

OPINION

High mountain country

BY GAGE JOHNSON

This is my story of my first off-road motorcycle race in the pro class at a National Hare Scramble in Montana.

Besides going to school and working at a motorcycle shop, I am a racer. Racing anything from off-road desert races to motocross, dirt bikes are my greatest passion. I was born into the sport, and take advantage of every opportunity to race at new venues and ride different areas. This last summer an opportunity of a lifetime came up: a bucket list race at a ski resort in Big Sky Montana. It would have been senseless if I had not gone.

From Medford, Oregon, to Big Sky, Montana, is one big, long haul. Estimating a 1,700-mile round-trip, two of my friends and I took to the pavement Friday around six in the evening. Four dirt bikes in the back of an F-150 Ford truck was definitely one tight squeeze; the weight of the four bikes compressed the suspension of the truck so much that we looked more like a moving truck from Mexico than three friends heading to the races. The drive through eastern Oregon and southern Idaho is bland: bland like oatmeal without brown sugar and raisins. At one point in the drive I didn't see one tree or a different shade of brown for at least one hundred miles. We drove all night, and even late into the morning. Exhausted was an understatement about what I felt like when we finally reached Big Sky, but that was just the beginning of our exuberant trip.

Picture tall green trees, blue skies, and a 25-million-dollar beach resort at the Bahamas at the base of a colossal mountain; that is what Big Sky Ski Resort looked like. My exhaustion was lifted from me at the moment the doors of the F-150 were flung open and I took a gasp of the cool high mountain air. Exploring the resort was first on my to-do list, and the first stop was the bathroom. The bathroom was a little too extravagant for a motorcycle racer like me. It had at least eight dispensers for soap, different scents of soap, lotions, and even a mouthwash dispenser with disposable cups. I knew I was in a "rolling-in-green" environment.

After venturing around the resort a while, I decided to call it a day and get ready for the race. The event would take place Sunday at noon. For a three-hour race of the most grueling, high-elevation terrain, preparing the motorcycle was very necessary and so was preparing your own mind. Race conditions were not the most favorable: Big Sky had not gotten any rain for a few days, leaving the soil dry and dusty. I was a little nervous on the day of

the event: the race would be my first at a national caliber in the pro class. It seemed like a pretty big deal to me at the time, which caused more anxiety than it should have.

The start of the race was a long, rocky ski run up the mountain. It would be a dead-engine start, which is probably one of the most common starts in off-road competition, and also the most nerve-racking. There were 30 or so pros on my start line, so the first turn would be a little crowded, similar to the stores on the morning of the Black Friday sale. Ready to rumble, I practiced starting my bike and pictured myself getting a good start. The starting official *finally* raised the flag and we were off and racing. Well, all the racers except me.

A 2012 KTM 350 SX-F was the motorcycle I raced that weekend. The bike was new and fuel-injected, but the bike was not alive and running when the flag rose at the start. I ran my battery dead while practicing starting my bike before the race. Panicking, I pushed my bike through the race classes behind me and finally got it started by bump-starting it. I raced through the crowd of spectators and was off to catch up to the racers in my class.

The rest of the race was nothing very interesting. Thick dust and a feeling of disappointment was all I experienced. The scenery was excellent, the atmosphere fantastic, but my result in the end was 14th place. A finish in my mind that is mediocre compared to what I know I can accomplish. A bucket-list event is definitely what this race was to me: A race that I can't check off my bucket list until I finish promisingly.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: I was raised in the Applegate Valley for 15 of my 19 years, and have been racing and riding for all those 15 years. It all started for me out here in the Applegate, and I know that the valley is better known for its beautiful scenery and vineyards, but it also has some great riding areas. The fight for the riding areas has been going on for some time now and both sides are working very hard to come up with an agreement. My story about the race in Montana is like a thank-you letter and proof that the riding areas help fulfill dreams for young adventure-seekers like me, and I know that without all the hard-working people behind the scenes keeping the riding areas open, I would not be where I am today.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Vagos Motorcycle Club outraged at court decisions

BY MARK "BADGER" SCHILLER

Recently my friend was on trial for an alleged assault. It ended up he was prosecuted for being a motorcycle club member instead of what he was formally charged with. They criticized him for the color of the walls of his house, his green shoelaces and slandered his friends, his family and anyone connected to the club he belongs to. This was done with a malicious intent and open hatred of the Vagos Motorcycle Club, green being the main color of the club.

I'm a member of the same motorcycle club. Law enforcement doesn't have to take photos from our Facebook pages, drag our patch (vest) into court, or take pictures of us when we're not looking, just ask us!

Being a member of a motorcycle club is not illegal! We teach our kids that law enforcement is there to help all people in trouble. We come from broken families and good families so we understand the hardships and struggles of parenting, and what it's like not to have parents ourselves. We're doctors, carpenters, lawyers, teachers, and blue-collar workers, and our kids all go to the same schools. We have the same rights as every American in this great country of ours. The right to associate with people we want to, to wear the color of our choice, freedom of religion and to speak about how we feel and what we believe in. The rule we all are taught is "innocent until proven guilty," which isn't being applied in these circumstances. "Guilty by association" isn't supposed to be the rule.

Grants Pass, Oregon, is more interested in prosecuting a man for being in a motorcycle club than the crime he's actually accused of. Their actions are a form of discrimination known as xenophobia. Now to have a court system that's allowing prejudice and hatred to be the mainstay of a prosecution is a miscarriage of justice and abuse of police powers of the state. This is wrong. Motorcycle clubs are not gangs or criminal organizations and we're not signing any paper saying we are a gang in order to get out of trouble. That would be a boldface lie! We support several fundraisers, we help when we can. Whether it be money, toys, or just time and fellowship. We pay taxes and vote, we have families, and we struggle with all the things in day-to-day living just

like everyone else. As a club we have zero tolerance for substance abuse, criminal activity and anything else that affects this club in a negative way. We constantly defend ourselves in court for the civil rights that our children are taught to appreciate.

This court allowed the media to be present in the courtroom and to make reports on court activities while telling everyone else not to talk about the case! This tainted this jury and any future jurors. When the jury was polled, it was eight "not guilty" and four "guilty." The district attorney's office is allowing the open prejudice of the assistant district attorney (ADA) to rule the court's time, money and efforts. Whether it's the ADA or false information she's receiving, it shouldn't be fast-tracked or thrown at anyone for publicity/propaganda to sway a jury's opinion. To date my friend has not been recharged nor has the case been dropped.

Not long ago discrimination and segregation were ruled unjust and wrong! Today these prejudices and hatred are being redirected to different types of people. The biker community is taking the brunt of these actions.

We are not sure of the cost for SWAT raiding a home. However, it would be less expensive to pull an individual over for a search warrant on their way to work. Then they could take a couple squad cars back to the residence to search instead of the high cost of a tactical raid in the early morning that affects the children in the households. Had my friend not been a member of the Vagos Motorcycle Club, this case would have never gone this far and cost him and the taxpayers so much in wasted money and time; actions like this have not been tolerated since segregation. Motorcycle clubs are the least of their problems! It's been a long time since I was a Boy Scout, but last time I checked, there's no merit badge for taking parents from kids or kids from parents for a career advance.

Thank you.
Mark "Badger" Schiller
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NOTE: For more information, see <http://salem-news.com/articles/december162011/vagos-release.php>.

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