



Touring

BY FRANK CONNER

The Superstition Mountains and an R-75 BMW

From Prescott to Douglas,

All the ranges I know . . . I drift with the wind;

No one cares where I go.

—Old Arizona Trail hand song.

The Swedish go-go-dancer and I were the only customers at Roy's on that foggy Monday morning in March. From Roy's you can usually look across the Pacific Coast Highway and watch the surfers taking off at State Beach, but this morning a heavy fog was shrouding Santa Monica Canyon, and only the dim outlines of the breakers were visible. The girl had lazed away a couple of

hours over eggs and coffee, talking about her dancing, and she said, "It's a bad place where I work, but I get along okay with the customers and there's never any trouble—and the owner is a good boss, which makes a big difference." Then she said, "When are you going to split?"

I glanced at the clock, slugged down my fourth cup of coffee, reached for some money, and said, "Right now."

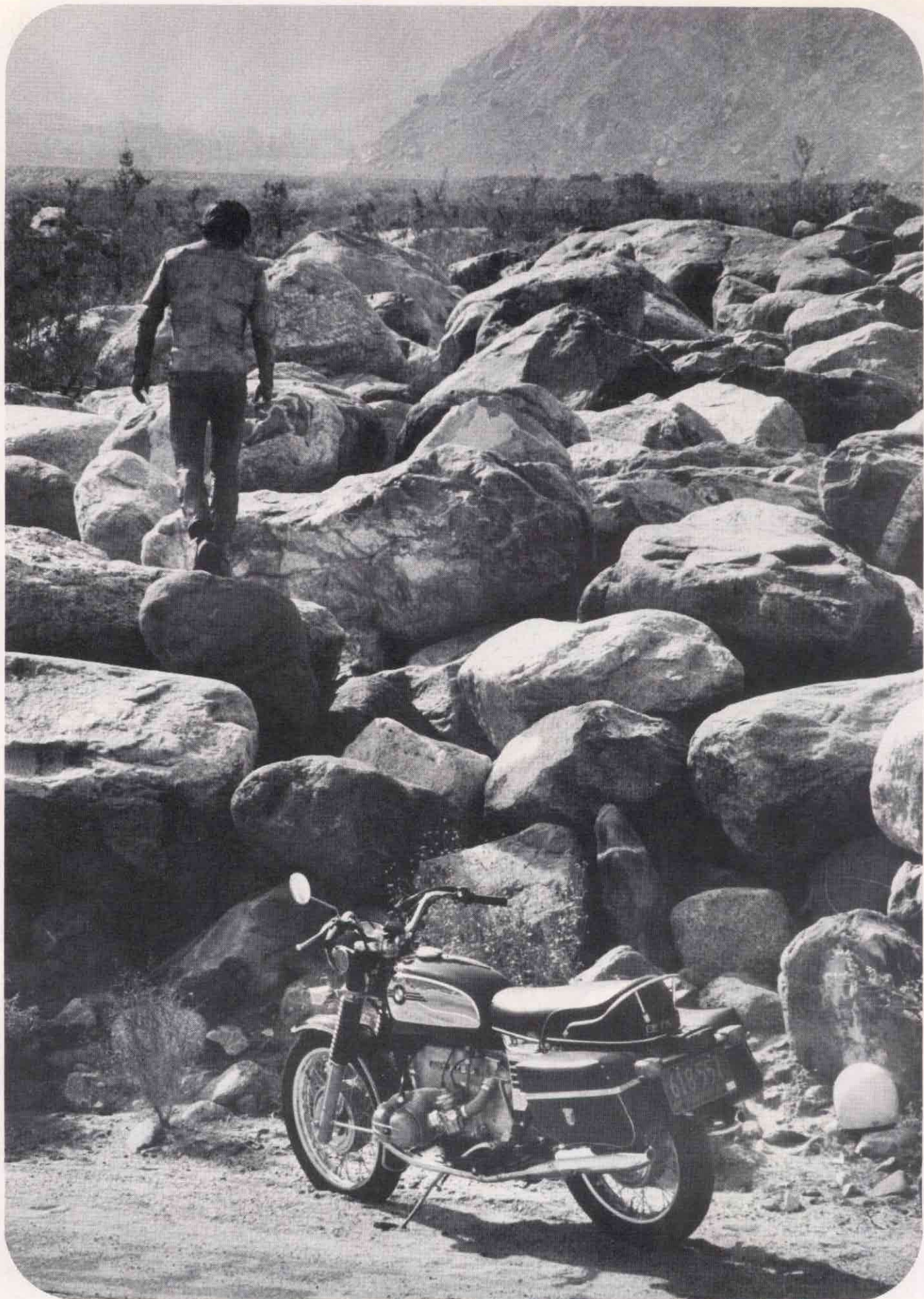
From behind the counter, Mac asked, "Where you riding off to this time, Frank?" Mac is a short, stocky, ugly, redfaced, gravelly-voiced individual who other people instinctively like: he can restore order to an impatient jam of rambunctious high-school

