

# VANNA



## SU/22

VOLUME 026 / SUMMER 2022

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SUPERFOX

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1973

## LEGENDS ARE BUILT IN THE SHADOWS

Words by **Ben Giese**

**T**he deathly talentless bow to their accolades, and the fools are fooled again. Everybody wants to be famous, but chasing the dragon of popularity is a dark tunnel with no light at the end. The deeper you go, the more hopeless it becomes. Still, we stumble forward like zombies guided by the glow of small screens, desperate for more attention, more views, more likes, more clicks, faster, bigger, better, now.

But what do you do when the screen goes dark? Who are you in the quiet hours when the limelight fades away? This is where the outsiders thrive.

Rodney Mullen comes to mind. Nicknamed the “Godfather of Skateboarding” and considered by many to be the most innovative skateboarder of all time, he usually skates late into the night. Alone. Until the early hours of the morning while the rest of the world sleeps. This is where the progression happens. Away from the crowds and without witness, for the pure, authentic joy of doing what he was born to do.

Legends are built in the shadows.

Like Kurt Cobain, whose genius poured out behind closed doors into guitar notes and scribbled lyrics in a spiral notebook that would eventually become an album that shook the world and changed the landscape of rock music forever. He hated the fame and accolades that came along with the success of his band. That’s not why he was doing it. He was an outsider, and he created music because it’s what he was born to do.

We need those outsiders, and that’s why this issue is dedicated to them. The ones who refuse to follow the crowd or jump on the bandwagon. The ones who don’t fit into a box. Who do things not because they are cool, but for the intrinsic value of the experience. The ones who push the envelope and choose to see the world from a different perspective. Who live their passions with reckless abandon and find the beauty of life bleeding out in the raw moments behind the scenes. The ones who don’t give a fuck about popularity and would rather pursue greatness. The outsiders. Living in the shadows and doing what they were born to do.





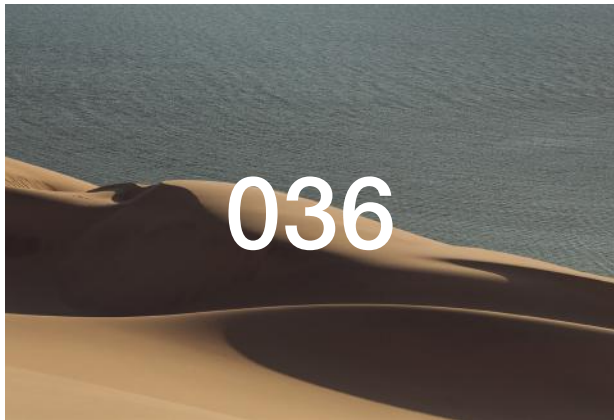
Photo by Ankit Sharma



LEGENDS ARE BUILT IN THE SHADOWS



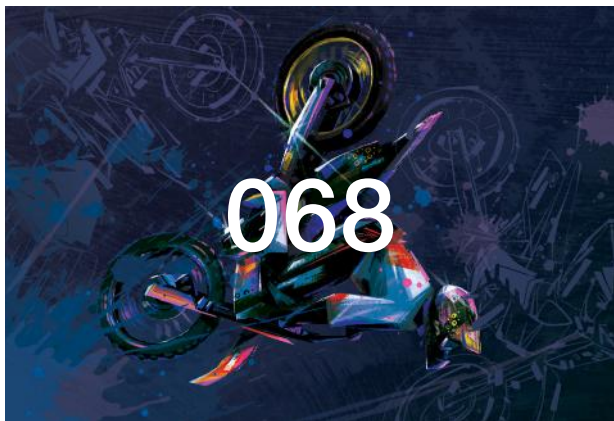
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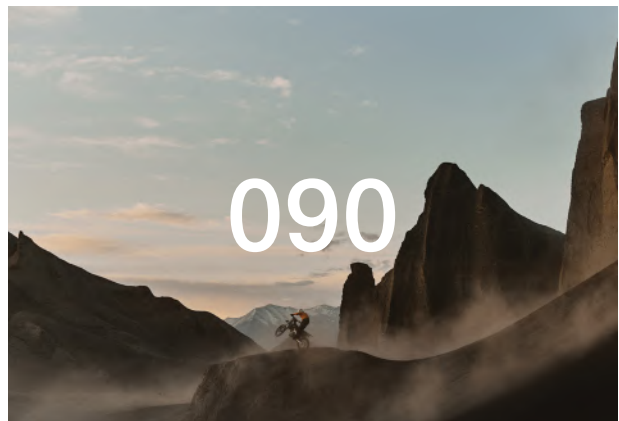
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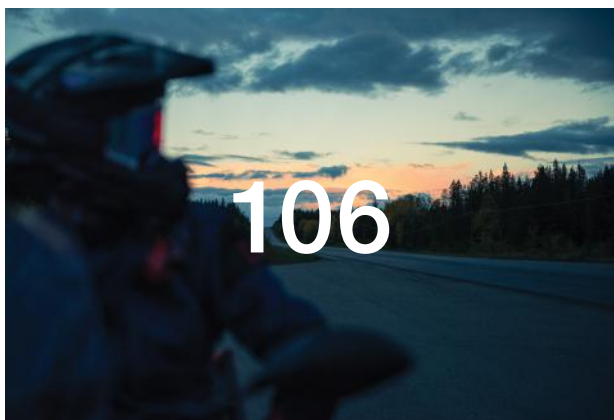
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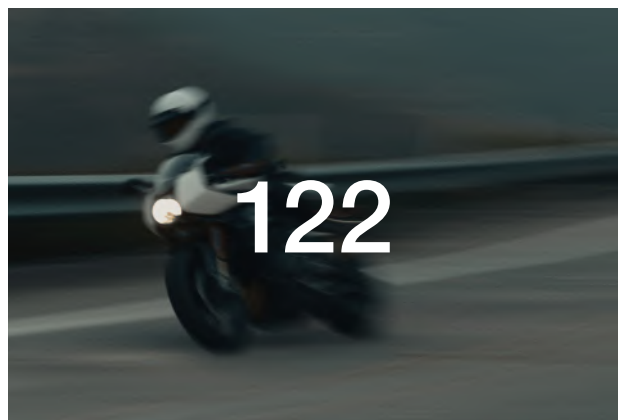
A WORLD UPSIDE DOWN



SUNDAY'S BEST



FULL CIRCLE



THE EDGE OF OBLIVION

# SU/22

# VAHNA

*noun* (vah-na)  
derived from the word VAHANA  
meaning "a vehicle of the gods"

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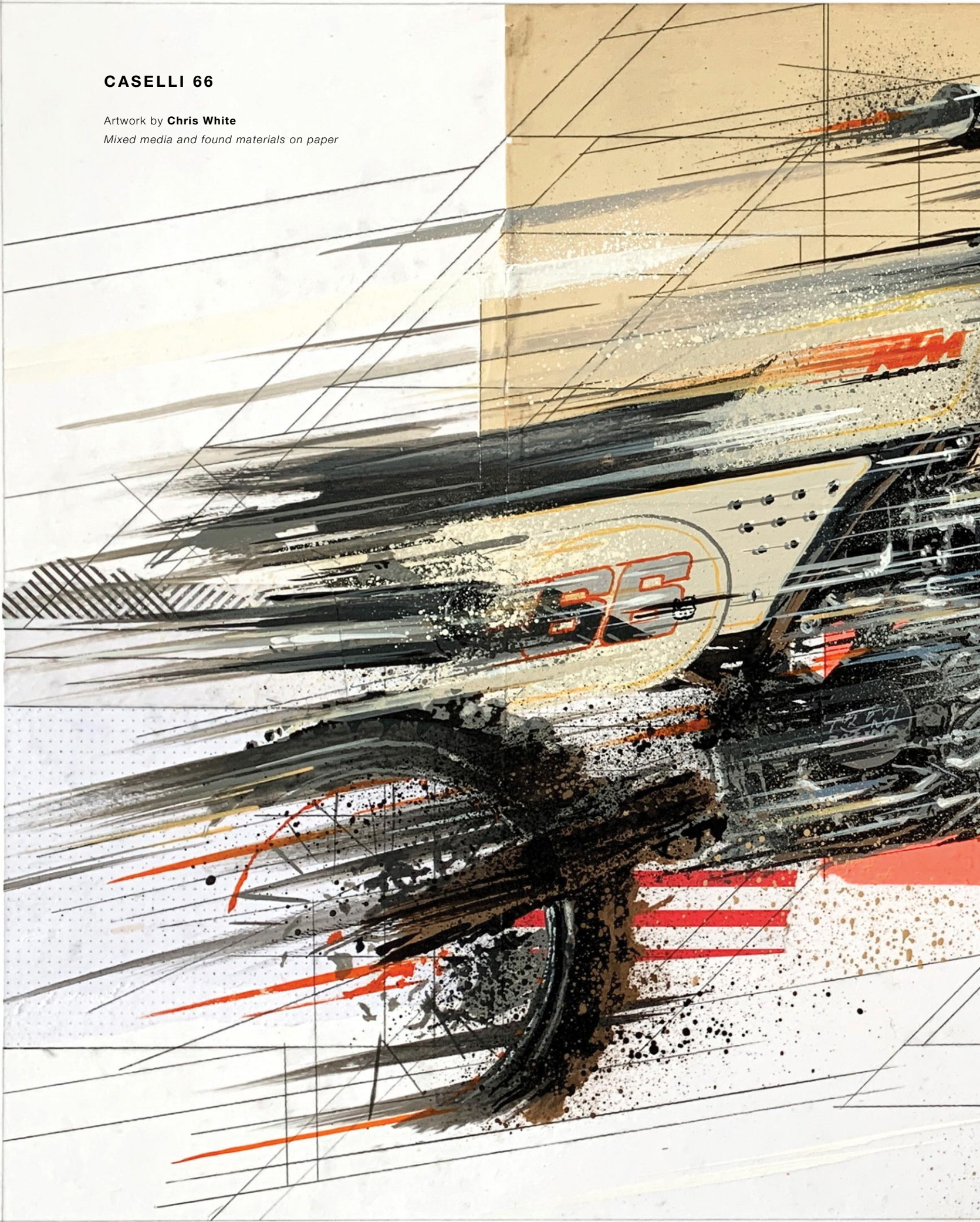
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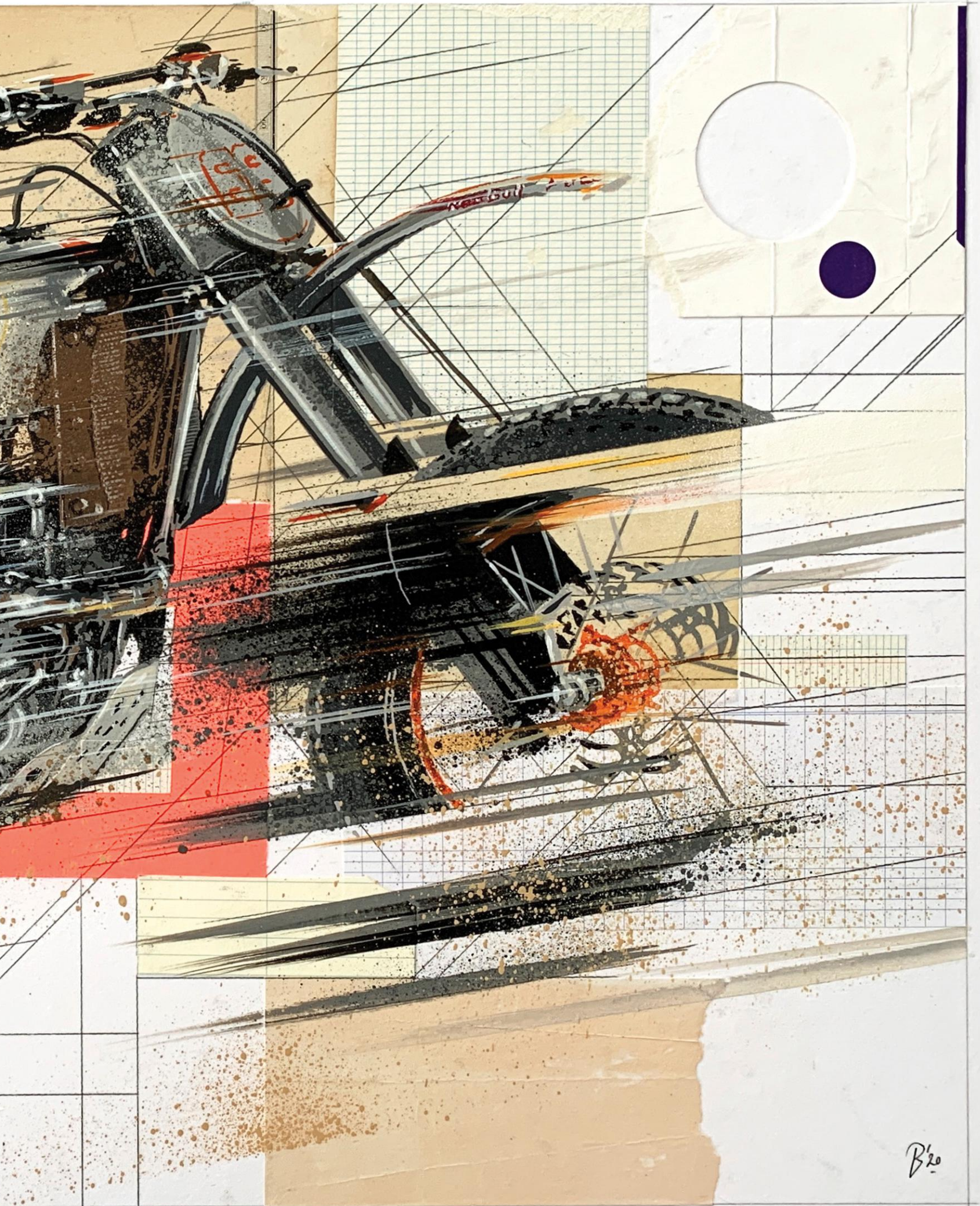


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*Mixed media and found materials on paper*





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FOR THE RIDE



# One of One

## MIKEY OJEDA: BLEACH DESIGN WERKS

Words by **Seth Richards**

Photography by **John Ryan Hebert**

It's after hours in Los Angeles. From the Hollywood Hills, the lights of endless sprawl underpin the gray horizon, and from the heights of this American Olympus, the gods of celebrity, culture and money invent themselves. It's here that Mikey Ojeda had a revelation.

