



Fred Rau

I started riding in 1971, on a Kawasaki K100, which by today's standards would probably be called a "dual sport." I did some dirt riding for a few years in the Rockies on a series of Hodakas, Kawasakis and Yamahas, culminating in my final enduro race in 1975, when I made an "almost-perfect 12-foot jump, over a 14-foot ravine." After I healed, I took up road riding, buying a Honda 750 -- the ultimate roadbike of the day.

My wife and I soon got into touring, finding we really enjoyed traveling on a bike, and rode all over our then-home state of Colorado, as well as our neighboring states of Utah, Nevada and New Mexico.

In 1977 we moved to Arizona, where I became an engineer with a power company, and also started writing freelance articles for several motorcycle magazines. We became associated with the newly-formed Gold Wing Road Riders Association, and eventually ended up buying a Gold Wing ourselves.

When the GWRRA found itself in need of an editor for their magazine, "Wing World," I volunteered, and ran WW during my "spare time" for the next several years. Upon leaving, I was contacted by Bob Carpenter, Editor of "Road Rider" magazine in California, and offered a job as Managing Editor. Though it was a drastic pay cut from the power plant, I agreed immediately, and we moved to California to start a new life. When Bob retired in 1990, I became Editor in Chief of RR, but in 1991, with Bob's help, I morphed it into an all-new, no-advertising format, which we named "Motorcycle Consumer News."

I served as Editor and later, Senior Editor for MCN for the next 15 years, after which I "retired" back to freelancing for a half-dozen different motorcycling publications. Then, in 2007, I started my own guided motorcycle touring company,

"Fred Rau Adventure Tours," and now, of course, am just starting to get back into publishing with this online magazine of my own, "Fred Rau Motorcycling."

Over the years, I figure I have published around 400 magazine articles about motorcycling, tested over 100 new models of bikes, and reviewed and compared hundreds of different motorcycling accessories. I hope to continue in that vein, only without any publishers telling me what I can and can't write about, how long the articles must be, etc.

To this end, I have recruited a number of old friends from the business, all of whom are excited about the chance of having unfettered freedom to write whatever they want, about whatever subject strikes their fancy.

We hope you will enjoy it as much as we expect to enjoy bringing it to you.

-- *Fred*

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Modern Moto-Journalism

I actually wrote this column a couple of years ago, when I first went back to freelancing, but it seems wholly appropriate for this new venture, so I thought I'd share it with you as my introductory editorial for "Fred & Friends." -- Fred

I am writing this column while sitting at a corner table in one of my favorite roadhouses. It's a rustic old place, built back in the Forties, on a beautiful, twisty mountain road, which I can see out the window at my left shoulder. There's a fire in the old Franklin stove to my right, to take the chill off the room on this crisp December morning, and the only sound is the crackling of the logs, occasionally overcome by the faint buzz of a motorcycle engine in the distance, as another rider makes his way up the mountainside. Maybe he'll stop in for a hot cup of coffee, and we'll chat for a few minutes, or maybe I'll just see a quick flash of color go past the window as he continues on his way. Either way, he's less of a distraction from my work than a part of it, so I don't mind.

I've been a journalist for over 30 years, specializing in the motorcycling genre in one form or another for the past 18 of those. But until about a year ago, that meant dividing my time between riding (about 30%), and sitting in an office (the other 70%). I would ride to try out bikes and equipment, and to visit places and things, and meet people, to write about. Then I would take my tape-recorded and hand-scribbled notes, and my exposed film, back to the office and compile them all into a story or report. I'd send the film to the photo department to be processed, while I wrote the story using a computer word processor. When the photos came back, they had to be cropped and sized using a weird circular calculator called a "proportioning wheel," and the text had to be sent off to a typographer, to be typeset and formatted. After all that was done, which took a couple of days, myself and a couple of assistants had to "paste up" the story, attaching glossy sheets of type to giant cardboard flats, using wax. These boards would then be sent to be photographed, and the negatives would be used to print the actual pages. That's an abbreviated, simplified version, but you get the idea.



The Good Old Days... Walt Fulton and I "testing" a couple of new bikes. And we had the nerve to call this "work!"

Today, I carry a laptop computer and a digital camera in one saddlebag, and there's room left over for some clothes. When the muse strikes me, I stop at some place like this roadhouse, set up the laptop on a table, and go to work. I still use a word processing program to write the original text, but after I've proofed and edited it, I can lay it straight into a magazine page template, of which I have six types, for six different magazines. If I have photos I have taken to go with the story, I just plug the camera into the laptop and download them, after which I can size and place them with the push of a button. When I'm finished, the article is ready to go straight to the printer, unless I'm working that day for a publication that wants to do its own layouts. Either way, the laptop has integrated wireless technology (Wi-Fi), so if I'm near a "hot spot," I can just log onto my mobile account, push a button, and everything goes straight to the publisher, ready for immediate use. If I'm out in the boondocks, like today, I can either just wait until I get back to civilization to transmit the files, or if the publisher is in a great big hurry, I can plug my cell phone into the computer, and upload to the internet through the phone.

The bottom line is, what used to take about six days and three people to complete, I can now accomplish all by myself, usually in about two or three hours. Last month, I gave up my office completely. My office is now in my saddlebag, ready to go to work wherever I am, whenever I feel like it. I've even produced and sold stories while sitting at a picnic table at a roadside rest stop.

But it isn't just the story writing, photography, communication and research that has been altered dramatically by the new technology. In some ways, it has had an even larger impact on other aspects of moto-journalism, like bike testing. I still remember using hand-held stopwatches, calculators, tape measures and painted lines on the pavement to try to determine a bike's 0-60 elapsed time and speed, or 60-0 braking distance. And getting top speeds and lap times was pretty much a hit-and-miss affair, where you usually made eight or ten attempts, and then threw out the best and worst, and averaged the rest in hopes of getting a somewhat accurate reading. I still remember once when we used three different timers, each equipped with his own stopwatch, to time one bike, and got three different readings. Everyone's reaction time on starting and stopping the watches varied by a few tenths of a second, and with modern sportbikes, that can be a critical difference. But today, you simply plug a radar gun into a laptop computer loaded with special software, and tell your test rider to make his run. In one single acceleration/braking run past the gun, the computer will spit out reams of information: Elapsed times and speeds for 0-60 and 0-100, top speed, G-forces, braking distance, etc.—and all corrected for altitude, barometric pressure and temperature. One guy to ride the bike and one to run the computer can generate all the performance specs in about 15 minutes that used to take five or six guys an entire afternoon. And with much greater accuracy, too. Nowadays, we'll often test as many as five or six bikes in a single afternoon—something we would have never dreamed of trying in the old days. That's probably why you see so many of those "Giant 20-Bike Shootout" articles touted on the covers of many of the larger cycle magazines these days.

Another giant leap forward has been the improvement in dynamometers, both in accuracy and versatility. But even that is about to be eclipsed, as I understand it. I haven't actually seen one yet, but I've heard from some experts in the field that there's a new dyno coming out that actually packs up into a suitcase, for portability. Evidently, you just put the bike on a stand—even the centerstand will do in some cases—remove either the rear wheel or brake disc, depending on the model, and bolt on a weighted sensor assembly. Then you start up the bike and run it through the gears. The sensor assembly then transmits to a laptop that spits out the horsepower and torque figures. Can you imagine?

It's a fascinating new world all this high-tech has given us, and we all benefit from it. You get much more accurate and complete information in the magazines you read, and I get to sit here in my favorite roadhouse and write about it.



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