surfers effortlessly, with a smile.

I answered, "Don't know for sure, Mac, but I think maybe I'll go to Silver City, New Mexico; never been there before, and I've been wondering about Route 60 and Route 70 for a long time. That ought to be some good riding."

Outside, the 1972 R-75 BMW awaited, its black paint gleaming wetly in the heavy fog. This year the gas tank has shrunk down to 4½ gallons, completely changing the looks of the motorcycle, making it seem longer and lower and far more graceful. But now they've added a bunch of chrome. The new gas tank has chromed sides, with indentations painted black, and there are





chromed side panels, with the same kind of indentations. I could look at the bike and almost hear the marketing guys talking: "But we gotta make it more exciting visually!" And somebody else says, "Well, you know how those American riders are—chrome, that's what they like." On some bikes you can use that approach, but not the BMW. It was so clearly designed for stark, functional simplicity from the wheels up that the chrome really looks out of place.

The BMW saddlebags were loaded for a casual week's ride, which is to say that I wasn't lugging along much stuff. There was the Parr rainsuit (which is thin and tough and fits over leathers and keeps the water out, but doesn't blow up like a balloon in the slipstream); a sweater; thin, two-piece longjohns that are *warm*; skiing gloves; spare underwear and socks; manuals (owner's and shop); spare bulbs, cables, and gaskets; shaving gear; and a road atlas.

I can get away with such a thin load because I never fool around with shirts and pants on a trip—instead I wear a leather jacket and pants. While riding in the desert, enough air circulates through the leathers to keep me comfortable, as long as I keep moving. In the mountains I add the longjohns and sweater. Each night I clean off the day's accumulation of bugs and dirt with a wet washcloth. I'm convinced that leathers save skin and bones if you get off a bike at high speed. And wearing leathers sure cuts down on the amount of clothes you have to take along. I never felt very sociable in black leathers, so now I wear some wild tie-dye stuff that you can't get anymore. But there are plenty of interesting high-color smooth and roughout leathers available to the touring rider who wants to look different.

My lightly-loaded BMW was all set to go, so I rocked it off the centerstand (the only easy-to-use standard centerstand that I know of), and climbed aboard. I am 5'8" tall; the saddle is 32" off the ground with me on the bike; so I didn't have any trouble planting both feet on the pavement. Just then a passerby walked up, studied the machine, and said, "Boy, that bike must weigh a ton. I'd be scared to ride it."

I smiled cockily and said, "It's no problem." I didn't tell the man that the Bayerische Motoren Werke had gone to great trouble—like using forged-aluminum foot pedals, and making their aluminum castings with lots of webbing for strength without weight—to make the BMW massive-looking and strong, but light. Loaded, the machine weighs 450 pounds, which is not bad for a 750cc touring bike.

I fed in a little choke and touched the starter button. The starter motor rotated everything quietly and efficiently (there is also a kickstarter lever, so that all is not lost if

your battery breaks way out in the middle of nowhere). The engine caught, and it idled quietly and efficiently. Starting a BMW is anticlimactic: nothing much seems to happen.

I pulled the clutch and punched the shift lever down into low with my left foot. The gearbox said "click"—quite a change from the old BMW "CLUNK!" I let out the clutch and headed toward the streets of downtown Santa Monica.