Ojeda and his friend, the pro skateboarder Nyjah Huston, are leaving an afterparty. As the evening's revelry disperses in the night, Huston, in a T-shirt and white Nikes, climbs on the murdered-out KTM 500 EXC-F Ojeda had just finished building for him, thumbs the starter, and sets off. Huston glances over his shoulder at the Uber full of women giving chase and pulls a heraldic wheelie, pronouncing his place in the world.

As the blast of the KTM's exhaust cuts through the perfume of sagebrush and spilled champagne, the party's din fades in the air, and Ojeda begins to realize the significance of his custom dual sport.

That night and others like it became the inspiration for Ojeda's custom house, Bleach Design Werks. Based in Los Angeles, Bleach specializes in building custom dual sports with an LA-inspired aesthetic. It's quickly attracted a celebrity clientele and sparked collaborations with Deus Ex Machina, Harley-Davidson, Alpinestars and Dunlop. And that's just the beginning. Remember the name. Bleach Design Werks is about to blow up.

“In the beginning,” Ojeda says, “I didn’t even like the idea of dual sports. I didn’t understand them.”

Given his background, it’s no wonder they seemed so alien. Ojeda grew up in Los Angeles and started racing motocross on a KTM 50 SX, practically learning to ride in the crucible of competition. A motorcycle was a tool for competition, not something to be ridden to the corner store for a carton of milk and a laugh.

Spending much of his childhood at the track prepared him for a career in the industry: first as an athlete manager for supercross and motocross racers, then as marketing director for an online motorcycle gear retailer.

When Huston, with whom he shares a love of skateboarding and motocross, said he wanted to customize a dirt bike to fit his style like he does with his cars, Ojeda figured he could help negotiate a deal with Kawasaki, given Huston and Team Green’s mutual association with Monster Energy. Huston had other ideas.

Ojeda recalls the conversation: “Nyjah said, ‘I want a dual sport. I want to ride it on the street. I want a KTM 500.’”

“I said, ‘We don’t ride those bikes. We ride dirt bikes!’ I remember arguing with him about it and was like, ‘You’re crazy. They’re not cool.’ But he was so persistent.”

Next to a purebred motocross bike, a dual sport is a compromise—and looks it. A larger tank, cheapo turn signals and a bulky license plate bracket diminish the form-follows-function look of a number-plate-and-knobby off-roader. They’re slower and heavier, too. The engines often have lower compression ratios for improved street-ability, larger radiators to cope with city riding and revised chassis geometry. To pass muster with the Feds, they have catalytic converters, charcoal canisters and quiet exhausts. In the process of becoming reliable, street-legal and socially acceptable, dual sports lose the purity that makes a motocross bike the most badass machine on a showroom floor.

Huston was undeterred. After picking up the KTM at Three Brothers Racing in Costa Mesa, California, he shocked Ojeda again by tossing him the keys.







Remember  
the name.  
Bleach  
Design  
Werks is  
about to  
blow up.



Nike® International  
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“Nyah said, ‘All right, take it home,’” Ojeda recalls. “I was like, ‘What for?’ He said, ‘Build it.’ I told him, ‘I don’t do that. I don’t build bikes.’”

Ojeda remembers thinking, “Once again, I’m getting talked into something I don’t do.”

“If I can style this dual sport as closely to a moto bike as I can,” he remembers thinking, “it might be cool. I’m going to take factory brakes from a motocross bike; I’m going to set the suspension up like a motocross bike; I’m going to be able to ride it on the track.”

He tore down the brand-new engine to have it Cerakoted black, gave the front suspension a black diamond-like coating, installed a slender motocross tank, added a bunch of titanium hardware, and gave it a

signature graphics treatment. It set the formula for every Bleach Design Werks motorcycle since.

After riding it, he realized this new breed of dual sport was no joke. “Ten years ago a dual sport was an XR650,” Ojeda says. “Now these KTMs and Husky and Hondas are so close to a motocross bike.”

“The way I saw Nyjah use that bike really became my whole concept behind the brand,” Ojeda says. “I use the analogy of a Ford Raptor. It’s fully capable off-road, but 90 percent of them will probably never see dirt. People want to go to the club, or go to dinner, or go on a date with their chick and be in this off-road vehicle. There’s this cool factor of it being this urban thing. Can I build the Ford Raptor of bikes?”

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Consciously or not, by understanding a motorcycle's implicit cultural message and its role in symbolic behavior, Ojeda has fit the machine toward man. Replace for a moment the image of Huston wheelieing away from that afterparty on his Bleach KTM with a 200-horsepower superbike, and the impression it leaves takes on a different meaning. On a superbike, that wheelie comes across as gratuitous and self-serving, an indictment of tact. A superbike's superlative performance is subjugated to its relation to the rider who will never be its master. It's too serious a thing to use as a playful prop. But on a lightweight single-cylinder off-roader producing less than 70 horsepower, that wheelie blithely tips its cap to braggadocio. The rider looks like he's having fun, not like he's desperate to impress.

It's no easy trick to express one's sense of self-assurance and self-gratification so convincingly, and yet such symbolic messages are critical to the way we interact with each other. The clothes we wear, the vehicles we

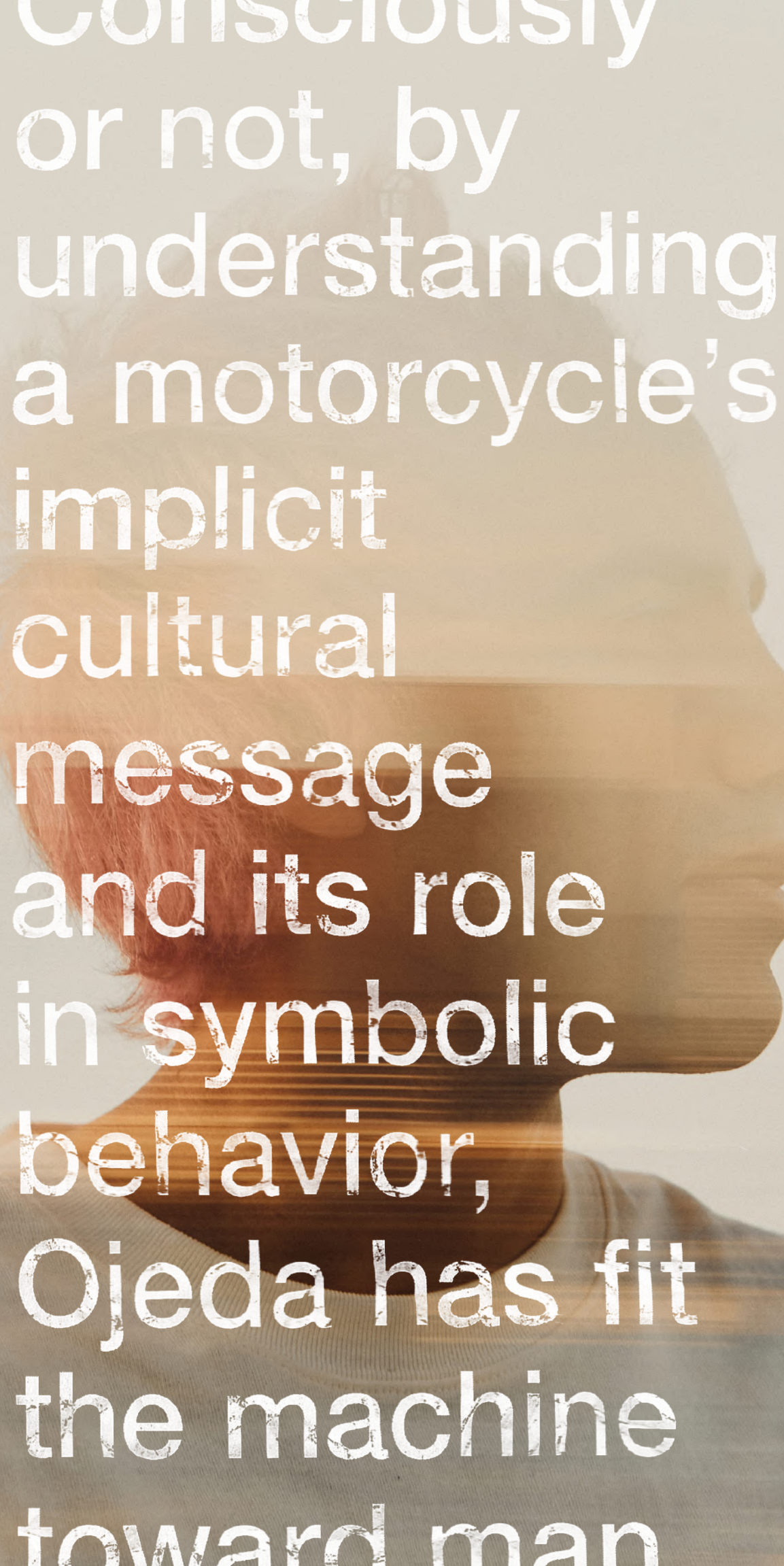
drive or ride, and the places we choose to be seen devise the identities in which we find succor and confidence. In one form or another, finding meaning and social position can be attributed to the way we style our lives.

"Style is everything," Ojeda says. "Style creates a feeling. There's no standard for style. My style is what makes me get up and feel the way I want to feel in the morning. I think there's style in everything."

"I take a lot of inspiration from fashion. Riding these bikes in the city, you're not wearing motocross gear; you're wearing normal clothes. The bike is an accessory that belongs with the way you look."

Bleach motorcycles look like LA pop culture and reflect the style of its celebrity clients, including Justin Bieber, rappers Ty Dolla \$ign and Arizona Zervas, Ben Simmons of the Brooklyn Nets, skateboarders Leticia Bufoni and Boo Johnson, and Ojeda's childhood friend, motocross racer Cole Seely.



A person's profile is shown in silhouette against a light, warm-toned background. The person's hair is reddish-brown. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, distressed, sans-serif font. The text reads: "Consciously or not, by understanding a motorcycle's implicit cultural message and its role in symbolic behavior, Ojeda has fit the machine toward man".

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As much as the Bleach look is an expression of Los Angeles, riding dirt bikes on the street has strong associations with broader urban culture. Dudes were riding CRs and YZs on the streets of Baltimore long before Ojeda Cerakoted an engine black or Bieber made it cool to suburban kids.

So, in a sense, a Bleach custom is a designer take on urban style. Exclusivity makes Bleach motorcycles the fare of rappers and basketball players, but the trickle-down effect is what most excites Ojeda.

“I see the bikes almost being the smallest piece,” Ojeda says. “How can we touch the demographic of people who can’t afford the bikes but want to be inspired by the way they make other people look?”

Bleach is rapidly expanding into the fashion world and is developing capsule collections with several big-name brands. One such collaboration is with Harley-Davidson. It puts him in good company: H-D’s latest fashion collab is with menswear giant Todd Snyder. Undoubtedly, Harley-Davidson wants a piece of the Bleach demographic.

Bleach’s current residency at Deus Ex Machina in Venice, California, further emphasizes Ojeda’s vision beyond two wheels. Ojeda sees it as an opportunity to

invite people into the processes of building a bike and developing a line of made-in-LA clothing.

During the launch party of the residency, Ojeda opened the Deus workshop and began to tear down the KTM, maneuvering around the lift while guests drank beer and chatted.

“We built the shop out like a clubhouse,” Ojeda says. “I wanted it to feel like when you hang out with friends in your garage. The workshop used to have a one-way mirror looking into the retail store, so no one could see in. The first thing I wanted to do was blow that whole window open.”

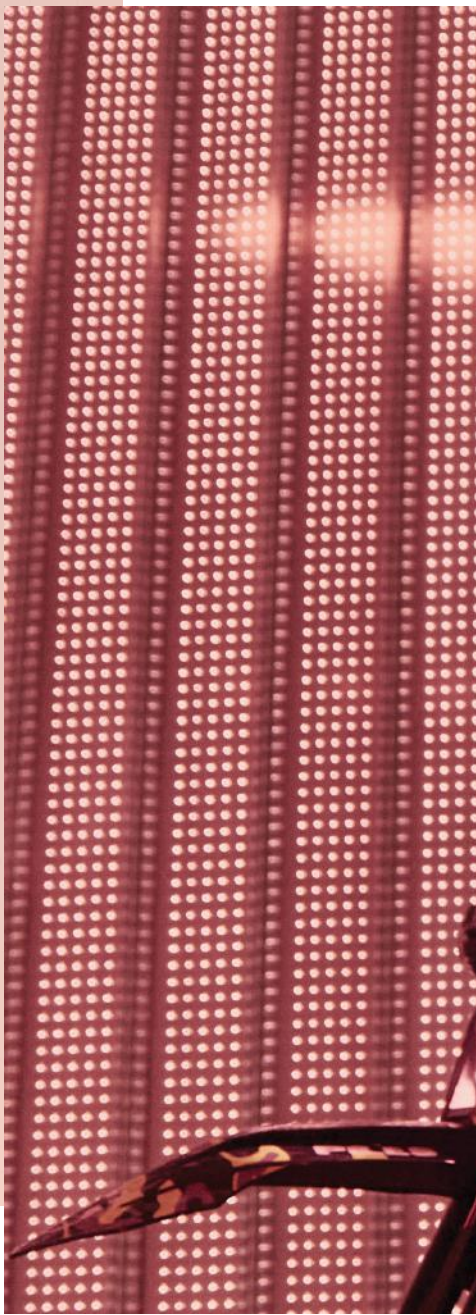
“The days of hiding everything are just dead. Creating transparency is so important. Everyone wants to feel a part of something, like they belong.”

