

# OUT OF THE SADDLE WITH TAMELA RICH

*Please officially welcome Tamela Rich to OTL!*

Many of you will recognize Tamela's byline, since she contributed articles in two OTL issues this year. This month we debut her column, "Out of the Saddle with Tamela Rich," which offers wisdom and wit that motorcyclists can appreciate. Tamela rides a G650GS from her home base in Charlotte, North Carolina.

## Finding Community on the Super Slab

By Tamela Rich #40500

As John Lennon wrote (and possibly cribbed from Allen Saunders), "Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans."

My summer schedule combined five rallies and leading a group tour. With the precision of a NASCAR pit stop crew chief, I booked an oil change between events.

Then life happened.

My mechanic diagnosed a couple of problems and would brook no discussion of putting the repairs off for another 1000 miles, much less 6000. Parts had to be ordered (of course), which would delay my departure by three days, maybe even four.

I average between 200-300 daily miles on a road trip, leaving myself plenty of time for photography, roadside attractions, chatting up locals, and impromptu detours. While I'd planned ten days to Colorado Springs, where I would speak at the Women on Wheels® annual Ride-In™, I could make it in five days without cramping my style.

Then life happened again.

My mechanic called with news that

the parts weren't properly expedited; my new reality was a 1600-mile ride in two days. Cancelling was out of the question, so I began considering options, including flying in and renting a bike, and even—gasp!—driving a car.

I called my friend and motorcycle journalist Neale Bayly for advice. If you don't know Neale, he's gotten out of much tougher scrapes in his worldwide travels than my 1600 miles of tarmac represented. "Hang on a minute," he said, "Turn this on its head. Why not make it a challenge and do an Iron Butt to Colorado?" I immediately cottoned to the idea and started thinking of it as my "Lemonade Iron Butt" (making lemonade from lemons).

Few of us enjoy the soul-sucking monotony of super-slab travel, but I must give it its due: it's fast and efficient. What I never expected to find was community on the interstate in an incidental tribe of drivers of sedans, SUVs, and trucks! Apparently, I was conspicuous as a (female) motorcyclist, so at several stops fellow denizens of I-70 chatted me up.

"Hey! Been following you since St. Louis. You're making good time."



Colorado Welcome Center staffer wishes Tamela well in her quest for an Iron Butt Burner award.

"How about that storm in Ellsworth?"

"Isn't it hot wearing all that stuff?"

"I'm gonna show your picture to my daughter. She rides a bike, too."

One couple had been following me in their pickup since Illinois. Stretching my back at a Kansas rest stop picnic table, I learned that they are also motorcyclists, but obviously not on this particular trip. We compared favorite riding memories and the husband suggested a few scenic byways I could take nearby. I said that I would have to bucket-list his suggestions because I had to make 1000 miles before 7:00 the next morning for my Iron Butt "SaddleSore" award. His face broke into a wide grin and he high-fived me. Looking at his wife, he verified that their longest day was about 800 miles (true confession: at that point my high-mileage day was 750), and wished me well.



The next morning in much-maligned Kansas, the state everyone complains about “getting through” en route to destinations, I was on my bike at 5:17 to make Abilene, the 1000-mile mark. A couple of horses watched the traffic from a hillside. For some reason it came to mind that as the temperatures climbed, they would turn nose-to-butt so that their swishing tails would keep the flies from each other’s eyes and nostrils. Funny how the mind wanders.

As the sun slowly rose behind me in the east, I saw hawks hunting from ledges of sandstone on either side of I-70. One landed on a highway sign beside me as I passed, which I took as an omen.

And then, the dawn.

Suddenly the prairie was an explosion of muted pinks, lavenders and oranges as the solar spectrum hit the contours of the land. Barns became theater screens for the light show playing from the east through bundles of clouds. I caught my breath and sent up a prayer of gratitude to my Maker, my family and my mechanic.

When I was pulling out of the Colorado Welcome Center the next afternoon, the husband from the Kansas rest



stop jumped out of his truck and asked if I made my SaddleSore goal that morning. After I confirmed, he gave me a congratulatory thumbs up and a low-five. I went on to tell him that I had just decided to go for 1500 miles in 36 hours by that afternoon to qualify for the Iron Butt Association’s “Bun Burner” award. With the zeal of a fellow enthusiast, he assured me I would nail it. He and his wife passed me about 15 miles up the road and we waved like old friends.

I did indeed make the Bun Burner (1500 miles in less than 36 hours) in Colorado Springs, then stayed off the bike for another 36! No, I did not discov-

er my inner Iron Butt Competitor—once is enough! What I found inside myself was physical grit and resilience to match the mental stamina that I have long recognized.

The experience also showed me that beauty is everywhere and in everyone. We must open our hearts to experience it.

*Author, rider, and television travel expert Tamela Rich is OTL’s new columnist. “Out of the Saddle with Tamela Rich” will appear in each issue. Read about the quirky people and places she encounters at [www.TamelaRich.com](http://www.TamelaRich.com) or follow her on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.*

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