The gearing is excellent for aroundtown riding. Low gear will get you to 40 mph, so you can ride either in low or second. The engine comes on at about 3500 rpm and redlines at 7000.

Low-speed handling is light and smooth. In fact, this particular R-75 leaned into the turns more smoothly than anything else I have ever ridden. Some bikes lean over in a series of small uncoordinated flops: the front wheel falls over; the rear wheel catches up; the front wheel falls over some more; the rear wheel catches up But not this BMW. It would lean over with one steady, smooth, precise motion that was beautiful to feel. I swooped around corners in Santa Monica for awhile, just enjoying the feel of the motorcycle leaned over.

When I was approaching traffic lights at low speeds, I found that I could lock up the double-leading shoe front brake fairly easily, but at higher speeds I didn't have any trouble. Too, the DLS front brake wouldn't prevent the bike from rolling backward if I were stopped facing uphill; then I had to use the leading-shoe/trailing-shoe rear brake.

I caught a freeway heading east. The coastal fog soon turned into bad smog. The air was heavy, and it tasted sour; soon my eyes and throat began to burn.

The BMW had found itself a home on the freeway. In fourth gear, the engine idled at 4100 rpm (70 mph). In third gear, 70 mph was about 1200 rpm faster. There was almost no vibration anywhere, and I could see everything in the mirror quite clearly.

As I rolled along, a young guy in a Porsche got interested in the motorcycle. He pulled up alongside, checked the machine carefully, dropped back and studied it from the rear, then pulled up to look at the profile view again. Deciding to be friendly, I said, "Hellooo." He stared at me deadpan, punched his accelerator, and disappeared into the traffic ahead.

The seating position on the bike was pretty good. I had to sit on the front part of the saddle to reach the handlebars, but I wasn't jammed up against the tank, and the front part of the saddle was very comfortable. Everything was great right down to my shins, where everything *stopped* being great. There is a 32mm Bing carburetor at the rear of each cylinder. This year the carburetor has a

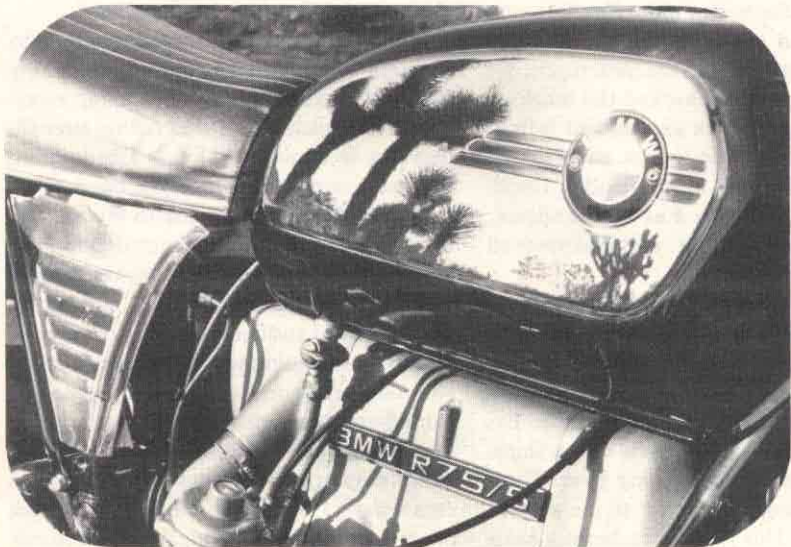
pressure-equalizing chamber up top, which works like a champion but lives right where your shin ought to go. If you have to stop quick, the chamber puts dents in your shins (even through boots). The shift lever and brake pedal got in the way of my feet. I had to ride with the balls of my feet on the pegs, or with my feet hanging off the ends of the pegs. As is, that part of the motorcycle just does not fit me.

Whoops! I had reached the first section of bad pavement grooves. The BMW danced on the grooves—not frighteningly, but uncomfortably. I screwed down the steering damper to see what would happen. It solved the problem; the bike started tracking straight. Emerging onto plain old concrete again, I unwound the damper.