While the motorcycle community is connected by common interest, it’s also divided by overt symbolic behavior that delineates who’s part of the club and who isn’t. The perceived barriers of gender, race and social class are just as evident in the motorcycle world as they are anywhere, and are even amplified by the distinct expressions of motorcycling’s subcultures. Marketing success is contingent on a brand’s ability to play to the right crowd. To transcend a specific niche requires a broader appeal.



A close-up photograph of a white and black dirt bike. The focus is on the handlebars, which have a blue grip and a blue brake lever. The front fender is white with black and gold stripes and the word "BLEACH" in large black letters. Below "BLEACH" is the word "WORKS" in smaller black letters. The front wheel is visible on the right side, showing a black tire and a black rim. The background is a blurred, natural outdoor setting.

As much as the Bleach look is an expression of Los Angeles, riding dirt bikes on the street has strong associations with broader urban culture.





Bleach bikes aren't easy to categorize. They don't fit easily in the custom scene, and performance aside, their LA-at-night style is a departure from the motocross and off-road scene from which the bikes are derived. Consequently, Bleach's demographic has come more from outside the motorcycle world than from within. So, despite Ojeda's deep roots and connections within the industry, Bleach can come across as an outsider.

"I submitted one of my first bikes to a motorcycle publication, and they denied it," Ojeda says. "They said it's not really a custom bike. I was bummed, thinking I'm not doing it right. Then I took a step back and realized I

had a different place to go. Now, seeing my bikes in all these different publications that have nothing to do with bikes—that's where I want to be. That's where I belong. We take in 'Nos' as if they're always bad, but sometimes 'Nos' are the biggest 'Yes.' You gotta find where you fit."

Ojeda looks beyond the insular subcultures of motorcycling to glimpse a world far larger. He has his eye on Paris Fashion Week, *Vogue*, and a culture in which two wheels are usually invisible. And in Los Angeles, where culture invents itself in the waning hours and outsiders become the in-crowd, Ojeda is on the brink of introducing Bleach to the world.





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# Death Acre

WHERE THE DUNES MEET THE SEA  
ON THE COAST OF ANGOLA

Words by **Adam Lyman**

Photography by **Archie Leeming**

“

I can't do this, man.”

I sat on the hard mattress of the dingy border-town hotel room and said the dreaded words. Silence.

Archie Leeming, looking tired, calmly paused his packing. We were both exhausted. I was at my wit's end. I had to break the news; I couldn't take the intensity of this trip anymore. It had been a wild journey already, fraught with frustration and challenges. And yet the “real” trip had yet to begin. The Death Acre in Angola — the South African nation officially known as the Republic of Angola and an adventurer's dream — was still ahead of us. But we had been met with relentless struggle already, and I didn't think I could be a good travel partner if we continued.

A strained conversation ensued. We were both a bit upset. The trip wasn't supposed to end this way. We had been planning it for nearly nine months and had been so eager. At this point it felt like it was supposed to happen. But I couldn't seem to change my feelings. By choosing not to go, I threw Archie's entire trip off. The Death Acre is not a place you go on your own, so without a travel partner, his dreams of exploring the coastal dunes of Angola were dashed. We packed the rest of our gear in silence and trudged out of our damp, shabby room with dusty panniers slung across our shoulders. A three-wheeled motorcycle with a covered cargo bed putt-putted into the courtyard to take us and our gear back to Angolan customs, where our bikes had been stuck overnight.

The Death Acre is a 50-mile section of coastline in Southern Angola. Here, mountainous dunes rise immediately from the sea's edge, ending in towering peaks of sand. There is no beach, no border between

the wall of sand and the ocean. Normally, there is no way to cross this section by land. However, at certain times of the month and according to moon patterns, the tide recedes to reveal a temporary passageway wide enough to pass between the sea and the dunes' edges. But after a window of a few hours, the ocean returns to the foot of the dunes, swallowing your tracks and any vehicle that remains. This is what we had come to explore. But the thought of doing so was very foreboding.

To even be at the Angolan border was a feat of its own. Two weeks prior, Archie and I had met in Windhoek, Namibia, after journeying several thousand miles each to get there. I was coming down from Northern Zambia, and he up from Cape Town, South Africa. And what a journey it had been. For months we had poured our hearts and souls into our old, classic Honda motorcycles for this trip. I had completely rebuilt my 750cc Africa Twin from the frame up, and Archie had freshly rebuilt his engine and carefully customized his XR600R for the long-range adventure. We lived and breathed old bikes, and our trip to the Angolan border had been a trial by fire, as it was the first time both bikes had been ridden fully reassembled.

Naturally, Murphy and his law had it out for us the entire time; anything that could go wrong seemingly had. Mechanical failures. Electrical failures. Engine problems. We quickly occupied any garage space across Southern Africa that we were allowed into. Some people would call it “chaos,” but to us it was just standard procedure. It seemed like there had already been at least two separate trips within this trip. I was beyond exhausted. We had chosen our hill, and the odds weren't looking good. I was ready to surrender before that proverbial death.

I gazed out the back of the three-wheeler, watching the chaotic road scene unfold as we plodded toward the border. People in flip flops drove small motorbikes in every direction on a packed road, zigzagging every which way. Crowded storefronts lined the street. A cow stood alone in the middle of a grassy roundabout. I was still going back and forth in my mind about my decision. We had been committed to this trip together for a very long time, and as we get older these opportunities are getting harder and harder to come by. There was a lot of momentum riding on this trip, but at this point I felt like we were pushing a rock uphill, knowing full well we may get crushed by it if we kept it up. Then the putt-putting of the three-wheeler slowed, and I snapped out of it as we stopped in front of customs, where our bikes had been held overnight.

Technically, the border was closed due to COVID-19. We weren't even supposed to be here. Everyone in Namibia had told us crossing was impossible. Until we convinced him, the Namibian immigration officer was not going to stamp us out of the country. The day before we had failed to cross into Angola because the immigration officer in charge of processing our visas was at church. So, stranded and destitute without passports, motorcycles or money, we were forced into a dodgy, humid and mosquito-infested hotel room near the border. Stranded and destitute was the last sign I needed to tip my decision-making scales.

As we trudged back up to Angola immigration, the officer in question came bursting out of the door holding our visas over his head, beaming with excitement. He spoke good English and had been very helpful so far, completely unphased by the border closure. "Are you guys ready for Angola?" he asked cheerfully. I countered with my somber news: We would be turning around and heading home. He looked very confused, almost concerned. "But Angola needs you!" he pleaded. I saw Archie cracking a smile in my periphery. The officer was in his corner — the last-ditch convincing effort he needed. "I've already processed your visa; everything is ready to go!" We were silent. Archie was gleefully holding back from piling on with convincing remarks. So, the officer continued for him, "There is nothing to worry about, where you are going it's so beautiful. Just come, don't worry."

I smirked and shook my head. This situation was so absurd. I looked at Archie, and he was laughing. The tension between us was broken. I looked at the bikes. Then toward the locked gate at the end of immigration and customs. We had come all this way.

We excused ourselves for a minute. I walked around the building and sat on the curb next to the bikes. Several

possible scenarios flashed in my head — some realistic, some fear-based. What if the trip takes longer than we expect? What if the bikes break down (again) and it becomes a massive undertaking to extract? What if the COVID situation changes and Namibia or Angola locks down their borders? I looked at the bikes. Back at Archie. Back at the gate into Angola. I could hear the voices of all the reasonable people in my life saying how terrible of an idea it would be to go through that gate. "Real Africa" was behind it — anything was possible once we stepped through. My head was in a fog from our night of battling mosquitoes and heat. On top of being road weary. We hadn't had a proper meal in days. I was blank. Several moments passed.

"All right, let's fucking do this." I stood up confidently. Archie beamed, and we hugged. It was on. Tension turned into teamwork. Back around the corner the immigration officer stood excitedly waiting with our passports in his hands. He might have been as excited as we were when he heard the news. All of us cheered. A few stamps and papers for the bikes later we passed through the gate and were on the road into Angola.

Everything changed as we crossed the border — the language, the people, the culture. We switched from driving on the right to the left. People, animals and other random objects poured into the streets. There were abandoned, rusted tanks sitting along the side the road, their turrets pointed south toward Namibia, remnants of the devastating civil war that had occurred mere decades ago. Empty hotel and housing projects sat idle. It felt strangely eerie, like driving through a documentary of the Soviet Union in the '80s, but this was Africa. European architecture and pastel-colored buildings dotted the roadside, making things even more confusing. But everywhere we stopped, the warm, relaxed nature of the people we met immediately shattered the artificial cold projected by these historical remnants.

Our route took us northwest from the border along the single tarmac road headed toward the town of Cahama. There was hardly anything there, just a handful of small shops along the road for a few hundred miles. A horde of small bikes crowded around a large above-ground fuel tank. We pulled in. Eminem was blasting on a cheap Chinese stereo. We filled up all fillable containers we had with fuel and water — from here on out there wouldn't be any official fuel stations. There may be fuel in the villages, but there was no way to tell. I scrounged up some grocery supplies. We would not see another tarmac road until the end of the trip, several days and nearly 1,000 miles later. Well, we weren't exactly sure what we would see.



The  
geological  
shift was  
clear.

There  
was no  
one else  
here. It  
was quiet.  
Barren.  
Isolated.  
Majestic.  
Ominous

There is something so enticing about heading into the unknown in a totally different country, with a completely unique landscape and culture. We pointed our fully loaded bikes into the sunset over the scrubby, bushy scene before us. From here, we'd head west toward the ocean across several hundred miles of remote bush track before reaching the start of the Death Acre. For us, the Death Acre was the proverbial summit of the trip. The last, most difficult task lying ominously at the end of the challenging track to get there. That morning's drama slipped far into the background as we started off into the dying sun looking for a place to sleep in the bush.

Dusty roads. Cool mornings, and hot days. Spirits were high — the riding was incredible. I danced on my foot pegs to the Grateful Dead blasting in my helmet as we weaved in and out of the rocky track flowing up and down through the bushy desert that slowly turned mountainous. This. This is why we do this. Exploring the far corners of the world with a good friend, loaded up on bikes we had transferred part of our souls into. We were firmly in the ever-elusive "zone." Things were coming together. All memories of past suffering faded away. What was up next? When was the last time a foreigner had been down these roads? Months? Years? Each small town we came across felt like an oasis. There weren't many, but every few hours a village would appear out of the dry, barren landscape. Over the next few days, the villages became smaller and smaller, farther and farther apart down more aggressive roads. Only a few hundred more miles to the ocean.

Iona National Park was the beginning of the endless sand. Deep sand. We trudged through the ruts of 4x4 tracks that had gone before us heading for a ranger station. This would be our last checkpoint before the open desert and the start of the Death Acre. We didn't know what we would find at the station, so both Archie and I were completely loaded with water and fuel. A 23-liter tank of fuel, plus six more liters in an auxiliary bag. Eleven liters of water. I could feel the weight of the Twin, now very top-heavy, shifting from side to side violently in the sand. We were both tired, but all remaining energy reserves were focused on keeping things upright and moving fast enough to maintain balance, and not get sucked into the bottomless fluff. Every now and then I'd break concentration to remind myself to take in the increasingly rugged, unearthly scenery unfolding around us.

Around midday we pulled into the ranger station in Iona. It was a simple camp, consisting of a few rows of block housing where we were offered to stay the night. We looked at each other. A real bed? Indoors? Behind the station was a sea of infinite desert. The mountains were no more — it was nothing but sand between us and the ocean. As we parked under the shade, I could see heat waves rolling off the surface into the horizon. Around sunset we hiked up a nearby mountain. From the top we had a 360-degree view of our surroundings. The geological shift was clear. There was no one else here. It was quiet. Barren. Isolated. Majestic. Ominous.

From the ranger station, we still had to cross the 60-mile section of desert plain that lay before us. There was no official road here — just open desert with faint two tracks in the windswept sand. Eventually they would lead to the Foz do Cunene, or "Mouth of the Cunene," which was the border between Angola and Namibia. There was a small police post guarding the border, nestled in an abandoned colonial settlement from the 1800s, amongst the dunes. Next, we'd ride along the brooding, desolate coastline for about 60 miles north from the police camp, where the Death Acre would begin. The whole area was wildly remote. Nothing but sand, wind and water for hundreds of miles. Cell signal had stopped four days ago.

We went flat-out Dakar Rally-style, pinning the bikes racing side by side like ink pens drawing a route on the surface of the blank virgin sand. Archie had the coordinates on his GPS, and we followed that line along with some faint tire tracks in the sand. We couldn't afford to get lost out here. The conditions were too harsh; the stakes too high.

As we got closer to the ocean, the flat desert turned to dunes, gradually becoming larger and larger. The sand shifted back from hard pack to soft beach. This is where Archie's XR600R was at its best. I, on the other hand, with a fully loaded Twin, was pumping the throttle to keep the ship afloat. If we stopped at the wrong spot — at the bottom of an incline, or the middle of a loose sand rut — we could get very stuck. So, we had to keep the speed up so that the bike could remain afloat above the sand — but not too fast, because the dunes were laden with treachery, oftentimes concealed. Most common was a hidden ridge: A dune face that appeared to gradually slope down the other side could drop off unexpectedly, leaving a sheer drop. Depth perception among the dunes was difficult to ascertain, so it was hard to tell which ridges dropped off and which ones didn't.



