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ADVENTURES FOR THE Cure

by Alisa Clickenger (MotoAdventureGal)

“I’m in.”

No questions, no details, no bike, no dirt riding experience. I just knew I was “in.” This was in 2008, and I was chatting with Sue Slate of the *Women’s Motorcyclist Foundation (WMF)*. Sue was excited about a new fundraiser WMF was putting together—a group of women riding dual-sport motorcycles and raising money for breast and ovarian cancer cures with a ride through the Rockies. Sue’s passion for motorcycling is contagious, and it was easy to get caught up in her inspired purpose, even without the details. Gin Shear and Sue Slate founded the WMF in 1983 as a means to encourage more women to ride motorcycles. Back then, they just wanted more women riding companions. In the 1990s breast cancer awareness was low, as was the number of women in biking. Their first motorcycle events were organized with the purpose of building a community of women riders.

In 1993 Gin and Sue started planning an Arctic motorcycle tour that would take them 175 miles north of the Arctic Circle in Inuvik, NWT, Canada. Gin happened upon an article about the number of women dying of breast cancer each year. She recalls the sobering impact, “We read a horrible statistic shared by a local breast cancer survivor. During the 10-year period of the Viet Nam war, we lost 55,000+ Americans to conflict and lost another 330,000 Americans to breast cancer. We started to imagine the ripple effect of all the lives that were affected. That thought was horrific. It dawned on us that four women riding motorcycles well beyond the Arctic Circle would create enough interest that we could raise some funds towards research and finding cures.”

The riders raised \$25,000, and it was a turning point for the organization. “We saw what a positive impact four riders could make,” said Gin. “Then we factored in the possibilities if we got more riders involved



Above Dempster Highway mud. Near Eagle Plains, Yukon.

Right, top Dual-sport ride leader Shirley Anderson crossing a creek on a trail off the Denali Highway in Alaska on *Adventure for the Cures* 2011.

Right, middle 2012 *Adventure for the Cures* dirt bike camp riders. Hollister Hills State Vehicular Recreation Area. Hollister, California.

Right *Adventure for the Cures* riders: Marna Deitch (left) and Sue Slate (right) on ferry about to cross the Yukon River.

from around North America.” From 1996–2007 Gin and Sue organized a series of Pony Express Relay rides. The rides were wildly successful, gathering large numbers of riders and raising \$2 million for Cures.

As always, every penny they collected went to fighting breast cancer. Over the decades, they either self-funded the trips or collected a handful of corporate sponsors to keep them riding and raising funds. WMF’s main financial sponsor has been *Progressive Insurance*, and both *Yamaha* and *Kawasaki* have kept WMF riders in bikes for many events. The *AMA* has been a corporate sponsor since 1996, as well as *BMW Motorrad*.

The dirt contagion started for Sue and Gin in 2006 when they wanted to take a dirt bike class in California. The *Honda*

Training Center told them that if they gathered a group of eight people they would get a discount. They gathered their group, took the class, and were hooked. The idea of dual-sport riding combined with rider training as a fund raising vehicle was the next step in their evolution.

Since taking the dirt bike training, the mighty fundraising duo had visions of a dual-sport fundraising ride. *The Progressive Adventure for the Cure* was launched in 2009. I was a part of the 12 fundraiser-riders that year, and we called ourselves “The Dirty Dozen.” While beefing up our off-road riding skills, thanks to instruction from Bonnie Warch and Andrea Beach of San Diego’s *Coach2Ride*, we sped into the movement to raise breast cancer awareness. Twelve of us, plus a score of volunteers for support, raised over \$47,000. And, like many

“Now such challenges don’t always force me to turn around just to avoid what is often a very short distance of difficult terrain. For me, that’s the value of good dirt/dual-sport training. It allows me to push the envelope while exploring new conditions to employ the skills I have and know will work.”—Sue Slate

Formerly pavement only motorcyclists, these Dirty Dozen Riders wrap up a day of dirt bike training with a trail ride in Keystone, Colorado.