At Banning the smog went away as if it had never been invented, and I was riding in bright sunshine. The air tasted fresh. I could see the mountains. Boy, could I see the mountains! The Southern California mountains and deserts were put there just for the pleasure of motorcycle riders; you cannot get enveloped by the sweeping grandeur of those large-scale landscapes if you're riding in a car—not even a convertible. For a long time I just rode, feeling the power of the countryside all around me.

But something had been puzzling me. The BMW has this tremendous long-travel suspension; 8½" of travel up front, and almost 5" in back, which should be enough to handle almost anything. Yet at 70 mph you could feel all the small bumps; the suspension wasn't reacting to them. The machine had about 1600 miles on it when I got it, so the suspension should have been broken in. On a hunch I ran the bike up to 95 mph, and the small bumps disappeared. Could those BMW designers possibly have designed the machine to give the best ride at 110 mph with two people aboard? Impossible! But . . . what about the Autobahn? The whole concept struck me as being hilarious, and I rode along at 95 for awhile, laughing hard.

Many big trucks were sharing the freeway with me—doubles rigs, and weird-looking chemical tankers, and lowboys toting everything from yachts to ribbed rubber tires fifteen feet in diameter. At first I had passed the trucks without any problem, but now the desert winds were beginning to hit me, and the trucks were creating turbulence—the kind that yanks you forward, makes the bike wag its front end and wobble, and moves you sideways suddenly, two or three feet. Since I wasn't going to be doing much precision cornering on this freeway anyhow, I wound up the steering damper again, which made all but the worst turbulence disappear. When passing moving vans in really vicious crosswinds, I reverted back to the old trick of accelerating and weaving from side to side





in my lane as I approached the truck, which killed the effects of the worst turbulence.

Now I was riding in true desert. The afternoon temperature was 95 degrees. The sun was to the south of me, and the mountains to my right were bluish and indistinct, but you could still see the snow atop the knife-edge peaks. Further down the road, all but the peaks of one mountain range had been covered by drifting sand or flows of lava; for miles the horizon angled up at fifteen or twenty degrees, with mountain peaks sticking out here and there.

Past Chiriaco Summit there was more empty desert, and a stark mountain range on my left. But halfway up one of those mountains was a gigantic concrete facing, from which huge pipes ran down the mountain-side to what looked like hydroelectric penstocks at the base, and there was an elaborate transformer network. But there was no sign of water anywhere around. Was it what I thought it was? Where did the water come from? Where was it going?

I was running along at about 80 mph—the BMW never missing a lick—and soon I was just floating along five feet above the road, barely perceiving the scenery and not thinking about it. On and on I went, almost in a trance. Then I saw a freeway exit labeled “Mecca”. I grabbed the brakes, but it was too late; I had already passed the exit. In the midst of all that desolation, “Mecca” was the perfect name for a town, or a filling station/grocery store/saloon. Whatever buildings there are in Mecca, I hope they have old rusty tin roofs.

At the outskirts of Blythe there was an orange grove. The sight of all those deep-green leaves and orange-colored oranges hit me hard; it was just too lush. Downtown Blythe was pastel-painted and poured-concrete buildings, and for once I didn't mind them at all; they were restful to my parched eyes.

Just after crossing the Colorado River, I saw my first saguaro cactus, and then I knew I was in Arizona. But somebody may have transplanted it there just to reassure me, because I didn't see any more of them for another ten miles. I ran the bike up to 90 mph and opened my mouth. The wind bulged out my cheeks, making me feel like somebody else—or maybe like nobody else.

But later on I was running at a sedate 75 mph on a two-lane stretch of Route 60 when a car coming at me with a U-haul trailer ran off the road into the sand. The driver, looking completely unconcerned, spun the steering wheel to get back on the road, never taking his foot off the gas. He got back on the road—sideways. I grabbed the binders and downshifted and headed for the dirt on my side. But the driver, still looking bored, steered into the slide and got his rig straight-

ened out just short of me. I stayed on the road and sped up again, but my hands and feet and knees quivered for the next five miles down the highway.