Archie stopped and looked down at his front tire. It was flat. We were already pressed for time, and this was an unfortunate setback. There was no shelter out here, and we really needed to make it to the river mouth if we had any chance of crossing the Death Acre the next morning. A puncture two hours before sundown, in the middle of the desert, with little backup options available, was the worst-case scenario. Here we go — this is what we had trained for on all our previous trips. We went through the motions of changing Archie's tube as the late-afternoon sun beat down and the wind whipped sand across our face. I could smell the sea in the intense wind blowing from the coast, which still must have been many dozens of miles away.

The sun set over the dunes, and the sea mist rolling in from the ocean was fogging up my goggles. We still couldn't see the ocean, but the smell and heavy air was unmistakable. As we got closer to the ocean, more and more rocks appeared, hidden in the dunes. There was more wind here, too. We were so close, but that didn't really matter. Each mile had potential for danger and getting very lost. Things were getting dicey now as darkness set in. We were pushing. Up and over the dunes, one after the other, going faster and faster with a sense of urgency. Eventually we crested a rolling dune and saw the ocean in the distance. I was in disbelief that we were actually here after all we'd been through. But there was no time to celebrate, as we had to find our camp.

An eerie, abandoned settlement rose out of the desert to greet us in the dusk. Tucked into the dunes and set back from the sea was a smattering of concrete block houses. Their paint had faded years ago and stood as gloomy gray dwellings in an already bleak landscape. Most of the houses were rundown and ramshackle, with roofs falling in, or filled with sand that had blown into their open doors and windows.

Guards appeared out of the block houses near the entrance to the village. People. There were people here. How was that possible? Their cheer and friendliness immediately cut through the town's eerie darkness that at this point was both quite literal and figurative. We were

welcomed by the guards, who took our details, effectively checking us "in" to the abandoned village.

In the last remaining light, we rode our bikes across town over to the ramshackle pump house at the edge of the river where we would sleep. Busted-out windows and graffiti added to the ghostlike feeling. Large pipes twisted in various arrangements were still scattered throughout the house, which looked directly over the river, which was something of an anomaly itself. A wide ribbon of fresh water winding its way through the dry, sandy desert, eventually dumping into the ocean. We later found out the river was packed full of crocs and a variety of sharks, adding to its exotic appeal.

There wasn't much time to take in how incredibly peculiar the whole settlement and situation was because we had to begin preparing for tomorrow. Our attention turned to the task at hand. I could feel the weight of the following day when we would make a go at the Death Acre.

Archie's alarm pierced the early-morning stillness. It was 4:30. Coffee, oats, a few quiet moments by the river. I looked for crocodiles. Nothing. The sun crested the top of the dune opposite the river. Time to go.

If all went well today, we would be camping in the middle of the Death Acre section. Archie had GPS coordinates to meet up with a group for a tour from a place called Flamingo Lodge going to Baja dos Tigres tomorrow and camping in the dunes for two nights. Our plan was to meet up with our guide at their camp and join the tour. If we made it on time. Through a variety of satellite communications Archie had arranged an hour window to meet them between 11:30 and 12:30.

Both Archie and I had been on a lot of trips to obscure places, but there was something different about today. I could feel it. This was serious. Countless things could go wrong very quickly and easily. Seamless execution was dependent on our skill, focus and preparation. Past images of sunken Land Rovers and motorcycles being hauled up a dune away from the incoming tide crossed my mind. Stories of experienced motorcyclists going headfirst over a dune and breaking bones surfaced. If *anything* went wrong, help wouldn't be easy or guaranteed. Definitely not fast. Things were serious.



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We started off. There was roughly 60 miles of challenging coastline to cover before the official start of the Death Acre. But there was no road. It was up to us to choose the right line, which was nearly impossible. Each line has its own perils. Near the ocean, riding was flat, but occasionally saturated sand would become quicksand, instantly stopping us in our tracks. Or a rock outcropping sticking into the ocean would block our path, and we had to go up and over the sandy bank to gamble on the inland line. Once inland, we were faced with deep beach sand and dunes with huge whoops, boulders and drop-offs. Rock chunks that could easily take out an engine case were hidden by the sand. The sand was anything but flat. Ramping off a dune, or diving into a hidden crevasse, seemed inevitable. One mistake and we'd go over the handlebars, breaking the bikes or ourselves. My adrenaline and focus had never been higher. Sure enough, both of us eventually dumped our bikes down a false dune side, luckily avoiding any critical damage or injury.

After many hard-fought miles, we reached the start of the Death Acre — marked by the towering dunes appearing out of the desert plain. Fortunately, the conditions made the famed Death Acre riding much easier than what we had just completed. The sand in front of us, recently covered by water a few hours prior, was hardpacked and gave us no issues. It was a calm, sunny day. We made good time. The scenery was beyond epic, unlike anything I had ever seen in my life. We were happy and smiling, and we had plenty of time to mess around and shoot some photos.

And then I got lost. Archie and I were separated for nearly an hour. I made a wrong turn into a false lagoon created by ocean currents. What appeared to be coastline eventually disappeared into the ocean. I didn't have the GPS, or any way of knowing where I was, or where Archie was. I didn't realize I was lost and waited for Archie to catch up, not knowing he had already passed me farther inland. Maybe he was having mechanical issues again, I thought. I waited. Nothing. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to me, Archie was completely panicked. He drove up and down the coast searching everywhere for me, writing notes in the sand, worried I had been lost and then backtracked. By the time we finally met again, he was rattled, and another hour was gone. We were pushing time again, putting our meetup window in jeopardy.

We continued riding up the coast. Dune ridges, towering over the ocean, wound northward as far as we could see. Past the lagoon, riding was easy again, as we flowed in and out of the curvature of the dunes. We made good time again, although still wary of our past hindrances.

Eventually Archie stopped abruptly on the coast. "This is it, the GPS coordinates. Camp Relief should be a few hundred meters that way." He pointed at the massive dune to our right. Finally! We were in a celebratory mood — the

highest of highs. Archie was beaming. The apex of our trip! We had done it! There was still sand in both of our helmets from when we had dumped our bikes over dunes earlier this morning. I had several near-misses with boulders. But we had made it. Months of planning and prep and hardship resulted in this moment. The trials and tribulations to get here were substantial. Just a week ago I had reached my wit's end, and nearly turned around. But here we were.

Time for a tea and snack by the ocean. I dug out the last bits of biltong (cured meat strips) and dried mangos — luxuries I had saved from Namibia. This was a real celebration. I suggested we move the bikes down to the water to create a makeshift shelter to protect us from the hot midday sun and slight offshore breeze. Still chuffed, we walked to our bikes to move them.

Thwap, thwap, thwap. Archie looked at me with a horrified face. His kicking intensified. Thwap, thwap, thwap. Nothing, not even a single fire. He kept kicking in denial. Several minutes passed. This might be one of the worst places for the bike to give up. Both our minds were racing. What if it actually didn't start? What if we were stuck in the middle of the Death Acre with a bike that's not working and no backup on the way? Thwap, thwap, thwap.

I suggested we go have that cup of tea, cool off, enjoy the surroundings a bit and not think about it right now. But it was too late. Archie had already begun spiraling — as one would — when you may be stranded in the middle of possibly the most remote desert location in the world. After 2 p.m. that day, the tide would come in and then no one could reach us by land. Our high had crashed immediately. The mood was again one of frustration and hopelessness.

We had our tea. Archie was visibly upset and disgruntled. I tried to provide some comfort and be a steady voice of reason, but even I could tell that the situation looked a bit bleak. Eleven-thirty turned into 12:30, which turned into 1:30. What if we waited too long, then missed our window to get out of the Death Acre? Do we camp here for the night? Will Archie's bike start again? What do we do if it doesn't?

I took another sip of tea and stared out over the ocean. In front of us to the north, the coastline swooped around, jutting out to a point. I fixed my eyes on that point. If our guide comes, it will be around that point. No sign of a vehicle yet. Meanwhile, our surroundings didn't seem to care about our internal turmoil. Everything was still. A calm, turquoise colored sea gently lapped the shore. Periodically the wind picked up across the sea, blowing bits of sand up and over the lonely dune peaks. Seagulls rode the thermals, hovering just over top the mountain of sand. Their shadows danced across the face of the dune below. A jackal sat completely still halfway up another dune, looking at us curiously. I broke the silence with another attempt at keeping the optimism up. We had the

essentials. We had prepared for this. There was enough food and water for an emergency overnight. It might not be ideal, but it was fine. My words seemed empty, hardly comforting in the void that was our current environment. There was nothing left to say, so we sat in silence, both running scenarios about what might unfold.

“What’s that?!” We strained our eyes toward the point like stranded sailors desperate for rescue. Nope, that was just a dark rock I hadn’t seen yet. We eventually gave up and walked back to the bike to inspect it. Seat off, tank off, luggage spread everywhere. Standard procedure. We checked the spark plug, and sure enough the spark was weak. It was yellow. Sometimes. Other times there was no spark at all. Without a multimeter we couldn’t pinpoint the problem exactly. All we could do was hope there was enough spark for enough of the time to get us out of the Death Acre.

We were nearing complete devastation. The whole trip had been a roller coaster of emotions, constantly going from highs to lows. But this was a new level of low. Archie was especially upset — he had put so much time and effort into painstakingly preparing the bike for the trip — and now we might be stuck for real. The uncertainty and anxiety that came with it was crushing.

I periodically peered up from Archie’s bike, looking toward the point. Nothing. Wait, there was movement. I squinted against the sun. Oh my god. A Land Cruiser came flying around the corner in the far distance with a long boat on a trailer wagging behind it. I did a double take. Even from this distance the cruiser was moving seriously fast. He must have been going nearly 70 mph along the beach, with a boat in tow. It was a sight to see. We could hardly believe it! Excitement flooded both our faces. Our guide pulls up and hangs out the window, greeting us with a wry, mischievous smile. The simple presence of another

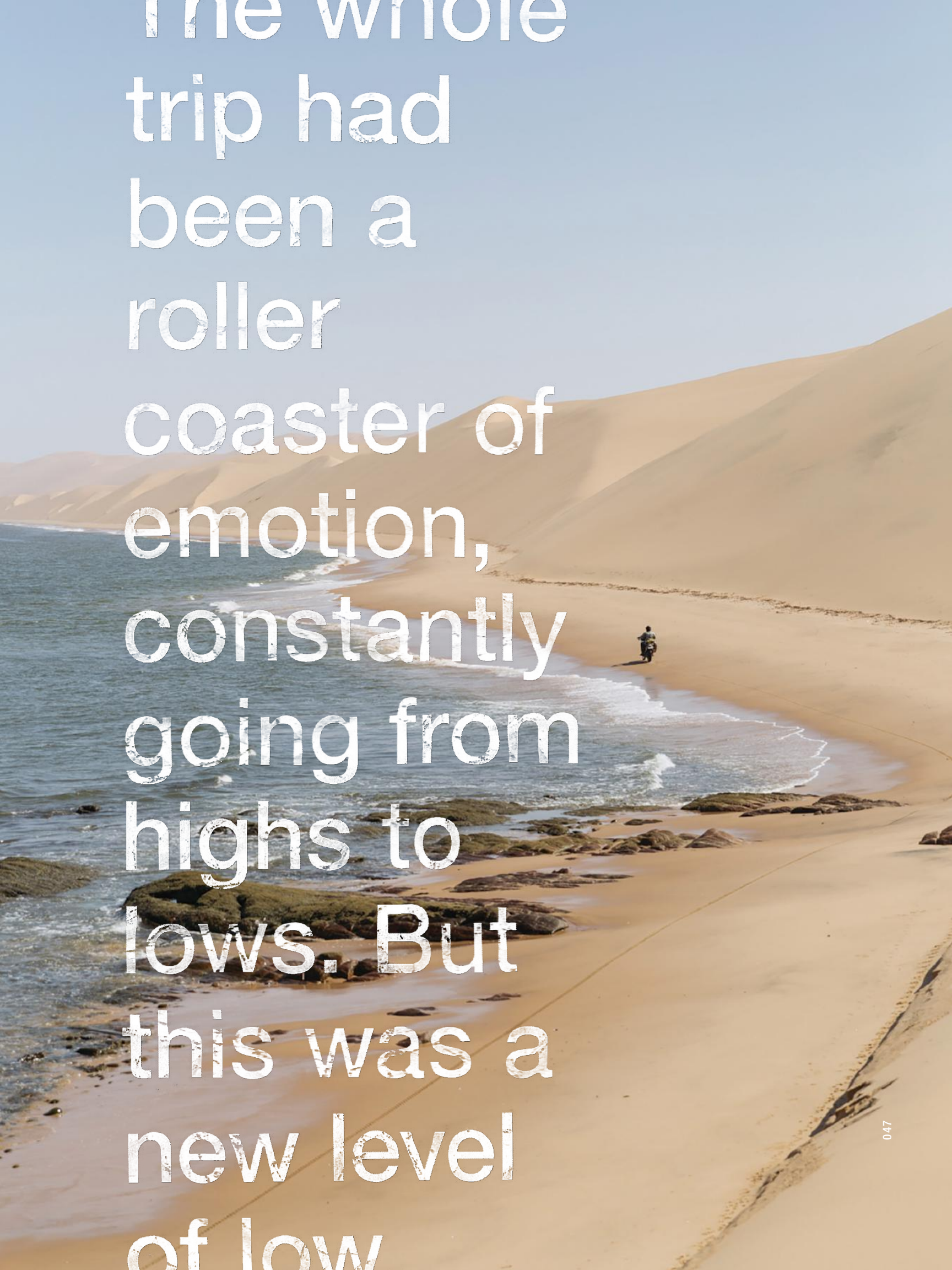
human washed away all the darkness of our anxiety and stress. We were saved!

