



OUT OF THE SADDLE

Tamela Rich

RA 40500

[@Tamela.Rich](#)

TamelaRich.com

Street to Dirt:

Reinvigorate and Reset Your Riding

“It was like being born again. Different skills, different thinking. Getting back into new rider mode.” That’s my great friend Joanne Donn aka Gear Chic, describing her 2021 move from tarmac to the dirt. She’s ridden a Triumph Street Triple for the past seven years, and sportbikes since 2004.

“I’d never had formal dirt training before 2021 and while I’ve ridden on dirt roads on my sport bikes, it was only when my digital maps led me astray.”

I can vouch for her on this. I was the reason she had to ride on gravel in 2019 after she followed me down a wrong turn as I attempted a short cut to the Blue Ridge Parkway. She was a trooper on her Street Triple with its ferocious torque at low rpms, while I had an easy time of it on my gentle, made-for-gravel G 650 GS. Today she told me she’s confident that if she’d had the skills then that she has now, it would’ve been easy, or at least easier.

Now Joanne’s an alumnus of the Colorado Backcountry Discovery Ride (COBDR), which starts in Grand Junction and ends in the Four Corners. She’ll be leading me next time.

Follow Joanne’s Lead

If you’re like me and haven’t had a lot

of mileage since COVID-19, or if you’re itching for a rider reset, maybe Joanne’s training plan will help you find a path forward. She started by taking the MSF DirtBike School with B.J. Hessler of DC Dirt Camp on a Sunday, and continued with B.J.’s ADV beginner class the following day. Located in King George, Virginia, DC Dirtcamp offers a variety of off-road riding courses for kids age six up through adults.

After her intensive training on the East Coast, where she worked at RevZilla headquarters, Joanne rode Sections 3-6 of the COBDR with an all-woman group led by Pat Jacques of ADV Woman. This tour of Colorado’s back country was the perfect introduction to her new home state, where she opened the second-ever RevZilla showroom in the country in Denver last October.

“I already loved motorcycling but (dirt) was so new and weird. Different disciplines require different sets of skills. You almost need to forget what you know and take everything in again. It’s a chance to reset and relearn.”

Where to Train

Of course there are many other other training options and schools across the country, including the BMW U.S. Riders Academy in South Carolina, where I have trained several times. I also took the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) dirt bike course in northwestern Ohio, and vouch for both programs.

You might find a convenient location near you to take the MSF’s newest class, the AdventureBike RiderCourse. The first class of coaches was trained in January, 2022.

If you’re thinking of moving from tarmac to dirt you won’t be alone, according to the Motorcycle Industry Council’s Andria Yu, “Dual-purpose motorcycles sales were up 18.6% over what was considered a monster year of sales in 2020, where we saw a 46.2% increase in sales over 2019.”

Those stats are collected and reported by the MIC Retail Sales Reporting System, which gathers motorcycle retail sales data from 14 leading manufacturers and distributors in the U.S. Andria clarified the data: “We do not break out ADVs from dual-purpose, as that is designated by the OEMs. So a BMW R 1250 GS is a dual-sport, as is a Honda CRF300L Rally or the Kawasaki KLX250.”

I’ll end on a note of congratulations to both Joanne and Andria, who were inducted into the Dealernews Top 100 Women in Powersports Class of 2021. Thanks to them, women in motorcycling will continue to be the leading growth segment of our industry.

The author of Hit the Road: A Woman’s Guide to Solo Motorcycle Touring, Tamela Rich serves as a Trustee for the BMW Riders Association and is a Contributing Editor to On The Level. Website: TamelaRich.com.



Left: Here’s Joanne with me on a gravel road in 2019, trying to find our way to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Below: Joanne Donn being coached by B.J. Hessler of DC Dirt Camp, July, 2021. Photo credit: Travis Howard Photography

Below left: Joanne on the COBDR, August, 2021



Above: Joanne with her street ride