Just outside Salome, a Stearman biplane sitting on the most haphazard-looking taxi strip I have ever seen, was drinking crop-dusting chemicals from a tanker. Paralleling me about twenty yards away in the desert sand, a high-school student was riding his trail bike, sitting loose in the saddle, bouncing up and down. I beeped my horn. His head flicked around; still bouncing along, he gave me a big wave and a smile.

I slowed for Salome, a small, ugly town with a lot of character. Accelerating out the other side, I was closing fast on a big semi ahead of me. There was a car coming in the other direction; it was going fast, and it was already very close. But I whipped the BM into the left lane and tucked in on the tank and let it hammer.

The semi was crowding the centerline; he probably hadn't even seen me yet. The car had seen me, but he was crowding the centerline too. His front bumper was getting big. I had to make it, and it was going to be very close. The bike flew along, rock-steady. When I guessed that my rear fender was even with the truck's front bumper, I threw the bike to the right, sliding past the car's left front fender. I smiled, realizing that this BMW was truly a motorcycle.

Later I felt guilty about maybe disturbing the truckdriver by showing up on his front fender like that (no regrets about the car), until I got another ten miles down the road. I topped a rise, and right in front of me were two semis heading my way, side by side. There was just no room for me at all. So I grabbed the brakes and came to a full stop on the side of the road. The truck in my lane edged over just enough to miss me; mighty obliging of him.

I raced with the sun to see if I could get to Wickenburg in daylight. The mountains up ahead were growing softer and hazier, and the air was getting cold. In my mirror I watched the sunset; a red and purple and orange sky. I pulled into Wickenburg a few minutes later, but by then it was pitch black dark. I went to bed easy in my mind about the motorcycle and the trip.

The next morning I rode alongside the Hassayampa River as it meandered sloppily along a wide sandy bed cut through fragile hills, with shade trees growing on the banks—a magical place. Then I took the freeway through smog-tinted Phoenix—along with a lot of going-to-work traffic—and picked up Route 60 on the other side. Toward Apache Junction I could see the Superstition Mountains up ahead. From that direction they bulge strangely, and the peaks stick out at odd angles. Stopping for gas at a

filling station, I asked the attendant, "Do people still shoot each other back in those mountains?"

He looked at me strangely. "I wouldn't have believed it—only moved here a few months ago—but I guess they do. Crazy Jake came by the other day, and he said somebody took a shot at him back in there a couple of weeks ago."

I paid him, fired up the bike, and rode it down the highway until I had a full side view of the Superstitions. Then I parked the bike off the road and sat down on a rock and stared at those ominous mountains baking in the sun. They got their name because the Apaches feared them. But maybe the white man has even better cause for fear. The mountains brooded, and their influence weighed heavily on me; I felt uneasy. Legend has it that one of the Peralta brothers (big landholders in Mexico a long time ago) ran short of operating money and brought a crew north to look for gold. They found nine veins of it—wire gold in quartz—there in the Superstitions. Being greedy, they came back for more, but then the Apaches killed most of the party and sealed off eight of the mines. A Dutchman, Jacob Waltzer, supposedly found the ninth mine near Weaver's Needle, a landmark that looks something like a high-crown sombrero. If so, the secret died with him. Other people have been hunting the Lost Dutchman mine ever since. The area isn't very big—maybe forty miles across—but it is a waterless maze of mountains and canyons, and the temperature in some of those canyons reaches 140 degrees in August. Many people have gotten lost and died of thirst in the Superstitions.

Others have been shot from ambush by prospectors gone crazy. I first went looking for the Dutchman mine fifteen years ago, taking two hardcase friends with me, and we were all well-armed. Three people had been murdered in there just before we went in. Now as I sat staring at them, those mountains looked and felt as evil to me as they had fifteen years before.

The road followed the Superstitions to Florence Junction; then Route 60 began an end run around them on its way to Globe. Just past the forks I saw a paved road leading back into the mountains; the sign said, "Superstition Valley Golf Course." I guess that's the beginning of the end. Ten years from now people will be crowding into luxury motels all over the Superstitions, and there will be fake gunfights every night to amuse the tourists. Perhaps it is just as well; those old mountains have soaked up enough blood.