Archie put the bike back together and started kicking. Thwap, thwap, thwap. Somehow, in a seeming act of God, the bike eventually fired, springing back to life. It was on.


We asked our guide where a camp was. He pointed at the massive dune rising behind us and said, “Just behind there.” We looked at each other, then back at him, confused. I was speechless. How could a camp be back there; there was a dune in the way? How were we going to get there? “Follow me,” our guide shouted as he drove away. Archie and I stood there, still in shock, as he looped around and charged up the side of the dune in the Land Cruiser with the boat behind him, the turbo screaming the entire way up. Up and over — the cruiser disappeared behind the dune. Not wanting to get lost again, Archie and I quickly saddled up and followed the guide through the mysterious portal into the campsite. Sure enough, over the first dune was a small relief surrounded by towering dunes where several basic camping shelters stood.

Archie and I got off the bikes completely chuffed. Archie was laughing. The darkness was over. The guide brought out cold drinks. Lunch was being prepared. Near total desperation turned into what felt like a relaxing beach holiday. A gazebo was popped up. French expats working in the oil and gas industry in the capital city of Luanda showed up in a second Land Cruiser that reeked of a burnt transmission. Both vehicles had problems on the way, delaying them for hours. We sat in the shade, enjoying cold drinks and each other’s company. The afternoon was spent swimming in the warm coastal water and wandering along the tops of the surrounding dune ridges. The high was back. Later that night we enjoyed a massive meal of hot food, huddled from the desert cold in one of the basic wooden shelters.



A photograph of a person riding a motorcycle on a sandy beach. The beach is bordered by large, smooth sand dunes in the background. The ocean waves are breaking on the shore, and there are some rocks in the water. The sky is clear and blue.

The whole  
trip had  
been a  
roller  
coaster of  
emotion,  
constantly  
going from  
highs to  
lows. But  
this was a  
new level  
of low



For us, adventure meant enduring some of the lowest of lows and the highest of stresses, and difficulties we had ever seen before. It meant more grit than glory.



I slept so hard that night, underneath the desert stars in the open-air shelter. So hard that when I woke up I had to remind myself where I was. We were on holiday! Not broken down and clinging to life on the side of a dune. I smiled. I heard the sounds of breakfast being prepared, and smelled bacon cutting through the pre-dawn stillness. Unreal. This could be a dream, as far as I was concerned. That morning we toured Baja dos Tigres with our guide and the group. The island was one of the most bizarre locations I have ever been to, a large fishing ghost town located on a tiny strip of desert surrounded by ocean and impassible desert. We walked around as tourists, excitedly exploring the ruins of 19th-century buildings. What a difference a day can make. Twenty-four hours prior it had felt like we were fighting for survival.

With ultra-high spirits, our entire group left the camp in a convoy. Archie and I on the bikes led the way, with the Land Cruiser behind us, speeding across the coast. Archie stopped and threw up his hands at the official end of the Death Acre. We really had made it this time. The town of Tombua appeared on the horizon. This was our first large town since leaving Cahama a week before. Motorbikes buzzed everywhere. Large Portuguese buildings and architecture sprawled throughout the city, painted in pastel colors. We finally arrived at the Flamingo

Lodge just in time to see the sun set over the ocean. We recovered here for the last few days of the trip, eating well, resting and soaking in the beautiful surroundings.

A few days later, Archie and I went our separate ways. I was headed back to Cape Town to start a new project, while Archie continued north on his motorbike along the West Coast of Africa, with his sights set on Europe.

It was in the quiet moments near the end of the trip that I could reflect and make sense of what had happened the past few weeks. This had been by far the most adventurous trip I had ever been on. I thought about that. Adventure. In a world of visual, manicured media, the way adventure is communicated has changed. The hardship involved in these types of trips is often lost, traded instead for one-sided glory or glamour. For us, adventure meant enduring some of the lowest of lows and the highest of stresses, and difficulties we had ever seen before. It meant more grit than glory. But, amid the troughs — no matter how low — there was always a peak. Perhaps it's the sheer difference in potential between the highs and lows that makes this type of travel so addicting. As the sun went down on that night and the rest of the trip, I was completely knackered and ready to head home. But I knew I would be back at some point. True adventure has a way of calling. Until next time.







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# to Dust


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They laugh at me because I'm different;  
I laugh at them because they're all the same.

—Kurt Cobain




















I'd rather be hated for who I am,  
than loved for who I am not.

—Kurt Cobain

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# A World Upside Down

## THE RACE TO LAND THE FIRST BACKFLIP

Words by **Nicole Dreon**

Illustrations by **Tomas Pajdlhauser**

**T**here was perhaps no era more exciting for action sports than the years before and after the turn of the millennium. ESPN's X Games first touched down in Rhode Island in 1995, followed by NBC's Gravity Games in 1999, and with the mainstream exposure from major TV platforms, alternative sports began to receive the kind of recognition normally reserved for traditional sports.

Athletes like Tony Hawk in skateboarding, Mat Hoffman in BMX, and Kelly Slater in surfing were just a few of the personalities who were becoming household names. Slater had won six of his 11 world titles by 1999 and was a recurring character on the popular TV show "Baywatch." Hawk cemented his status as an icon when he landed the 900 the same year and then used the "Tony Hawk's Pro Skater" video game series to become a global sensation. Nike even started to feature skateboarders in ads alongside golfers and joggers.

For most of the 1990s, the motocross industry revolved around the clean-cut world of racing. Jeremy McGrath made Supercross go mainstream by winning

seven AMA SX titles between 1993 and 2000. Some even credit him with sparking the freestyle movement when he began throwing the Nac Nac during races. With his compelling personality, McGrath's popularity appealed to fans well beyond racing.

By 1999, both the X Games and Gravity Games added freestyle motocross to their events lineup. Up until that point, freestyle was a rebellious counterculture of mostly older racers performing BMX tricks. It was an incredibly exciting time for the sport, and the level of tricks was progressing rapidly, but freestyle motocross needed something (or someone) to put it on the map the way Hawk, Hoffman, Slater and McGrath did in their respective sports.

From 2000 to 2002, the world of freestyle motocross would be turned upside down with a series of exciting, dramatic and heartbreaking moments in the race to land the first backflip on a full-size motorcycle – a trick that would unlock a whole new realm of possibilities and ultimately define freestyle motocross as we know it today. Here is that story.

# Late 1999



## LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

Carey Hart had recently moved back to his hometown of Las Vegas, Nevada. He was two years into an unexpected freestyle career and enjoying an income that he had never experienced when racing. As a racer, Hart was one of the most successful privateers on the circuit but was always scraping to get by. "People barely even looked at me in the pits," he said.

Then, in the small window of three or four months, he went from barely being recognized to becoming part of what he calls "that group of eight ... the group of guys who started this thing [freestyle], and made it so popular. It was quite a bit of culture shock at the time, and it was extremely exciting to be a 23-year-old kid getting that kind of attention, and not as a racer."

Longtime motocross journalist Eric Johnson remembers when he first started hearing Hart's name. "I knew he had lined up at some supercross races," Johnson said. "He was this handsome kid from Las Vegas. Carey had that bad-boy look. He had the tattoos. I remember thinking that he was the first purpose-built freestyle guy."

With some of his early freestyle earnings, Hart started building a house next door to BMX pro T.J.

Lavin. While he waited for his house to be finished, he lived with Lavin for six months. Every day the two would ride BMX bikes together in Lavin's backyard and spend time on dirt bikes at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway, where Hart had a little jump set up.

At night, they would hang out on the roll-in in Lavin's backyard and talk about the future. With the Vegas skyline in the background, it was the perfect place to manifest dreams. Just a few months earlier, Hawk had landed the first 900 on a skateboard. With one signature trick, he cemented his reputation as an icon in the world of action sports.

"I just felt that the next progression of the sport was to start flipping and getting upside down," said Hart. "But nobody was even talking about it. I had a feeling it could be a monumental thing for the progression of freestyle motocross, but I had no idea about the global and mainstream impact that it could have."

Hart said that he and Lavin talked about the backflip nonstop. One night in particular stands out to Lavin. "We were just sitting there and talking, and Carey was like, 'I'm going to do a backflip on my motorcycle at Gravity Games.' And I said, 'Well, I'm going to win the Gravity Games.'"

while progressing tricks in BMX was aided by foam pits and Resi-Mats, those weren't an option on a dirt bike at the time.



#### WOODWARD, PENNSYLVANIA

On a whim, the two caught a red-eye flight from Vegas to State College, Pennsylvania. Lavin was convinced if he could teach Hart to flip a BMX bike, he could parlay that knowledge to a motorcycle. It was a dark, cold and lonely night in the dead of winter when Lavin and Hart arrived at Woodward PA near Penn State University, the first Woodward Camp devoted to training for sports such as gymnastics, cheer, skateboarding and BMX.

When they arrived at Woodward, the compound was dead. It was only Hart and Lavin out at Lot 8. Hart had only been on the BMX bike for about 45 minutes when he started landing backflips perfectly on the Resi-Mat. "It wasn't even really that big of a deal for me to teach him," said Lavin. "He just did it. He was very, very natural on the bike."

Up until 2000, freestyle motocross had adapted tricks from BMX, like the no-footer and can-can, and invented small

variations of its own. While progressing tricks in BMX was aided by foam pits and Resi-Mats, those weren't an option on a dirt bike at the time.

Hauling a 225-pound motorcycle out of a foam pit wasn't practical, not to mention the fire hazard. The first backflip on a dirt bike would have to be learned the hard way—onto dirt. Ouch.

There were other guys who could have done it first, too. Riders like Travis Pastrana, Mike Metzger and Brian Deegan were all right there.

"All those other guys were very good," said Lavin. "They could easily have done it, no problem. But nobody had the vision that it could really be done. Everyone was like, 'there's no way that we can flip a 225-pound bike.' Carey just had the gut. I mean, that's really all it took. Somebody committing 100 percent, and that was Carey."

# Early 2000

# Summer 2000

## GRAVITY GAMES, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

The day of the freestyle final at Gravity Games, the stands were packed. Hart remembers being a mess. Each time the start order circled back to him, he would just ride around the course, hitting jumps but not doing anything. Brian Deegan sat atop the leaderboard.

"I went to Gravity with the sole purpose of doing a flip and hopefully not killing myself," Hart said. "I planned to do it on my last run, so my first one or two runs were a disaster."

Lavin, who had just won the BMX dirt contest, helped Hart dig out a run-in on the backside of one of the landings. "I built him a BMX lip for the jump," Lavin said. "I wanted to make sure that he got around. We weren't positive that a dirt bike would get around yet."

Lavin said he also warned Hart not to hit it in second because it was going to send him to the moon. Hart insisted that he wanted to go as high as he could because he was nervous that he wouldn't clear the rotation.

On his final run, Hart almost looked like he was just going to ride around the course again and not doing anything. Finally, he aimed his bike at the takeoff that he

and Lavin had just built. He accelerated up the face in second and committed to the rotation. He went huge, overshot the landing, and his body blew off the back of the bike. Still, the wheels touched down and hung on briefly. He claimed it by throwing his arms in the air, and the crowd went wild.

With so much adrenaline, Hart didn't realize that he had compressed a vertebra and pulled some ligaments in his lower back—an injury that would bother him for the next 20 years.

"As far as I'm concerned that was the first backflip on a dirt bike," Lavin said. "Nobody knew it was possible, except for him. He opened up that channel for everyone who came after him, and now they all knew it was possible."

Hart's name was now synonymous with the backflip, but it also opened up a whole can of worms. Since he didn't ride away clean, it left the door open for someone to still be the first to technically land it.

"There was this black cloud over me for the next few years, because it was just constant chatter of the flip," Hart said. "The pressure was brutal."

Nobody  
knew it was  
possible,  
except for him



## X GAMES, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

After missing Gravity Games because he was in the middle of a busy race season, a young Travis Pastrana showed up at the X Games in San Francisco two weeks later. In a lineup of former and current racers throwing their hats in the ring for freestyle, Pastrana was undeniably the most talented rider.

"Pastrana could actually race," recalled supercross legend Jeremy McGrath. "He was really good at it, but I think it was difficult for Travis to stay focused because he's just all over the place. In a good way. He was just a wild, wants-to-do-everything kind of kid. I think freestyle was just good timing for Travis because it fit his type of personality really well. He was just made for freestyle motocross."

Pastrana had won the inaugural freestyle contest at X Games in 1999 and gained notoriety when he jumped his bike into the San Francisco Bay on his last run. At only 16, he had a reputation for being fearless and spontaneous and certainly someone who wouldn't be afraid to attempt the backflip.

Before the start of the second run of the freestyle

prelims, Lavin came up to Pastrana and asked, "Are you going to let Carey beat you?"

Pastrana was already qualified for the final and reasoned with himself that he had done hundreds of flips on his mountain bike and smaller bikes before. He then got caught up in the moment and went for it in the middle of his run.

"When I pulled on the handlebars, my hands came off," Pastrana recalled of the ill-fated backflip attempt. "I kind of over-rotated and landed on my feet, but without the bike. I actually broke my talus."

When Pastrana collected himself and scanned the crowd, he saw his mother Debby's face and knew he was in trouble. "My mom was so pissed," he remembered.

He then put the flip on the backburner and went on to win the freestyle final the next day. By season's end, he had captured the 125 AMA Motocross Championship title. He was the only rider dominating the two genres.

"My main focus was racing at the time," Pastrana said. "Freestyle was always a hobby, then X Games started getting bigger than racing."



# Summer 2000

After Hart  
and Pastrana  
attempted  
the backflip  
in 2000, there  
wasn't a lot of  
talk about it for  
another year.

#### 2000-2001

After Hart and Pastrana attempted the backflip in 2000, there wasn't a lot of talk about it for another year.

"After Carey 'kind of' did it, we thought, 'Where was the incentive? We can die doing this,'" said Pastrana.

