



A GS obsession

The new R1200GS Adventure is one of the most accomplished bikes on the planet – so what can we learn from a 175,000km 30-year-old ancestor?

By Michael Guy

The first time I saw a picture of Corrado Capri's 1984 BMW GS I knew that it was a bike I had to ride one day. I didn't know how it was ever going to happen, and when a mutual friend told me that it's in Corrado's last will and testament that the bike will be buried with him, I kind of ruled out ever throwing a leg over it.

And yet here I am, stood at an altitude of over 2000m in an area called Moncenisio, in the Italian Alps, and Corrado has just handed me the keys.

There are reasons why this bike is so special to the 65-year-old Italian engineer from Turin. He's had the bike since new, it was bought in 1984 before heading off in 1985 on one of his first adventures, a ride that would define him as the accomplished traveller he has become.

Thirty years later and the bike has travelled more than 175,000km (108,675 miles), 40,000 (24,850 miles) of which have been in Africa. They've been to countless countries together and lived through good times and bad. For 20 years Corrado used this bike on an almost daily basis, only retiring it from active service in 2004.

Many people who have that level of connection with their bike would clean it, restore it and try and convince their wife to let them put into the living room, but not Corrado. He had no desire to do any such thing, and the mud you see in the pictures is from Africa – and it's been there since the 1990s.

Before he even set foot in Africa all those years ago, Corrado used his engineering expertise to prepare the bike for what would be a tough and



Even in KM that's an impressive figure. The bike still carries African dust

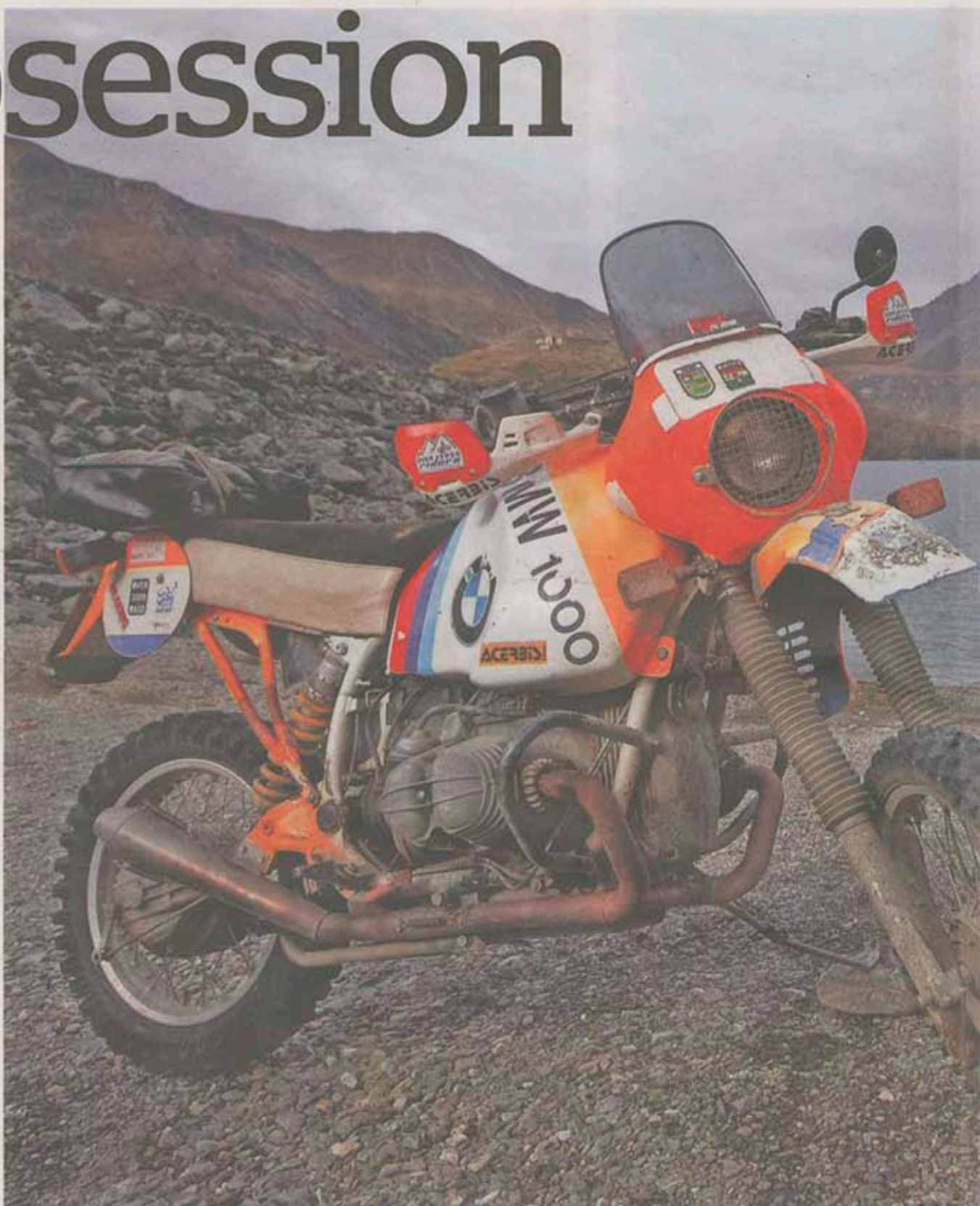
arduous ride. Inspired by the BMW Paris-Dakar winning race bikes he fitted a kick starter to the bike, taken from the first ever GS's launched in 1981. He didn't fancy heading into genuinely uncharted territory solo without the option of being able to start his bike should he run into electrical issues. The other big changes came to the suspension to cope with the monster 40 litre fuel tank, luggage and 20 litres of water that he carried into the desert.