Running through desert, I topped a rise, and there was Superior—a mining town—spread out in the valley below me. The road got curvy on its way down, and I overtook a stack of fifty cars and trucks and campers crawling along. I took to the centerline and left that collection of vehicles behind me, feeling like a free man.

On the other side of Superior the road looked as if it would run smack into a

sheer cliff, but at the last moment it angled to the right and began climbing hard. I followed it. Up the crumbly mountains, weatherbeaten and cracked, I rode past vividly-colored strata of rock—white, pink and orange. Queen Creek Canyon, a narrow, dry gorge, ran right beside the road.

Later I rode by Bloody Tanks Wash (and I don't think I want to know about that place), toward Miami-Globe. The first thing you see in Miami is a huge pile of mine tailings and a giant smelter stack belching chemicals and smoke.

At a restaurant in Globe, the waitress said, "Been real dry in these parts the last two years. So dry that a lot of cattle on the San Carlos reservation have died of thirst."

I told her about the Seven Years' Drought in West Texas, when newcomers to El Paso had built houses in the mouths of arroyos and lived there for maybe five years before the first rains came and washed them all away.

Just beyond Globe the highway forked. Route 70, the road I was supposed to take to Silver City, angled off to the right. Route 60 went left and headed north into the San Carlos reservation. For some reason I turned left. The countryside was dirt and low shrubs—maybe a little greener than pure desert. Then the road climbed up to a pass, and suddenly there were pine trees and other evergreens. They looked a little scraggly, but they were the first pines I had seen on this trip.

Running along at 70 mph, I started catching hard, medium-size bugs. Zing, splat; zing, splat. They stung my chin, and gradually they covered my face shield. One bug splattered right on the edge of my shield and ricocheted up into my open mouth; he tasted bitter.

Now I was at 5000 feet elevation, and the air was cold. I passed an Arizona Highway Department outpost, and they had a whole string of longjohns hanging on the clothesline. I stopped and went behind a tree and pulled on my own longjohns.

Just past the crest of another hill, there was a steep cliff and a tremendous valley spread out in front of me. I stopped; the sign said, "Salt River Canyon." I'd never even heard of it before, but I was enchanted. At the rim of the canyon I sat on a weathered piece of lava with Spanish bayonets growing on either side of me and some prickly pear behind. Down below, the olive-green Salt River was shooting rapids and making white water about a mile away, and the air was filled with the dull roar of the rushing water.

I climbed aboard the BMW and went a hundred yards and found that the canyon I had been studying was only one of a huge network. Though not quite as large as the Grand Canyon, they were fully as spectacular. Through the ages, the Salt River seems to have chopped off the sides of great mountains, leaving caves and potholes in their faces. The river has cut its way down through all different kinds of rock; you can study those layers either

from a distance or from five feet away, because the road switchbacks right down to the bottom of the canyon, crosses the river, and winds its way up the other side.

Some of the rock layers are softer than others, so the river has cut ledges and steps; veins of hard rock stick out vertically here and there. There were turnouts all along that road, and I stopped at each one to study the magnificent scenery.

I followed Route 60 up through the Fort Apache reservation and into Show Low, where I headed west on Arizona 77 into Snowflake. Then, right out in the middle of nowhere, with no houses or other buildings or towns or *anything*, I rode past a huge papermill running full tilt. Why was it there? Another mystery.

The road began to climb mountains, and then I was in the Tonto National Forest. The woods were thick, and the pine trees were tall. The afternoon sun flicked on and off between those trees so rapidly that it was like staring directly into somebody's strobelight on fast flash. After awhile it makes you dumb, and you can't think anymore. There were groups of birch trees scattered among the pines, and many small ponds, and little patches of unmelted snow and ice in the shadows.

To the north was the Mogollon Rim, a huge mesa that drops off abruptly into the Tonto Basin. Zane Grey had a cabin in the Basin, and he wrote about the range wars that took place there in the 1800s.

At Payson I turned north on Arizona 87, into more forests. Then there were still, cold lakes surrounded by meadows, and to my right were weathered boulders stained chartreuse by lichens. To me that whole scene looked just like the tundra country of Northern Canada.