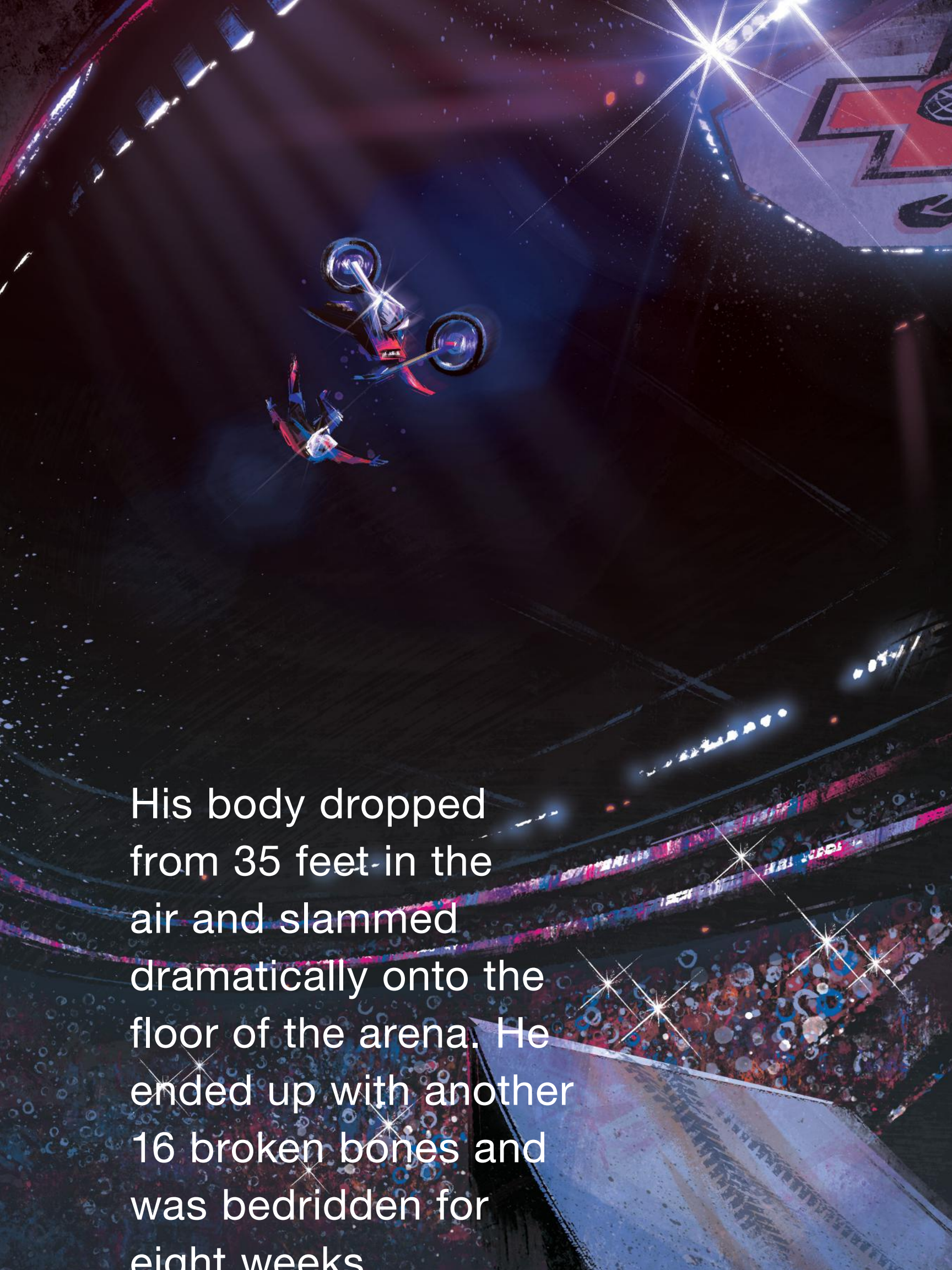
Still, freestyle motocross continued to grow in popularity, with racers like "Cowboy" Kenny Bartram and "Mad" Mike Jones being drawn to the discipline and the freedom it gave them for personal expression.

"Everyone wanted to be part of it," Johnson recalled. "Everybody was talking about freestyle."

Riders like Brian Deegan were among the first to

capitalize on personal branding with the likes of Metal Mulisha gaining traction. His bad-boy image also lent itself perfectly to the times.

"Freestyle motocross needed the good guy and the bad guy," said McGrath. "They needed Travis, and they needed Brian. They needed Larry Linkogle. They needed a Mad Mike Jones. They needed these wild personalities to create fireworks. If everyone that moved into freestyle was super calm and had a racing type of mentality, there wouldn't be any rivalries, fighting or wildness in the things they were doing, and it probably wouldn't have lasted."



His body dropped from 35 feet in the air and slammed dramatically onto the floor of the arena. He ended up with another 16 broken bones and was bedridden for eight weeks

# Summer 2001



## X GAMES, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Eric Johnson remembers the moment he got off the plane in Philadelphia and people were already whispering. “Carey is going to do it,” they were saying. “He’s coming back to do it.”

Johnson, who was there as an X Games judge, was down on the floor of the arena right before Best Trick. “I was talking with [Carey] and watching him,” Johnson said. “I remember thinking, ‘He doesn’t want to do this.’ I could tell.”

Just a week before, Hart got hung up on a trick and destroyed his right collarbone.

“I was going into X Games with the sole purpose of just watching,” Hart said. “I had no intention of riding at that point because I was a week out of surgery.”

But then when he got there, all the chatter started. The energy at X Games that year was electric. Stephen Murray had just landed a double backflip in BMX Dirt for

gold, and Bob Burnquist earned an almost perfect score in Skateboard Vert.

“There was all this chatter and all the pressure,” said Hart. “I bought into it.”

Hart made the impromptu decision to keep his name on the roster. He committed to the backflip on his first run and used the dirt takeoff next to the ramps, similar to the dirt step-up he had used at Gravity Games.

The minute he took off, his right hand—weak from the recent shoulder surgery—pulled off the handlebar, and he had to eject from his bike. His body dropped from 35 feet in the air and slammed dramatically onto the floor of the arena. He ended up with another 16 broken bones and was bedridden for eight weeks.

Kenny Bartram went on to win Best Trick, while Pastrana captured the three-peat in freestyle. No other rider even thought about attempting the backflip that week.

# Spring 2002



## INTRODUCING CALEB WYATT

Caleb Wyatt was a mostly unknown rider from Oregon, far away from the action sports scene. He was riding in the back of a tour bus heading to a freestyle demo when he heard about Carey Hart's backflip attempt. "My career had basically just started, and it was clear to me if I didn't do a flip, it was pretty much going to end before it started."

As the industry debated whether Hart's first backflip attempt counted or not, since he didn't ride away clean, Wyatt saw an opportunity. "I thought, 'Here's my ticket to beat everyone to the punch.'"

Wyatt grew up doing gymnastics and flipping BMX bikes into ponds, so he was comfortable getting inverted. He made his first attempt to get upside down on a full-size bike at the Spokane Speedway in the summer of 2001.

Utilizing a huge pile of debris as a landing and a dirt takeoff, he almost pulled it off on the first attempt. On the next, he panicked while he was upside down and jumped off the bike. The bike came down on him and knocked him out. He was sick for weeks with a concussion.

"The flip isn't something you really learn," said Wyatt. "You just have to do it. It's a commitment. Every ounce of your body tells you to get off the dirt bike. It's not normal to be upside down."

Still, Wyatt remained committed to being the first to land it. He plugged away with different setups near his house in Medford, Oregon, for the next nine months. One spring day in April, Wyatt told his agent, Carter Gibbs, he was ready to do it. He didn't actually think he'd have to follow through anytime soon, though.

Eighteen hours later, Gibbs, along with a cameraman, unexpectedly drove up from a San Diego. It was time for Wyatt to make good on the flip.

"I wasn't expecting it to happen like that," said Wyatt. "And I was scared. I was like, 'Oh, man. I have to at least crash trying, for the sake of him wasting all that time and money dragging up here.'"

Using a step-up style jump, it took Wyatt five tries into a pile of mulch for him to ride away clean. But he did it. He wrote his name in the history books. What happened next, Wyatt could never have predicted.

"I lost sponsors. I got hate mail telling me I ruined the sport and that 'people are going to start dying,'" said Wyatt. "It was kind of weird at first. I didn't know how to react; it totally blew me away that people reacted negatively."

Then, a few weeks before Gravity Games and X Games—events that could have put cash in his pocket if he landed the backflip—Wyatt dislocated his hand.

I had literally convinced myself I was going to die, and I was okay with it.”

#### PASTRANALAND, MARYLAND

Kenny Bartram was at Travis Pastrana’s house in Maryland when they got the word about Mike Metzger. Metzger had landed about 25 backflips out in the desert in California in one day.

“We both went, ‘Oh, crap. If he did 25 in a row, it’s a consistent thing. It’s going to become necessary,’” Bartram said.

Immediately, the two started going through the progression: BMX bike to mountain bike in the foam pit, to minibikes on a small dirt step-up, and then finally the big bike on the bigger dirt step-up.

For Pastrana, it was easy. As soon as he figured out how to do one, he did another 30 that day. For Bartram, who was one of the hottest freestyle riders at the time, it was a different story. He’d never even done a backflip off a diving board.

“I had literally convinced myself I was going to die, and I was okay with it,” he said. “I called home and told my mom and dad I loved them. I didn’t tell them what I was doing but told everybody I loved them. I don’t even know what happened the first couple of times. I don’t know if my hand flew off or if I was uncommitted or whatever, but I landed it on my fourth attempt.”

When Gravity Games rolled around a month later in Cleveland, Bartram’s backflip was still shaky, so he didn’t throw it. Both Metzger and Pastrana did, though, landing it in their qualifying runs. Since Pastrana ran first in the start order, he technically landed the first one in competition.

Gravity Games didn’t air on TV for another month, though, which meant the backflip had yet to be revealed to the world when riders showed up to the X Games in Philadelphia.

Summer  
2002

# Summer 2002

## X GAMES, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Kenny Bartram had just attempted his first backflip in competition during X Games Freestyle and was lying crumpled on the floor. After using a dug-out step-up on one of the landings, Bartram rotated sideways in the air and came down on his leg. Medical was trying to cart him off the course and to the hospital when Bartram said he told them, “No, no, I’m not leaving. I know what Metzger’s about to do. I’m not leaving.”

Bartram was sitting in first when Metzger dropped in for his last run. With 30 seconds left on the clock, Metzger floated a backflip off the super kicker and landed in the sweet spot, setting himself up perfectly for the next dirt hit. Going for his second consecutive backflip, he slowed the rotation in the air to account for the bigger gap and landed perfectly.

From the talent booth, Pastrana, who had injured his knee at Gravity Games and wasn’t competing, called the run. Wyatt looked on from the sidelines with his dislocated hand, and Bartram, who was icing his leg near medical, threw his arms in the air in celebration. The crowd went ballistic. Metzger’s back-to-back backflips were the first to be aired to the world.

A day later, Metzger captured his second gold and third medal of X Games in Best Trick. But it wasn’t the Godfather who stole the show this time—it was Carey Hart. After putting the backflip on the map with his attempt two years prior, Hart watched as riders like Pastrana, Metzger, Wyatt and Bartram all successfully landed it. He desperately wanted to finish what he had started.

For two years, he had yet to ride away with anything but broken bones. His confidence was low. During practice, he didn’t hit the ramp once, and then he sat out the first two passes as the start list kept circling back to him.

Finally, on his third and last chance, Hart rolled down from the start and hit the ramp. He rotated the backflip perfectly. When he put the wheels down and rode away, the emotions of the crowd were overwhelming. He was bombarded with celebratory hugs on the arena floor, including his father and his then-girlfriend-now-wife, Pink.

“For me, it just put a period on the sentence,” said Hart, who earned silver. “I just wanted to finish what I started.” And the rest was history.