Corrado understood that he didn't need a sharp-handling and twitchy bike. Instead, inspired by BMW's desert dominance once again, he fitted a longer fork which gave the bike significantly improved stability – perfect for the huge distances in unpredictable terrains he was traversing.

During his time with the bike he travelled extensively throughout Africa. Often returning to Italy before heading back into the wilderness.

"I've done 175,000km on this bike and it's never, not once broken down,"

Continued over



Great GS moments



1980 The new R80 G/S is shown for the first time. The 796cc boxer twin has

a single-sided swingarm and monoshock. BMW label it the ultimate dual purpose machine.



1981 BMW enter the GS in the Paris-Dakar and win by over three hours. The following year

Helge Pederson sets out on a ride that ultimately takes ten years to complete and covers 80 countries.



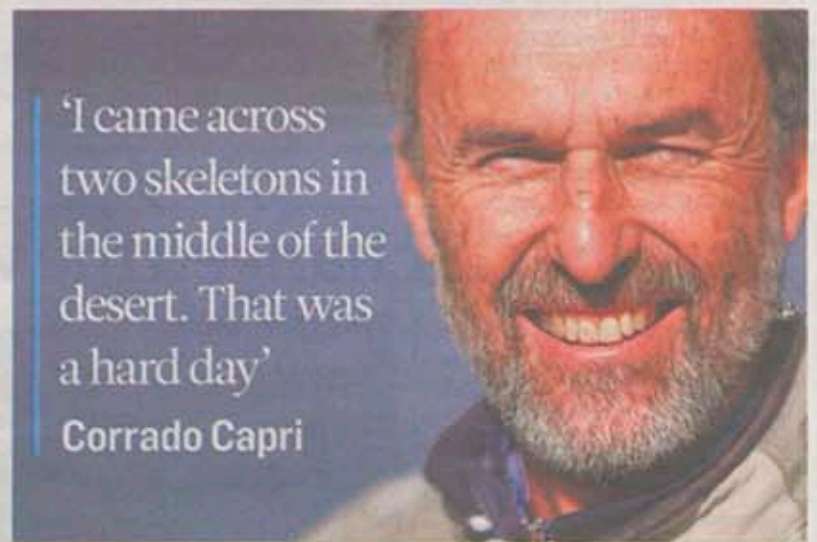
1984 Capacity climbs to 980cc and the bike is re-named the R100GS. Belgian rider Gaston



Thirty years old, battle-scarred and coated in dirt picked up during desert escapades, Corrado's GS is the real deal



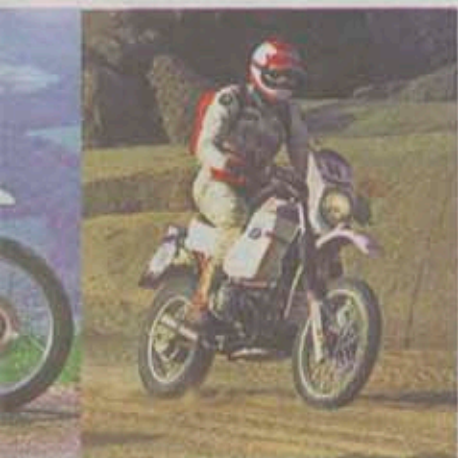
Corrado has decreed that the GS will be buried with him when the time comes



'I came across two skeletons in the middle of the desert. That was a hard day'
Corrado Capri



MCN's man is on the latest GS, but keeping up isn't easy



Rahier takes the Paris-Dakar title for BMW and repeats the feat for the German marque the following year.