Then I hit twenty miles of the worst paved road I've ever ridden. It was colored deep red, and it had potholes a foot deep, and bad (horrible) washboard that you could not see in the late afternoon. The bike was bottoming its suspension, wagging its forks and bouncing all around. I couldn't blame the BMW; I think that any street motorcycle would have reacted the same way. When I could see them, I rode the worst sections standing on the pegs.

Then the setting sun lay right above the road. But this sun was not red and dim like a setting sun ought to be; it was bright yellow, and running full blast. I had no visor on my Magnum, and the sun blinded me completely; I had absolutely no idea which way the road went next. In a panic I slowed to ten mph and tried to figure out what to do. Finally I discovered that by covering my shield with my left hand and peeking out between two fingers, I could see a little bit. I rode like that for fifteen minutes before the sun went down. It was dark when I got to Flagstaff.

I checked into a motel, found a restaurant nearby, and ate dinner. A man walked into the place, saw me, did a doubletake, and asked, "Pardon me, but did you ride a

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motorcycle through the town of Show Low this afternoon?"

"Yep."

"By George, I didn't *think* there were two set of clothes in Arizona looking like that. I work for a paper company, and I was inside a store selling a man some paper goods when you rode by."

Aha! Maybe this man could solve one of the mysteries for me. "You know that papermill way out in the middle of nowhere between Snowflake and Herber?" He nodded. "Good. What's it doing there?"

He laughed. "That mill has been there since 1960, and I've asked everybody I know, including some of the management, and nobody know why it's there."

Arriving back at my motel, I saw an immaculate 500cc Suzuki twin parked outside the office. The bike had a handlebar fairing, and camping gear laced neatly to a sissy bar. While I was checking out the Suzy, its owner came out of the office to have a look at the BMW. He was a young rider named Mario De Benedittis, who worked for the telephone company in Denver. Mario was returning from a week's vacation to Los Angeles. He and I decided to hunt down a six-pack and swap lies about motorcycles for awhile.

"Well," said Mario, "I like good handling, good braking, and fast acceleration, in that order. If a motorcycle won't handle right, why buy it? And if it won't stop quick, you're in trouble. Anyhow, that's what I wanted, and I don't think you can find that combination in any other 500cc twin for less than a thousand dollars, so I bought the Suzuki. It's been reliable—hasn't given me any trouble at all. The only problem with it is that it vibrates way too much; it's got a high-frequency vibration that really bugs you."

I asked Mario how well his camping-gear rig worked on the road.

"I bought that sissy bar for the bike, and I tie my tent and sleeping bag and travel pack to it. Then those things are out of my way, and they don't get loose, and the bike isn't cluttered, and it's comfortable, but it still doesn't work very well. The sissy bar with my gear tied on acts just like a sail and catches the wind. It blows the bike all over the road, even though I keep the steering damper clamped down. You know how bad those winds get in the desert." I nodded; I knew.

"Well, one time this afternoon the wind blew me right off the road. I was going pretty fast, and the shoulder was soft dirt, but I was able to keep the bike up and get it back on the road . . ."

We swapped bikes and rode them around Flagstaff for awhile, then came back and talked until 1:30 in the morning. The next day we met for breakfast and continued to talk about our trips over coffee. I rode away from Flagstaff with a glow. When you're alone on the road, one of the nicest things that can happen is to

meet another rider passing through—a good guy—and spend a few hours talking.

I left Flagstaff on Route 89A, mostly because I had never been on that road before. A few miles down the road a sign said, "Lookout Point Ahead". I couldn't see anything to look out at; the countryside was just rolling hills. Then the road dived down into a huge gorge—Oak Creek Canyon. The air had turned bitter cold, and there was a thin scum of ice on the asphalt as I rode beside Oak Creek. Then the sun hit the towering cliffs on my right, with that extra intensity of a backlit Kodachrome transparency. The top half of the cliffs looked like granite, which had yielded only grudgingly to the water, showing gouge marks here and there. The bottom half was brick-red sandstone; it had given in gracefully and was molded and curved.

The canyon widened out, and then there were individual mountains of sandstone eroded into fantastic shapes. In the mouth of the canyon was the town of Sedona.