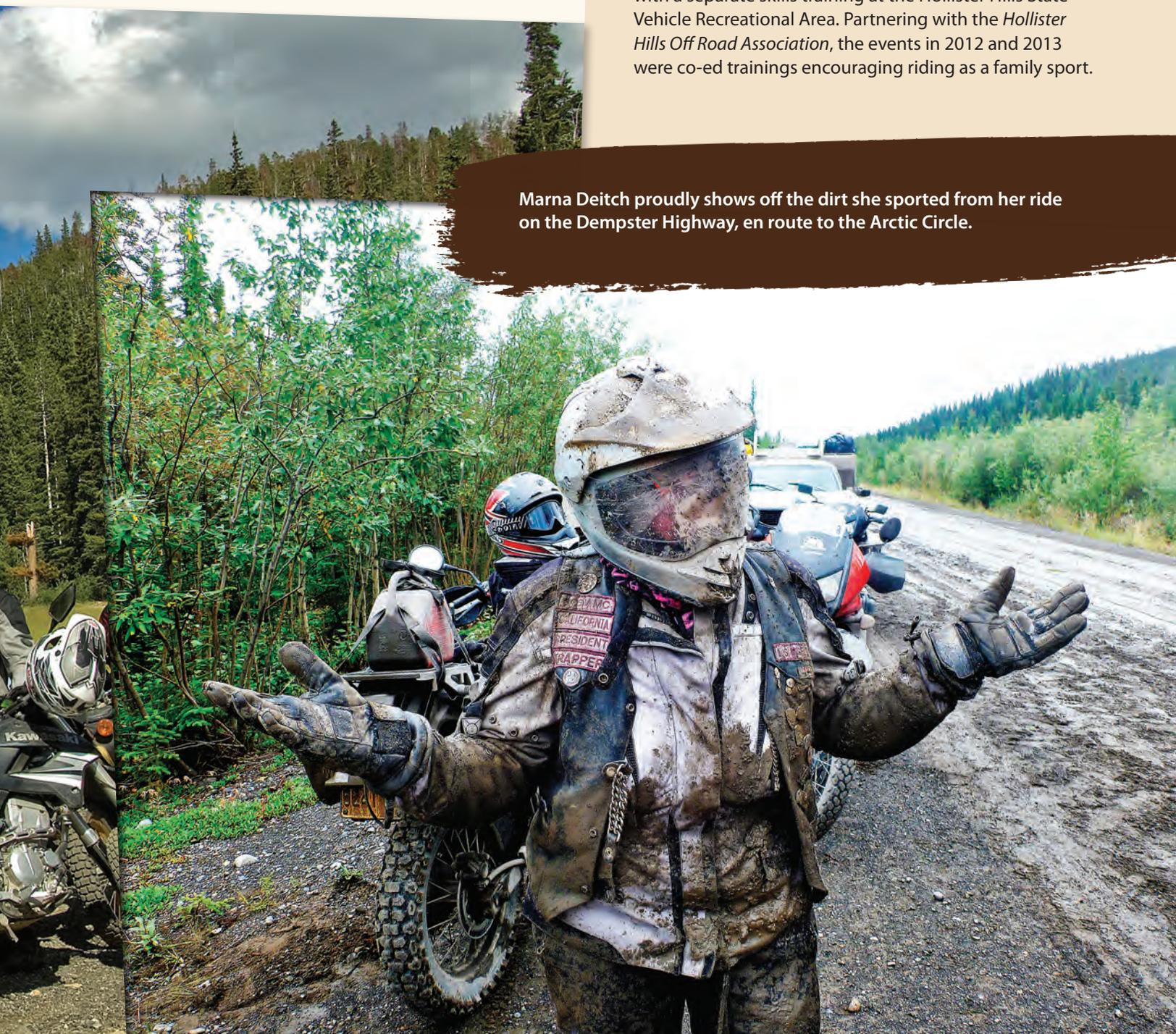
riders, none of us could have imagined where two wheels would eventually take us.

We were all experienced street riders, and we welcomed the opportunity to broaden our riding horizons and get dirty. Many of us became so passionate about the new possibilities for dual-sport riding that we went out and bought ourselves new bikes. Several of us traveled near and far, and a couple of women in the group even made dual-sporting a lifestyle change. And, for a couple of us, a lifestyle change would come through the object of our fundraising efforts: Cancer.

The very next year after our *Adventure for the Cure* in Colorado, two of the *Dirty Dozen* were diagnosed with breast cancer. One was Gin Shear, co-founder of WMF. Gin's diagnosis brought those statistics right into the

heart of our tight-knit group. That one-in-eight-will-get-breast-cancer statistic wasn't such an abstract concept anymore. Sue Slate said, "The irony is that in 1993, when we did our first breast cancer ride, 'The Arctic Tour '93—Ride for Research,' we didn't personally know a single person who had had breast cancer. But somehow the statistics got through to us." Because they were well educated about detection, both riders beat their cancer, and both women are still riding on the road and in the dirt.

Since the original *Adventure for the Cure* and the new focus on rider training and smaller events, WMF has organized other dual-sport rides every year since. In 2010 Sue raised \$2,500 in Alaska on an industry ride with *MotoQuest*. In 2011, nine women and three men rode in their Alaskan and Yukon *Adventure for the Cure* and raised \$33,500 for breast cancer research. That has continued with a separate skills training at the Hollister Hills State Vehicle Recreational Area. Partnering with the *Hollister Hills Off Road Association*, the events in 2012 and 2013 were co-ed trainings encouraging riding as a family sport.



Marna Deitch proudly shows off the dirt she sported from her ride on the Dempster Highway, en route to the Arctic Circle.

While encouraging families to ride together, WMF sees women as the key to the health of the sport. If more women ride, that means that more families are sharing the sport together, and more kids are growing up on bikes and riding through adulthood. "Motorcycling can be a family sport... it doesn't have to be just an individual sport. You see that in dirt biking especially. Dirt biking can be a good take-off point for families who do street riding and want to get their kids involved. They can get into dirt biking, get their kids up to speed, and grow the sport in all areas," says Gin.

Gin and Sue can be seen working tirelessly throughout the motorcycle industry. You may have had one of them lead you on a *Kawasaki* demo ride, host you at a *Riders of Kawasaki* event, or perhaps you've heard one of them speak at an *International Motorcycle Show*. WMF's most recent activity has been behind the scenes joining seven motorcycle industry organizations to form the *Women's Coalition of Motorcyclists*. The objective of the new group is to create highly visible female role models throughout the industry, as well as providing scholarships for promising female motorsports competitors.

If that's not enough, the *Women's Motorcyclist Foundation* is also planning to ride the Continental Divide this year. They'll be laying out a route for a 2014 fundraiser, another *Adventure for the Cure*. And, you guessed it—I couldn't say no this time, either. No questions, no details. I just know I'm "in." **ADV**

BREAST CANCER FACTS

- > **1 in 8 women** will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime.
- > Breast cancer is the **2nd leading cause of death** among women.
- > **WMF has raised almost \$2.5M** for breast cancer research and cures.
- > Each year it is estimated that **over 220,000 women** in the U.S. will be diagnosed with breast cancer and more than **40,000 will die** from it.

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