1988 Dakar adventure edition model is launched. Changes include a bigger tank, crash protection and a bash plate as the GS seals its position as the ultimate do-it-all motorcycle.



1994 R1100GS is launched and it not only gets a capacity hike, but it has the first four valve head boxer engine. Telelever front suspension system, featuring a wishbone and single shock, is added.



he explained. "I've ridden throughout Africa on my own and with friends, to places that it would be very difficult to travel to now in 2014 due to the political situation. I crossed the Ténéré Desert on this bike. I had a map, but there were no roads, tracks or paths, it was completely uncharted and of course this was a long time ago, so before GPS. It was on that ride that I came across two skeletons in the middle of the desert. That was a hard day."

Fast forward 30 years and I'm about to get a ride on his pride and joy. In return I give Corrado the keys to the latest all-singing, all-dancing BMW R1200GS Adventure I'm riding. The 2014 GS looks big and purposeful, but Corrado's GS is still the coolest adventure bike I've ever set eyes on.

The Dakar-inspired colour scheme, and the fact that it's as he rode it in Africa, makes it even more exciting for me. The moment you hit the starter, it bursts into life with the same boxer twin bark all GSs have right up to the latest water-cooled 2014 model.

Before I put the bike into gear I take a deep breath. I'm nervous. I want to feel what the bike is capable of, but above all I want to give it back to Corrado in one piece.

With just 70bhp on tap it feels slow-revving and lazy compared to modern equipment, but that doesn't make it a slow bike. As you would expect Corrado looks at one with the bike, he knows every single intricacy intimately, and knows exactly how it will behave on whatever type of terrain. Trying to keep up with him earlier in the day was a challenge despite me being on the 2014 GS Adventure with all its cunning electronics.

Power-wise Corrado's bike is a massive 55bhp down on the latest 1200GS, but every one of its 70 horses are a pleasure to use and easy to access. For all the technology and development that has gone into fuel injection, engine mapping and electronics over the last ten years I found myself lamenting the move away from carburetors. Corrado's GS is from an age way before

fuel injection was introduced, but it remains beautifully fuelled with a throttle connection it's hard to find on modern bikes. Even at altitude where carbs should be out of their comfort zone, unable to cope with the thin air, the venerable bike behaves perfectly.

The chassis feels compliant and flexible and the longer forks make the bike feel super-stable, but slow to change direction. Weighing in at just 176kg - 89kg less than the 2014 GS Adventure! - the lack of mass is a huge bonus. With an incredibly tight steering lock and trademark low centre of gravity, the bike is a pleasure to ride slowly as well as fast.

As the miles tick by I find myself smiling from ear to ear under my helmet. There's no question it feels like a 30-year-old bike - it's loose, it rattles, and there's a bungee holding the centrestand, but it's got soul and character in abundance. And it can still deliver a level of engagement it's hard to feel on a modern bike. No wonder Corrado wants to be buried with it.

'Corrado is at one with the bike, he knows exactly how it will behave on every terrain'

How the GS changed the world

In 1981 BMW launched a motorcycle that would change the world. At a time when the bike market was flooded with big-capacity, multi-cylinder muscle bikes the innovative German manufacturer did something completely different. The original 796cc boxer GS was the first of its kind and a bike that spawned one of the biggest selling genres of motorcycle in the market today. It's gone on to inspire thousands of people from around the globe to embark on big miles, epic travels and ground-breaking adventures.

Fast forward 33 years and the GS has gone through Darwinian levels of evolution. Its capacity has climbed by nearly 50% from 796cc to 1170 as has its weight - from a waif-like 190kg in 1981 to a monster 262kg in 2014.

BMW's early know-how was inspired by racing success in the Paris-Dakar, but the evolution didn't stop there. The latest R1200GS Adventure is the pinnacle of globe busting adventure bikes. It's a grand tourer of epic proportions that has become all things to all men.



The process has seen it develop into a bike that is now fully loaded. An onboard computer is linked to the top-of-the-range sat nav and operated by a dial on the handlebar, there's cruise control, electronically adjustable suspension to suit anything from two up touring with luggage to extreme enduro, engine

mapping for street, rain and off road, plus ABS settings to cover every eventuality.