I headed west across a wide valley, and the vegetation died away; a bare mountain range loomed ahead. The road dipped down and crossed the Verde River into Cottonwood, with its stand of huge, stately cottonwood trees growing along the flanks of the river, as if planted there in groves.

Three-quarters of the way up Mingus Mountain hangs Jerome, clinging by its fingernails to the steep mountainside. Jerome is a ghost town: in 1931 it had a population of 20,000; now 300 people live there. It was a copper-mining town which experienced almost every kind of disaster imaginable. For example, the main ore body (which has a heavy sulfur content) caught fire, and they couldn't put it out, so they stopped tunnelling for the ore and instead dug a huge open pit down from above so they could strip out the burning ore; that went on for several years. But now the rich ore is gone, and so are all of the miners.

On the other side of Prescott, I ran into about twenty miles of crooked, winding mountain roads, with no scenery worth looking at. So I gave the bike a workout—it was almost never upright. I shifted back and forth between second and third gear on that 30 mph road and had the time of my life slinging the BMW into the corners. In the open curves that I could see around, I was using every inch of asphalt.

The mountains died off into a grassy valley, and then I climbed some more hills to the town of Yarnell, at an elevation of 4700 feet. At the other end of town, the land drops off in a vertical cliff; half a mile straight down is flat desert stretching westward as far as you can see. I followed a Transcon semi down the narrow winding road. He was using every inch of the asphalt—just as I had done in the mountains outside Prescott—so I just trucked along behind him. Then came a short straightaway, and I was gone. On the desert floor, the air was like a blast furnace.

There were dust devils near Salome.

They were about six feet in diameter, and some of them were a hundred feet tall—miniature whirlwinds greedily sucking up dust from the ground and storing it in their fitfully-swaying columns.

Back in California, I left the freeway at the Mecca/Twenty Nine Palms exit, and turned my back on Mecca (regretfully) to ride through the Joshua Tree National Monument. The Joshua trees—yucca plants that graduated—were there in great numbers, along with every imaginable variety of cactus. The harsh mountains still looked harsh in the dim light as the Southwest staged another spectacular sunset.

That night I rode the streets of Palm Springs, watching the people saunter along the sidewalks illuminated by the floodlights tied to the palm trees lining the streets. The people wore resort-town finery, and they strolled slowly, displaying their own finery and checking out the other people's. Should someone else out-finery them, they can always stroll into one of the exclusive shops and buy better armor.

I headed for Los Angeles. Turning it on, I could only get 100 mph on the clock, sitting up. But by now the machine had 3600 hard miles on it (of which I had contributed about 2000), and it was evidently beginning to lose its edge. But I had to turn it on to learn that.

The R-75 was getting about 46 miles per gallon at 75 mph, which meant about 200 miles on a tank of gas. The machine still wasn't shaking, and it hadn't dribbled off any nuts or bolts along the way. It had run quietly and tirelessly. It was very comfortable to ride from the shins up. It was one of those rare combinations—a good bike for putting around town or for tooling across the United States. A sloppy rider can feel at home on it, and a skilled rider can get a lot of performance out of it.

The present R-75 is a far cry from the R-69 model of a few years back. The R-69 had been designed for a sidecar, and you could tell. There was a great flywheel-effect lurch when you shifted gears; to go faster, you had to wind up the twistgrip like an alarm clock, and even then nothing startling happened; and in the corners the machine felt as if it were itching to dump you off. The R-69 was a two-wheel means of conveyance, rather than an exciting motorcycle. But—as with the Harley 74—there was a contingent of BMW fanatics who loved the R-69 just as it was. It took a lot of courage for BMW to leap out of their comfortable niche and build an entirely different type of motorcycle. Happily, the R-75 justifies the risk, and it should appeal to a wide range of riders.

I pulled into Santa Monica Canyon—still foggy—and parked outside Roy's, all set to tell Mac and the Swedish go-go dancer about my trip. But the dancer was working that day, and Mac was resting up at home after having a couple of teeth pulled. Foggy or not, the waves sounded good. So I went back to the motel to grab my wetsuit and my fins. ©