

HOW I FELT IN LOVE WITH SPEED

Slow in, fast out.”

I was given that famous cornering mantra when I was just five years old. As his way of bringing the track into the house, my dad would take any chance he got to repeat this advice along with his other life rule: “Famous last words: watch this.”

Despite my upbringing, it still took me twelve years to experience the true essence of speed. My first bike was a Yamaha TTR125, a small dirt bike that suffered up steep hills and careened down the backsides as if there were no brakes at all. It was a liberating experience for a fourteen year old. When I first twisted the throttle on the bike, its nine fierce stallions seemed to roar to life, the rear

tire hurling dirt behind me. I felt like Ricky Carmichael. In reality, it was a miracle if I ever reached thirty miles per hour while trying to dodge the older riders on their 450cc motocross bikes whizzing past me. It didn't matter to me though.

The little bike was short lived. I managed to crash a four wheeler into a tree about four months after first feeling the freedom of two wheels, so my dad decided to sell the bike. He and I would still ride together as we had since I was two: we would suit up, I'd climb onto the back of his big BMW R1200RT sport tourer, he would mount the machine, and off we would go. But I never forgot the

feeling of being at the controls of my very own motorcycle.

Seven years later, my dad knew I was ready for a bike again, so he bought a KTM 690R and an 1190 Adventure for the two of us to ride together. I loved my bike, but I drooled over his 157 horsepower beast, sitting like a fighter jet in our garage. Despite the fact that I did all his maintenance for him, my dad wouldn't let me go anywhere near his 1190.

On one of our rides nearly a year after purchasing the bikes, we made a stop at a gas station for a drink and a snack. I decided to ask him again if I could ride the 1190, knowing that the answer would be a hard no. To my surprise, he



Night Rides | Pen Oldham | digital art

threw away his Gatorade and then threw me the keys. The engine barked to life like a rabid dog.

Speed is a drug. Once I got a taste of it, I thought of nothing except getting more. My addiction began at thirty miles per hour on the baby Yamaha, then at ninety on my 690, and then there I was, still in second gear but well on my way through sixty. Seventy. Redline, clutch in, upshift, clutch out. One hundred. One twenty.

Upshift. One thirty and still climbing. My vision blurred, and all that remained in focus was the apex of the next turn as I scorched along the country lane, moving too fast to look at the speedometer. I didn't know where my dad was, and I didn't care. I just wanted to find another gear, nail another apex. I needed more speed. It felt like at least Mach one.

We made it back to the garage, and I hopped off of my father's

rocketship. He pulled in a few minutes after me.

"I like your bike," I said, still coming down from the massive rush I had just experienced.

"Yeah, I could tell. We need to get you on a track, kid."

As we walked out of the garage with our gear, I thought of that possibility. A real racetrack, with real race bikes. "Yeah, screw that 'slow in, fast out' nonsense. I want to go fast in, faster out." ❖