake and rear brake, how to shift through the gears, and where the kill switch was. When she was ready, well, somewhat ready, he helped her pull on a helmet and pointed her to a trail in the woods and told her to take a spin.

20 minutes later Bevin returned to camp. The transformation was astonishing. The transformation was complete and obvious and had happened in such a short period of time. Bevin was smiling brightly from under her helmet and actually looking at Kevin and Michele that way. She asked him to show her other trails and asked more questions about how to ride better and exclaimed enthusiastically about her short first ride. She was enjoying herself.

Riding a dirt bike is my favorite hobby. It takes me away from the cares of the world, away from my job, my chores, frustrations, sorrows, everything. When you are focused on the trail in front of you, it demands your undivided attention, and you are set free. The trail is my psychiatrist; my bike is the psychiatrist's couch. And although I spend plenty of money on my hobby it is still cheaper than a human psychiatrist; at least that's what I want to believe whether it's true or not. I was a NYPUM (national youth project using mini-bikes) director for several years here in Tucson. The program is aimed at At-Risk youth but any kid could join. The dirt bike is used as a motivator and rewards kids for good behavior with opportunities to ride dirt bikes for free. Not everyone gets reborn by riding a dirt bike; but, when I hear a story such as Bevin's or actually witness such a transformation myself it renews my faith in the power of the motorcycle.

With Kevin and Michele dirt bikes became a family affair and held them close together.

It was the same for Kevin when he was growing up in Colorado. His uncle Eugene owned a motorcycle shop in Canon City and had a barn full of bikes the family could enjoy (as referenced above). Kevin wanted his own bike so his uncle sold him a 1972 Yamaha GT80. Kevin's Father paid for the bike and Kevin repaid him by helping out at his Father's Tastee Freeze. Kevin was 6 years old.

His family would often go on long rides together. Everyone was included. I mean everyone. Not everyone knew how to ride so some family members would have to ride double. As he grew older he acquired larger bikes. His Grandmother Mary Louise decided she wanted to join in the fun so she commandeered him to take her on the back of his bike. He was 12. She was feisty and red-headed and loved the adventure. Kinda reminds me of Michele; maybe the seed for 2-up riding had been planted many years ago.

#### DON'T BE TOO INTIMIDATED – CHECK OUT HIS CREDENTIALS

The "Ski Slope" is a 1,400 foot descent over a length of 2 miles. I broke my hand protector (an aftermarket plastic one that has since been replaced by protectors with strong aluminum bars through them), clutch lever, and two fingers on my left hand when I hit a medicine ball sized rock hidden in the overgrown trail in a switch back turn. The bike slammed down and my head was dazed from a boulder it hit when I fell on my back.

Ron had found this "road" on his phone GPS once we had climbed to the top of a mountain in the Santa Rita mountains south of Tucson. We couldn't find where the road connected to the main but I knew of a trail that headed in that direction. So we squeezed our way along the trail looking for the jeep road. It was steep and very technical. The trail was treacherous and sometimes we were uncertain that we were on the right path. We took a break after a quarter of a mile at a clearing that overlooked the mountain range. Great view! I asked Ron how close we were to the road. He quickly checked his GPS then surprised us all when he announced we were already on it! The road was overgrown, steep, and strewn with cantaloupe size loose rocks as well as boulders and fallen trees. We practically crawled under low hanging branches in several places.

We could barely make out a trail much less a road. The GPS showed the road we were on but it seemed to dead end before reaching a Forest Service road 2 miles away. The prospect of getting to the end of this road without a connection to another road out was not encouraging. But since we are adventurers we decided to continue down the mountain. Most of the time our bikes were sliding down the mountain instead of being driven; thus the reference to a ski slope.

When I crashed and broke my clutch lever we really became concerned about the road coming to an impassable dead end. I dreaded the thought of having to retrace our path, trying to climb this road without a clutch.

Don and Ron each had radios. So Don went ahead to check out the end of the road while Ron road behind me as I continued down at a slower pace. The clutch wasn't necessary; I turned off the engine and left it in neutral and used my brakes to slow my pace. After 20 minutes Don radioed Ron ... the jeep road ended at the Forest Service road! What a relief.

Since that time we have ridden the "Ski Slope" several times. It generally takes 30 to 40 minutes depending on how many breaks we take. It is surprising how quickly you become winded and heated up riding downhill.

The reason I tell this story is so you can appreciate how difficult a ride that trail is. So when I tell you Kevin and Michele did it in half that time you might realize what a feat that is. Yup, at the end of the 2 Sun Adventure 2015, Kevin told me it took them only 15 minutes to do the Ski Slope; very impressive.

These guys are fast and expert at deflating egos when they pass you. If there is any consolation to those of us who have been passed by these 2 up riders it may be Kevin's dirt bike resume: 44 years of riding experience, 30 years in the top 10 for Trials competition in Colorado, and 4 Senior AMA National Trials Championships (30, 35, 40, and 45 class). Here's the jewels in the crown, Kevin owned the #1 plate for Trials competition in Colorado for 2014 and on



Nov. 8, 2015, he was awarded the title again for 2015!

Trials riders climb 2 story brick walls with their bikes, then do a 180 turn and stop on the wall half way back down. Ridiculous as well as awesome. I am not jealous of these riders because they do stuff I would never even begin to attempt because I don't believe in the dark arts and I am a mortal and what they do is impossible. So why should I or anyone else be jealous of Kevin when he and his wife pass us on the trail; they are not in our caste. We should be content to watch them perform their magic, buy some of her preserves, and feel blessed just be in their presence. They are a cool approachable couple and deserve the recognition they get. As a pair they are most proud of finishing the grueling Big Bear Dual Sport ride (San Bernardino, CA) as the 19<sup>th</sup> bike on the A-loop; only 73 bikes completed the ride this year.

For years they have ridden their red Honda 2001 XR650R which he adapted with passenger pegs and a special 2 up seat for her to ride on. They affectionately named the bike "Lucille Balls". If you are riding in one of the AMA National Dual Sport events in the Southwest look for them on their new ride; a 2006 Honda XR650R named "Rockhell Welts".