He rotated the  
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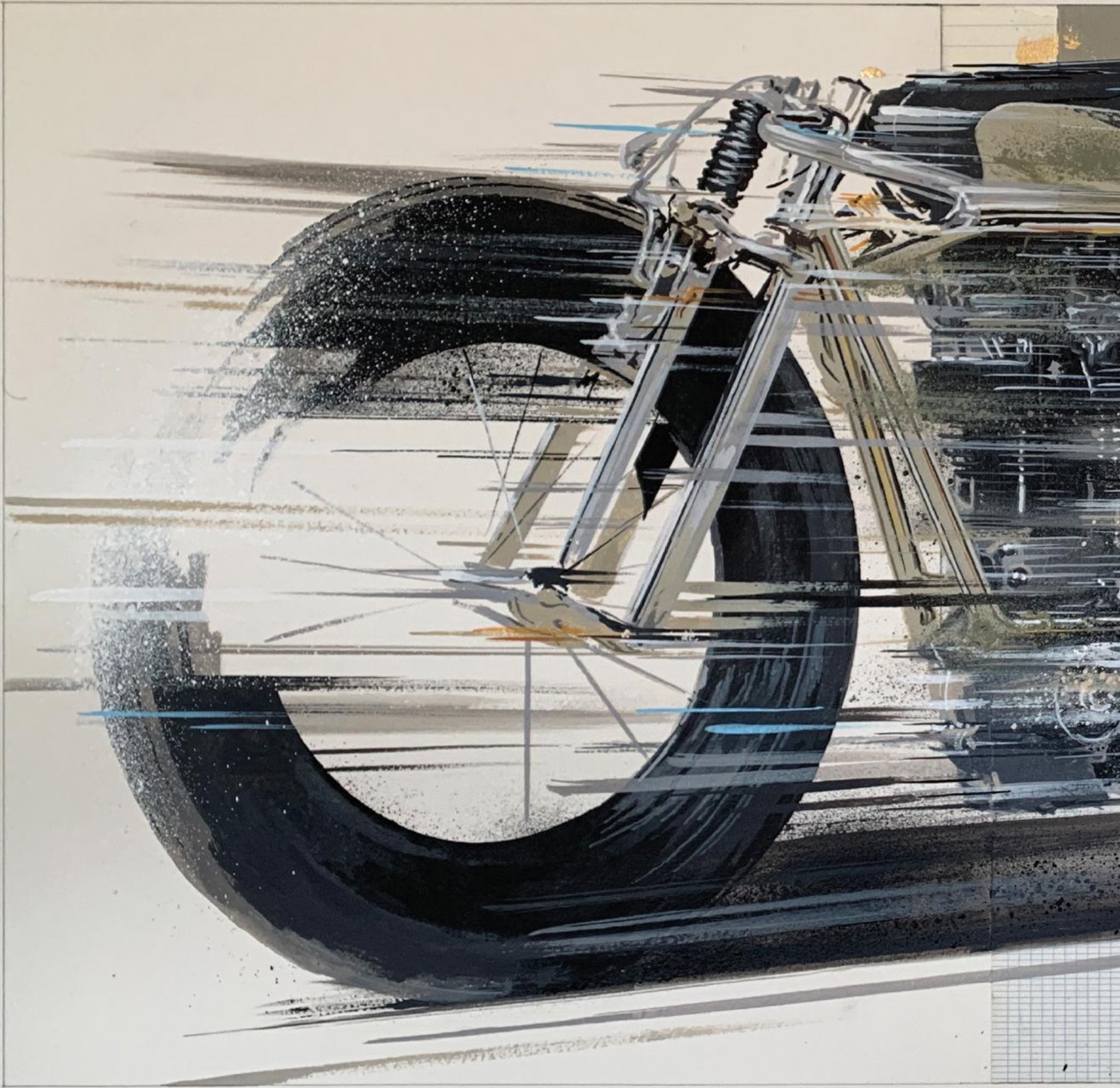
**TYLER BEREMAN**

*From the 805 Beer film "The House That Built Me"*  
Photo by **Matt Welch**





BLEACH  
— X —  
DUNLOP



## **BLOWN VELOCETTE**

Artwork by **Chris White**

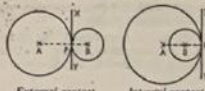
*Mixed media and found materials on paper*



TANGENTS

81

2. If two circles, centres A, B, touch at P, A, B, P lie on a straight line.



External contact Internal contact  
FIG. 55.

If the contact is external,  $AB = \text{sum of radii}$ ;  
if the contact is internal,  $AB = \text{difference of radii}$ .

EXERCISE 34

1. P is a point on the major arc BC of a circle; the tangents at B, C meet at T. If  $\angle BPC = 65^\circ$ , find  $\angle BTC$ .  
 [2] The tangent AT at a point A on a circle makes an angle  $36^\circ$  with a chord AB; D is a point on the minor arc AB such that  $DA = DB$ . Calculate  $\angle ADB$ .  
 3. In fig. 56, AB is a chord of a circle and AT is the tangent

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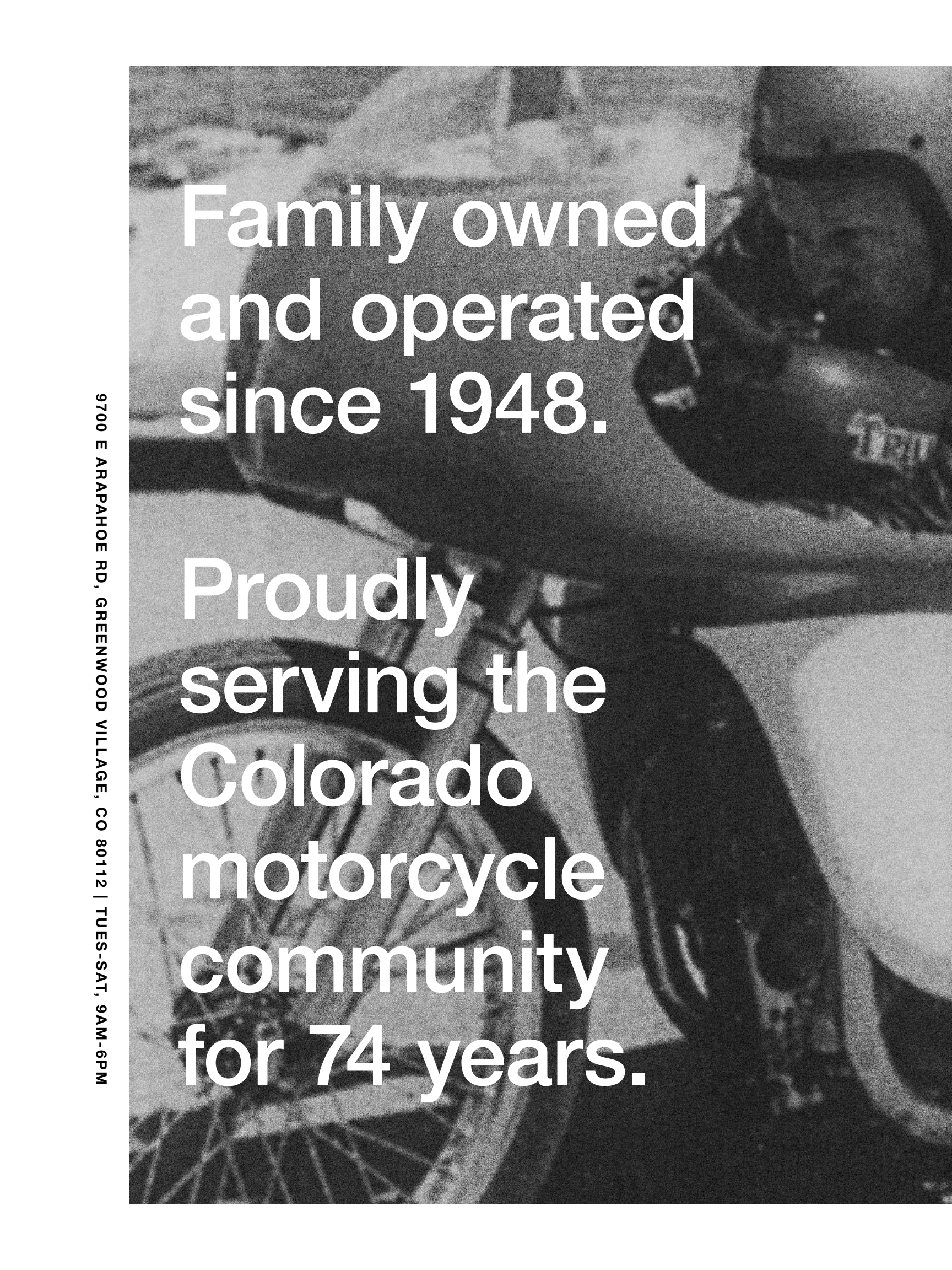
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# Full Circle



## A FATHER & SON'S TWO-WHEELED JOURNEY FROM PAST TO PRESENT

Words by **Jason Hamborg**

Photography by **Christos Sagiorgis**

I could see how a person would make the argument that no sane parent would buy their kid a motorcycle. It's basically a two-wheeled ticket to the hospital. However, as someone whose parent made that exact mistake, I could argue the opposite. A motorcycle is a gateway, not just to the physical world, but into your psyche. To better understand the limits of yourself and those around you.

Of course, very few of those manic parents bringing home that first bike have any sort of existential motivation. In my case, I'm pretty sure my old man just wanted to give me an opportunity that he never had as a kid. Plus, it was a way to keep me busy, out of my mom's hair while she did the bookkeeping for the family logging operation.

My dad was always cool like that. I remember my first major riding injury: a broken collarbone after trying to impress some random kids at a sandpit on my PW50. He came home with a SEGA and a fresh copy of "Sonic the Hedgehog" to entertain me while I healed. Similar to his PW purchase, he didn't know the first thing about video games but knew damn well that he would have loved one at 6 years old.

That 1994 Yamaha PW50 changed everything. My dad tied a rope to the back fender and chased me around the yard as I learned the ins and outs of throttle and brake control. Within a couple of years, he made the mistake of taking me to watch a local race. Up to that point, I had only seen motocross in static images in magazines. Seeing the riders hitting jumps and hearing the sounds of 250 two-strokes racing up and down the hills was all I needed. Kiss your weekends goodbye, Dad, we're going racing!

It started slow, with local races and the odd overnight trip out of town. But quickly things progressed. Three races a year turned to 5, turned to 10. Soon we were gone nearly every weekend. My brother, my dad and I, the three amigos, would load up on a Friday after school and come home late Sunday night. Like clockwork. My parent's business, the logging operation, was 4 hours north of my hometown, meaning it wasn't uncommon for my dad to get back home on Sunday at 10 p.m., drop the trailer and continue north so he could make a meeting with the mill for the next morning. At the end of the week, he would get as much done as he could on a Friday morning before driving back home, hooking up the motorcycle trailer and driving to wherever the next race took us.

As a kid, you don't really recognize that sacrifice. You're blind to it, sleeping most of the drive or looking out

the window dreaming about the race weekend to come, all the while your parent is burning the candle at both ends. It's funny, if I would have taken a moment to pay attention to all of this, I could have realized there was more going on than "chasing the dream." Say whatever you want about my dad, but one thing for certain is that he's a realist. In his mind, there was no "dream" to chase. He certainly wasn't blind to the fact his kid was getting 4th place at some rinky-dink motocross race in rural British Columbia.

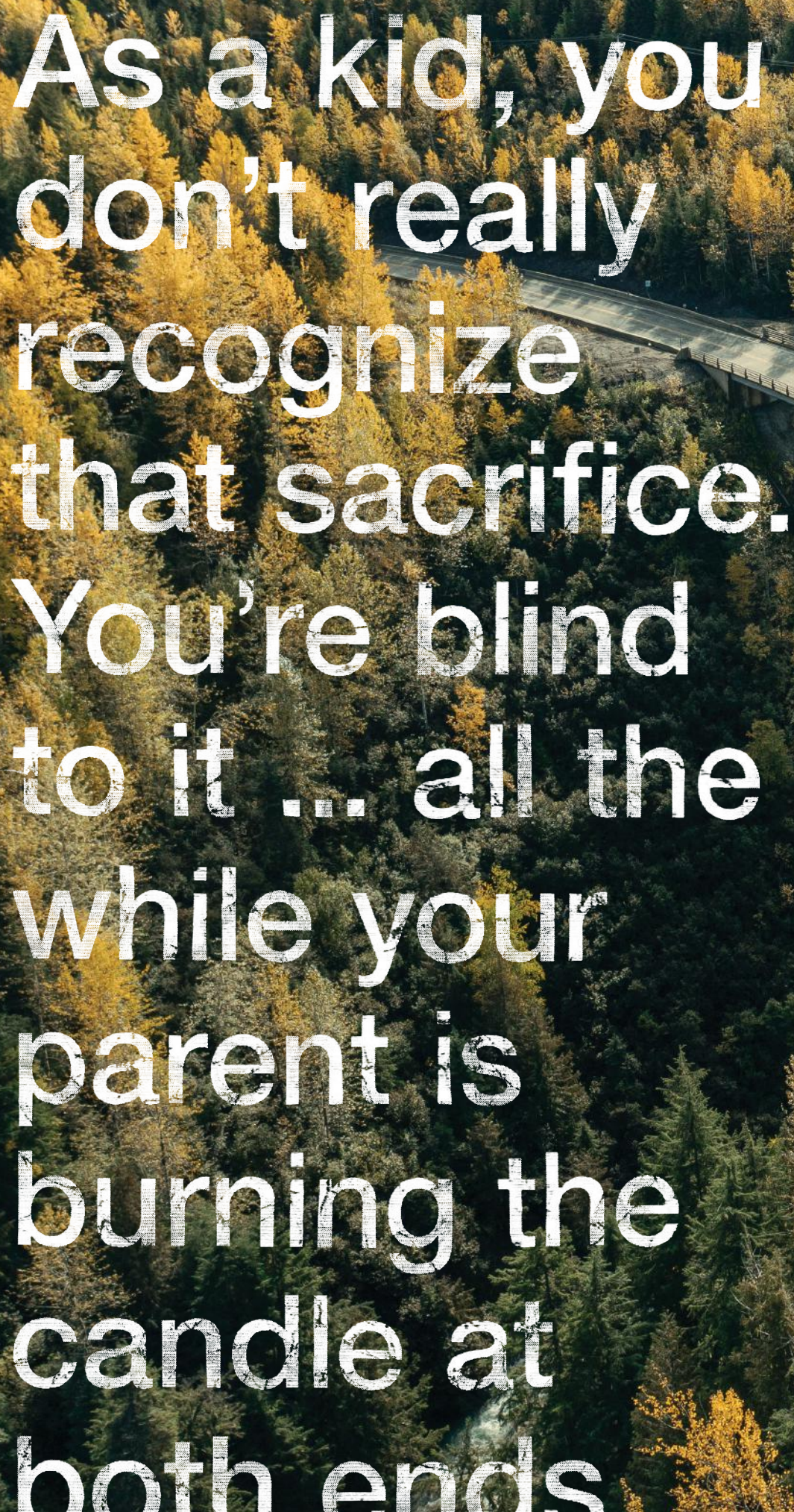
Looking back at it now, I realize that all those hours, all those arguments and trips to the hospital meant one very important thing. A chance to spend as much time as possible with his kids. A chance to watch them grow up, guide them and, most importantly, make up for the lost time from being gone in the bush for weeks at a time. Was it perfect? Hell no. But it was our way, and in a lot of ways, that's all you can ask for. The only problem is that until recently, I didn't really appreciate what it gave me.