They say that the world has gotten smaller and it's fair to say that the GS has played a part in this with its ability to propel riders, passengers and luggage around the globe - whatever the terrain.



Bike-swap: Michael Guy is immediately at home on the veteran GS

Great GS moments



1999 Capacity increases again with the introduction of the R1150GS.

Its 1130cc six-speed engine replaces the 1085cc five speed unit used in the R1100GS.

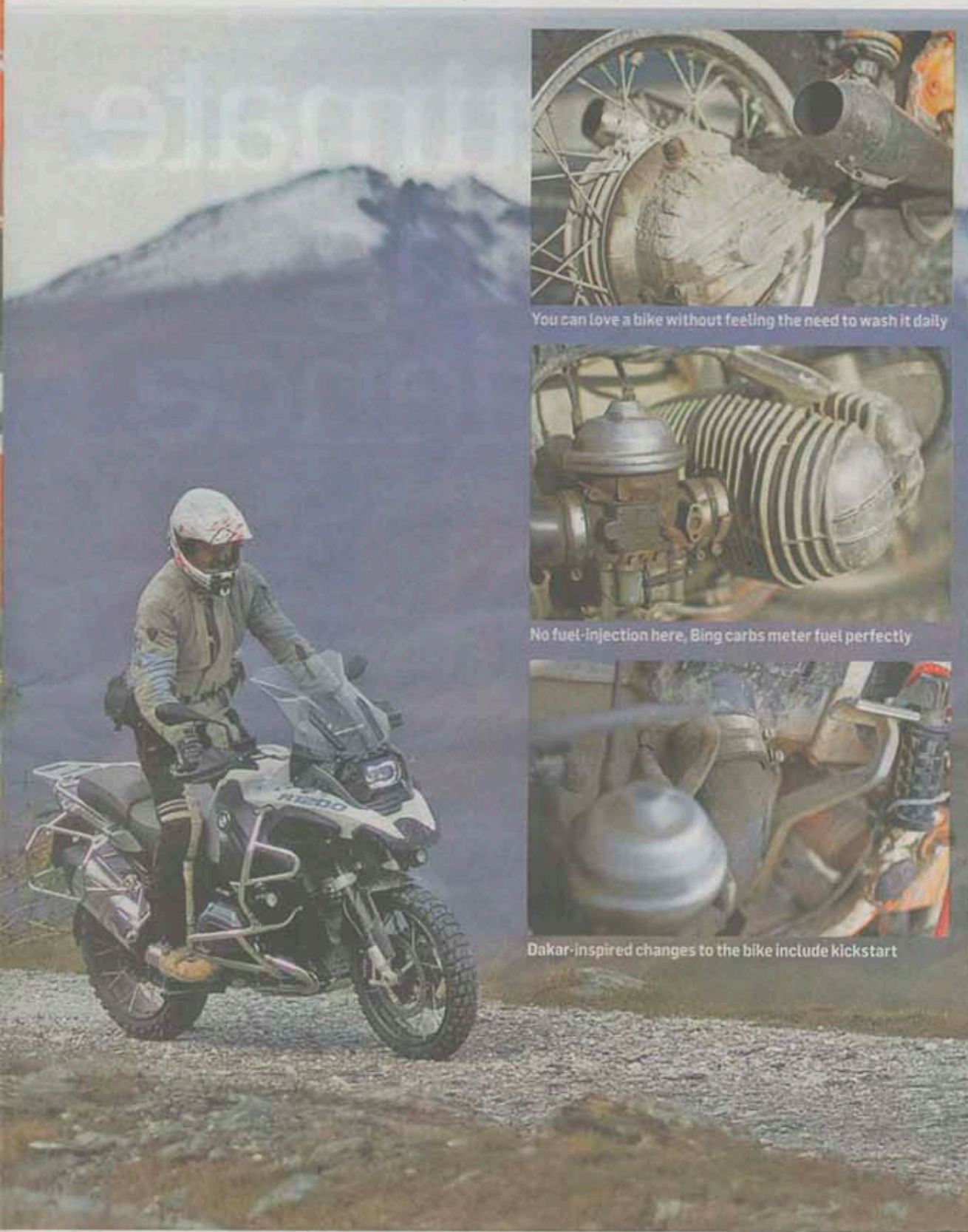


2004 A fresh-faced Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman embark on their Long Way

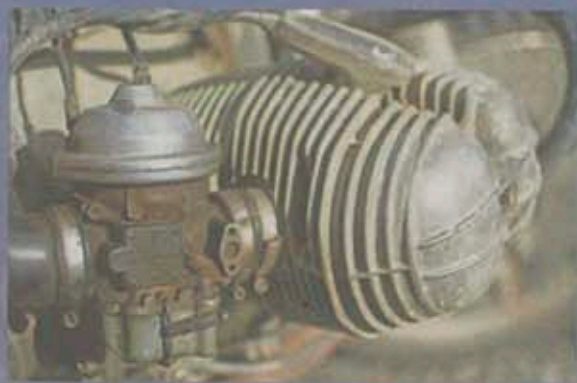
Round adventure onboard the new R1200GS which is 30kg lighter than the 1150 and boasts 100bhp.



