

STARTING LINE

by tim suddard • tim@grassrootsmotorsports.com

There's a guy I know, name of Dan Davis, who did PR for years at Kumho Tire. I first met him at a tire introduction and press gathering at BeaveRun, where he displayed his Porsche 944 race car in front of some 50 media representatives. Along with the Kumho Tire stickers, he had *Grassroots Motorsports* decals prominently displayed all around the car.

I took him aside and quietly suggested to him that while I sure appreciated his loyalty and support, politically it might be better to remove decals for such a public arena. He looked at me and said something along the lines of, "I don't give a crap. I like your magazine and I like you and I can run any decals I want on my race car." It wasn't hard to like Dan, and I did so immediately.

We worked together for many years, but then—as often happens in life—things changed. Dan got tired of the travel demands of his job and decided to become the PR guy for a local bank chain in his native Cleveland; I respected him for putting his family first and sticking closer to home with a more stable situation. I talked to him occasionally after that, but it wasn't the same. He was one of the good guys, and I missed him.

Fast-forward to a couple of months ago, when Dan called me up and asked me to guess what his new job was. I told him I had no idea, but the call and the excitement led me to assume he was somewhere back in our world. "I am the new PR director at Triumph Motorcycles!" he crowed, no doubt remembering my well-documented love of these bikes. My congratulations were very sincere.

A few weeks went by and Dan called again, this time to share the details about a Triumph press event he was putting together in San Diego. He asked me if I might like to go. I started to say, "No, I don't have time for that," but then I changed my mind. Not only would



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it be great fun, but I've always wondered how a bike press event would compare to an automotive press event. So I flew off to San Diego to ride motorcycles through the desert.

The first thing I noticed was that the bike event was going to be quite leisurely: We had nearly three days to really get to know the bikes and the staff at Triumph, compared to the one-day blitz that is most car introductions. Right behind that was the awareness that the new Thunderbird Commander and LT cruisers were each twice the bike of my beloved Bonneville—in more ways than one. I felt very out of my element on an 800-pound cruiser. That said, by the first day's end I got used to the surprisingly taut chassis and felt like I'd been riding one forever.

Triumph made it clear that if they were going to enter the cruiser market, they were going to do it with bikes that handled in that legendary Triumph way. Three disc brakes hauled the speed down quickly, and the fit and finish were spectacular. I'm not a cruiser kind of motorcyclist—at the beginning of the event I wasn't even able to fathom why someone would want a cruiser—but I did come away with a new appreciation for this segment in general, and these nice looking, nicely made Triumphs in particular.

I also gained a newfound appreciation for motorcycle journalists. These guys were hardcore bikers: Everyone wore full leathers and their own helmets, and most had bike racing experience. They were not there for the wine and sunshine; they rode the piss out of those Triumphs. (To my great relief, after about an hour of getting used to the sheer mass of the bikes, my experience and ego kicked in and I was able to keep pace and not embarrass myself.)

I think the experience was good for me in other ways, too. It felt great to get out of my comfort zone and into a new crowd. It was probably also good for me to relearn old skills, never mind to remember what it feels like to be the new guy in a group.

Dan and I hit it right off again, riding, drinking and talking until the wee hours of the morning. At the end I even helped him and his crew load the fastest motorcycle in the world back into its trailer. I felt oddly proud as I walked through the lobby of the swanky Rancho Bernardo Inn pushing the twin-Bonneville-engined Gyronaut X-1, which held the record from 1966 to 1970. After 30 years in this business, it was worth it to slow down, take a side trip and rekindle an old relationship.

So buy a Triumph and drive the roads east and north of San Diego. Barring that, find some other way to make new friends, reconnect with old ones, and burnish some of your lesser skills. At first you may be uncomfortable leaving your usual routine, but trust me, you'll come back with a new perspective.

GRM