I stopped racing in 2008. Real life was starting. I was graduating from high school and working at the local Suzuki dealership, and the prospect of parties and girls was getting more and more attractive. I stopped riding for nearly 6 years, and as much as I hate to say it, that is probably the time that I have the least recollection of spending quality time with my dad.





Looking back at it now, I realize that all those hours, all those arguments and trips to the hospital meant one very important thing. A chance to spend as much time as possible with his kids.

An aerial photograph of a suspension bridge spanning a deep valley. The bridge has a concrete deck and a complex steel truss structure. The surrounding forest is dense, with many trees showing vibrant yellow and orange autumn foliage, while others remain green. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

As a kid, you  
don't really  
recognize  
that sacrifice.  
You're blind  
to it ... all the  
while your  
parent is  
burning the  
candle at  
both ends





1953

I graduated from university in 2013 and finally had the itch to ride again. I bought a used bike that needed some maintenance, so I called up my dad and brought the bike up to his place to work on it. Both of us were years out of practice, but we managed to wrestle a fresh tire onto the rim, only pinching one tube, and we sat in his garage sharing a mix of frustration and pride as we stared at the tire. For the first time in a long time, we had an opportunity to spend genuine quality time together. Over the subsequent years, bikes helped us rekindle our relationship. Discussions about rides, maintenance or new motorcycles gave us talking points well beyond basic family conversations.

In 2018, hell froze over, and my dad who was always the observer finally became a bike owner himself. His buddy convinced him that they should do a trip across the Southeastern U.S., and that a Harley Street Glide was a perfect tool for the job. The old man started riding, and riding a lot. He even rode that Street Glide down 200 miles of dirt roads in Baja. I was now the one giving words of encouragement. Taking time out of my days to talk about the latest trip or offer advice on parts for his bike. That's when it all clicked. Nearly a decade removed from our racing days, I realized that the roles had reversed. Bikes would now become my way of spending time with

my dad, cultivating our relationship and ensuring we had more to talk about than the weather and politics.

In the summer of 2021, I began planning a ride from my hometown, Prince George, British Columbia, heading east into the Robson Valley at the edge of the Rocky Mountains. The ride would feature a small portion of Highway 16, and a motorcycle route called Route 16: a stretch of highway totaling 600 miles from Valemount to Prince Rupert, BC. I have driven the highway multiple times over the last several years, but this was going to be my first time experiencing the journey by motorcycle. But I needed a partner to make this trip truly enjoyable, and after several foiled attempts to organize a trip with my old man, our schedules aligned, and he was going to be able to join me on the journey.

We set out from Prince George early in the morning, and I realized quickly that this was our first true "trip" on bikes together with a mission and some actual ground to cover. We found our groove naturally, with my dad leading, and me chasing just behind. The highway immediately leaving Prince George is straight and open, with lots of room to daydream. But slowly the topography changes, as the once-distant mountains begin to dominate the sky. Eventually, we were engulfed by stands of cedar as the highway carved a path through the mountains, running



An aerial photograph of a river flowing through a dense forest. The river is turbulent, with white water rapids cascading over large, dark rocks. The surrounding forest is lush green, with some trees showing early autumn colors of yellow and orange. In the bottom right corner, a concrete dam structure is visible, extending diagonally across the frame. The overall scene is a mix of natural beauty and human-made infrastructure.

That's when  
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Nearly a  
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That's when it hit me: the sleepless nights, the hospital visits, the broken bikes and bones. It was all just leading up to the time when we could switch roles and have an opportunity to share a moment like this.





parallel with the mighty Fraser River. The first stop on our journey was the Ancient Forest/Chun T'oh Wudujut Park, part of the world's only temperate inland rainforest. Walking through the forest and being dwarfed by the ancient trees, it's easy to forget the pressures of the outside world. The feeling of being completely present in the moment. The same feeling Dad and I had hanging out in those dusty racetrack parking lots growing up.

We continued east along the highway, carving through the terrain like the river beside us until we turned north, off the beaten path to explore a "shortcut" along the south side of the Fraser. This was my first time seeing my dad ride on the dirt since he had crashed my brother's bike in 2006 and given himself a goggle-shaped bruise across his forehead. Fortunately, we transitioned from the asphalt with no issues, and like a proud parent, I smiled under my helmet as we pushed our way through mud and sand, slowly climbing up from the valley and farther into the mountains.

Day two was reserved for exploration within the Robson Valley. We had lofty ambitions in the morning to set our sights on Mount Robson, but with the weather we were struggling to see through the fog past our handlebars, let alone see the top of the Canadian Rockies' tallest peak. So, we made our way back into Valemount to

explore the many forest access roads, climbing out of the valley and into the alpine. Valemount sits at the foothills of the Cariboo, Columbia and Rocky Mountains and makes for an ADV rider's dream.

By midday, my dad was sick of his traction control and was determined to find a way to shut it off so he could "do some burnouts." Just like the days when my dad found the blind confidence to coach me through hitting a new jump at the track as a kid, I was now blindly coaching him through a KTM menu screen I had never seen before. It's funny to travel hundreds of miles just to compare each other's ability to spin the tire around a corner.

Pulling up to our final destination on the shoreline at the northern tip of Kinbasket Lake, I paused with reservations about my dad riding in this deep sand. But without hesitation, he clanked passed me on the big 1290, and we had come full circle as I watched my dad push his way up the shore, confidently displaying all the skills he spent years ragging me about. Feet on the pegs, looking ahead and standing up. In that moment I couldn't have been prouder. That's when it hit me: the sleepless nights, the hospital visits, the broken bikes and bones. It was all just leading up to the time when we could switch roles and have an opportunity to share a moment like this.







# CHASING THE RIDE

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# The Edge of Oblivion

**BREAK AWAY FROM THE CROWD**

Photography by **John Ryan Hebert**

In collaboration with **Triumph Motorcycles**











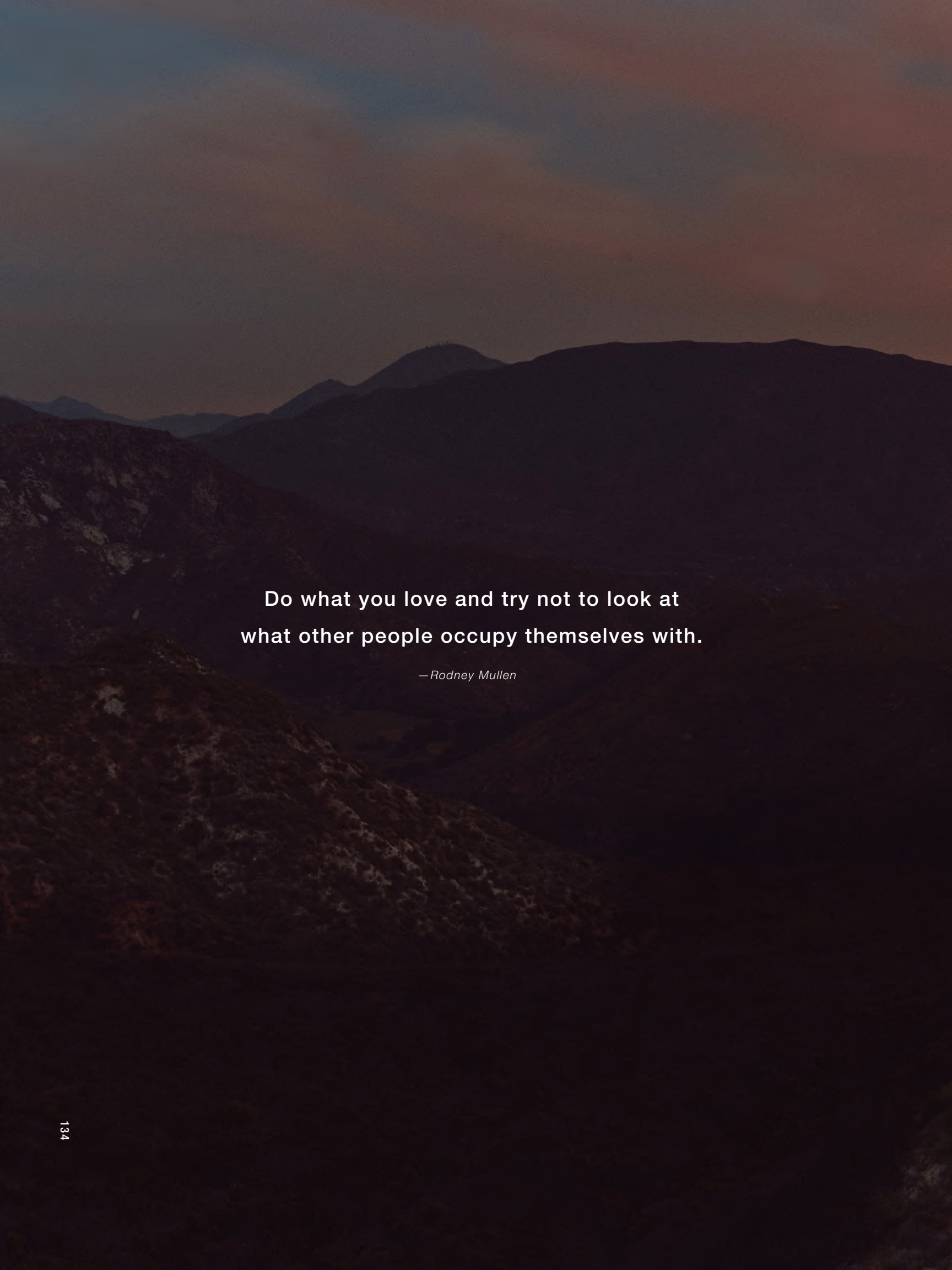












Do what you love and try not to look at  
what other people occupy themselves with.

*—Rodney Mullen*





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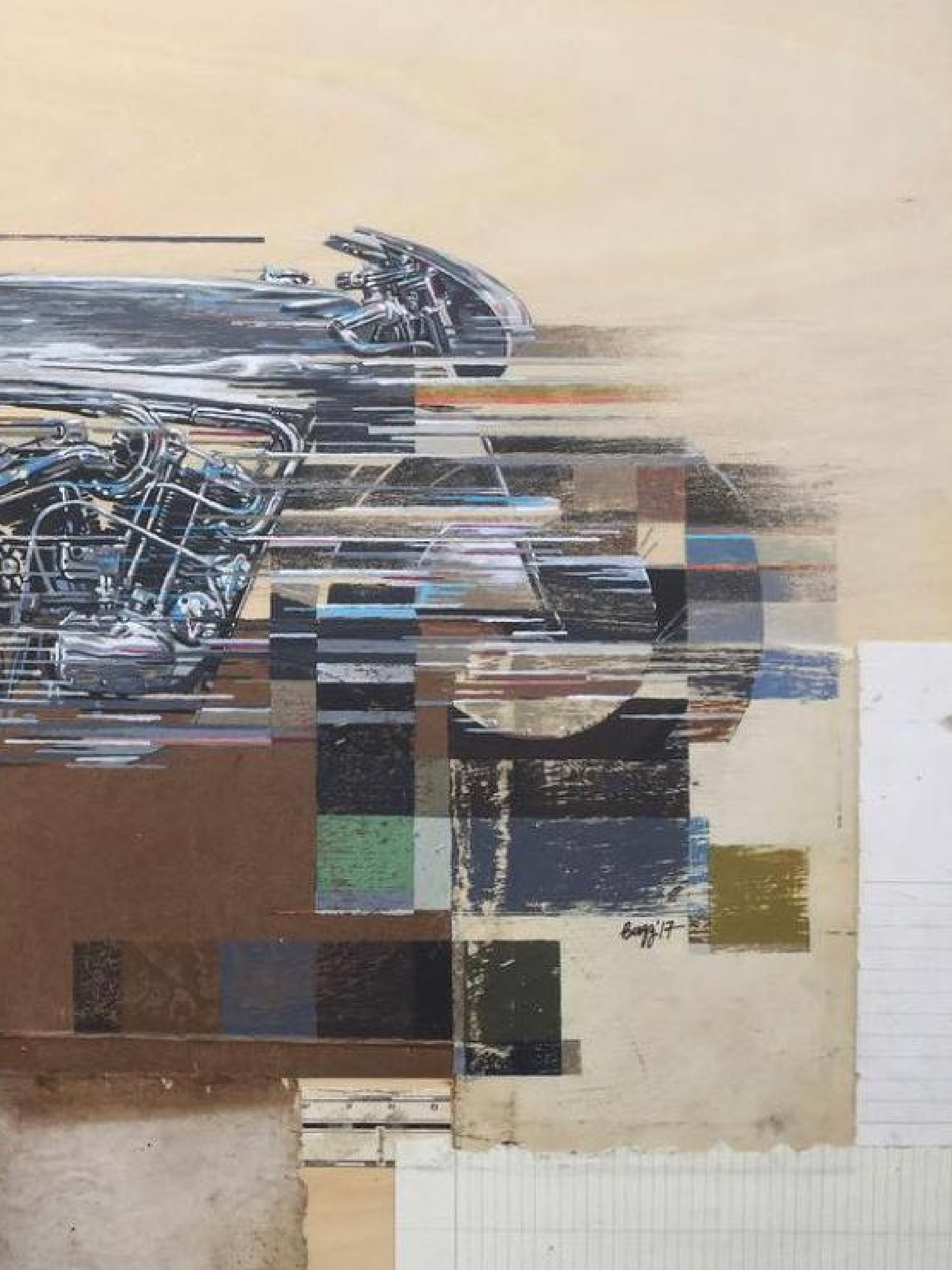
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# HAZAN SUPERCHARGED IRONHEAD

Artwork by **Chris White**

*Mixed media and found materials on paper*





Baggi/17



**TYLER BEREMAN**

*From the 805 Beer film "The House That Built Me"*  
Photo by **Matt Welch**



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