2008 As Ewan and Charley fever sees sales boom, power increases to 105bhp and the



You can love a bike without feeling the need to wash it daily



No fuel-injection here, Bing carbs meter fuel perfectly



Dakar-inspired changes to the bike include kickstart



Every two years, BMW puts GS riders to the ultimate test

More than a Trophy bike

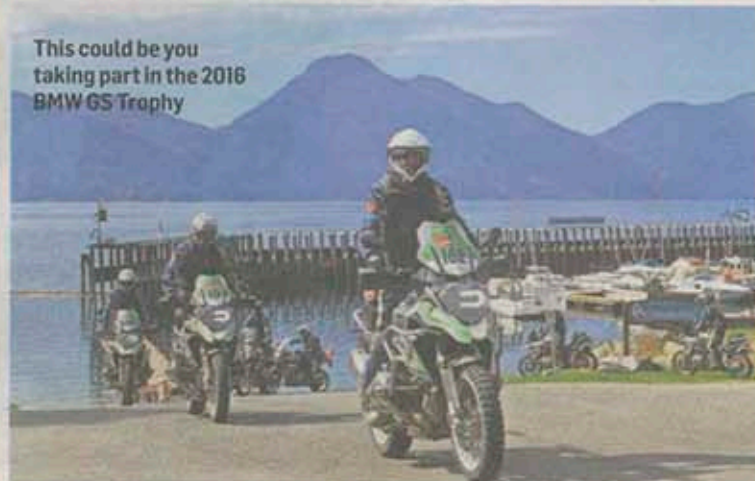
To celebrate the mass appeal of owning a GS, BMW launched the GS Trophy. The philosophy was to get teams of amateur riders from around the world to compete in a multi-day event onboard the R1200GS's smaller sibling, the F800GS, that not only tests riding skills, but pushes the boundaries with navigation, maintenance and special team building exercises.

The biennial event started back in 2008 in Tunisia. In 2010 the GS Trophy was hosted by South Africa before moving to South America in 2012 and then onto Canada this year. With each event interest and numbers have swollen, culminating in there being 16 teams made up of 19 nationalities and a total of 120 people in 2014.

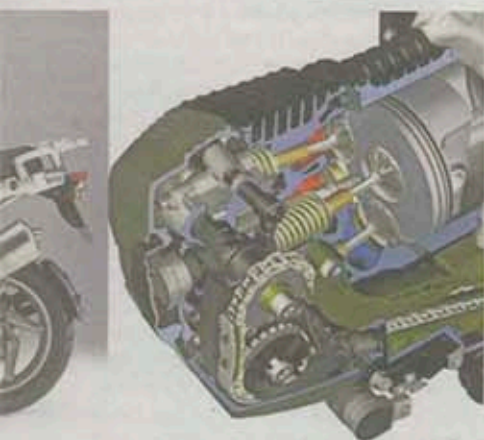
With only three riders in each team, qualifying is a major challenge. In the UK riders have to go through an intense selection process by completing two days of riding, mental, and physical strength tests. Hosted by Dakar hero Simon Pavey at his BMW Off Road Skills training facility, wannabe riders are put through their paces and pushed to breaking point as Pavey seeks out the three strongest candidates.

In 2014 the Canada event was won by Central & Eastern Europe team closely followed by South Africa and France. No location has been set for the next GS Trophy, but it will take place in 2016. You just need to be a GS rider to qualify for the competition.

■ Details: www.bmw-motorrad.co.uk



This could be you taking part in the 2016 BMW GS Trophy



bike is fitted with ABS, electronically adjustable suspension (ESA) and traction control.



2010 Another power hike thanks to the introduction of a double overhead cam sees

power climb to 110bhp. The BMW continues to be the best selling big bike throughout Europe.



2013 All-new water-cooled engine sees power climb to 125bhp and there are a plethora of

electronics and rider aids to make it the most advanced bike in its class. New GS Adventure follows in 2014.