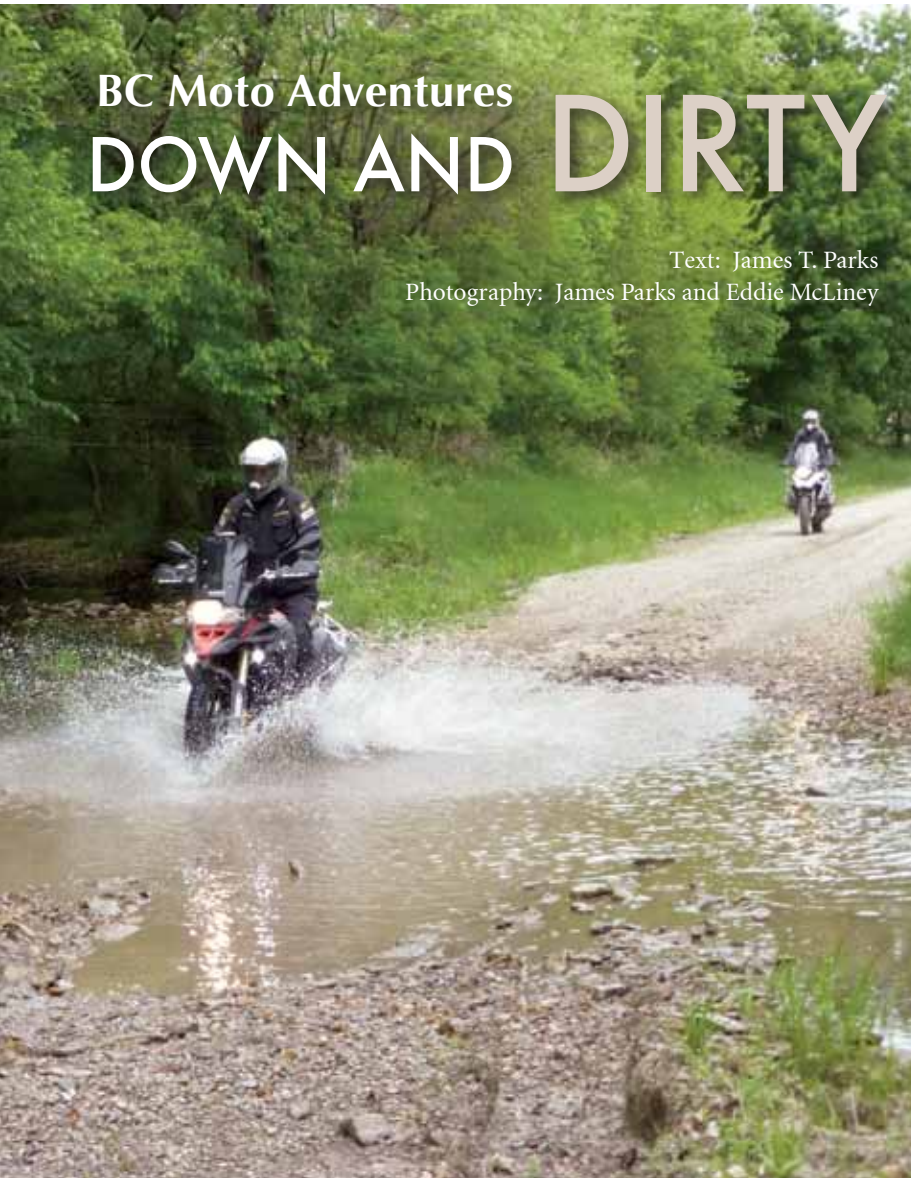


# BC Moto Adventures DOWN AND DIRTY

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Photography: James Parks and Eddie McLiney



**Having taken up off-pavement riding rather late in my motorcycling career, I found high quality formal instruction with Engle Motors (the event sponsor) and BC Moto Adventures's Off Road Foundation course. Having done some light off-road riding for several years I thought, "How hard could a foundation course be?" I soon found out ...**

Successful negotiation of water crossings is just one of the many skills to be mastered by aspiring off-road riders.

Our gleeful graduation ceremony takes place on a low water bridge in the Kansas outback.

My friend Eddie McLiney is hosting this particular training event (it travels around the U.S.) on his farm in eastern Kansas. Knobby tires and hardcore riding apparel are required for everyone, and we are admonished to stay well hydrated.

## Day 1: It's All About Balance

Ten students (8 men and 2 women) gather for the briefing by two instructors. Chief instructor Bill Conger designed the off-road course at the BMW Performance Center in South Carolina (and was formerly the lead motorcycle instructor there), competed in the 2010 Dakar Rally, regularly races in motocross events, and now runs his own off-road riding school. Liz Allen, Bill's able assistant instructor, regularly competes in off-road events and pilots her hefty BMW R 1200 GS with impressive ease and aplomb.

Although temperatures are slightly above 40 degrees, we're advised to strip down to only one layer beneath our protective gear because they tell us we'll be sweating within a matter of minutes. And we are! The first series of exercises to maintain balance and learn to ride by feel are performed on an uneven, grassy meadow. Standing on our pegs, we perform tight turns in slow motion, shift our riding position, and do stops and starts without putting a foot down. Soon my thighs are burning, my forearms are aching, and I'm perspiring like the temps are in the triple digits.

Several of the later exercises focus on the proper technique for riding in ruts. Because of a previous ill-fated rut-riding experience, I'm especially anxious to master this. I guide the bike with my feet while standing on the pegs and shifting weight. Trying to stay in the middle of a deep rut by moving the handlebars back and forth usually increases oscillation of the front wheel against the sides of the rut, which can trigger a crash. The secret is to guide by feel and not by sight. It works like a charm. By day's end I'm a better rider, but a tired one.





### Day 2: Final Exam

One of the most useful techniques we practice is backing down a steep incline without losing control. An untrained rider's first instinct is often to grab a handful of front brake, but because the front tire has little grip in this situation, the bike will quickly lose traction. For a controlled rearward descent, we put the bike in first gear and squeeze and release the clutch.

We also work on the panic stop. Using the front brake off-road is just as important as it is on-road, but it's vital that the rider have a light touch and modulate the front brake lever to keep the front wheel from sliding. Leaving the bike's ABS system turned on makes this next to impossible, because no braking is applied to the front wheel. The other piece of the panic stop equation is purposely locking up the rear wheel and not letting up until the bike is completely stopped. To do otherwise, as you might know, frequently results in an ugly high side crash—ouch!

Our final exam is an afternoon off-road ride through muddy ruts, water crossings, steep inclines and declines, plowed ground, loose rocks, tree roots, and other obstacles. Later, back at the farm, we go through additional exercises, but my energy level starts to drop rapidly. I'm really tired and my bike and I are a little banged up, so I'm looking forward to a nice long hot shower.

### Course Takeaways

Although this two-day course is physically demanding, I've definitely learned much more about off-road riding:

- **Higher Skillset Required:** Proficient off-road riding demands a much broader and more well practiced set of skills than on-road riding. Those who do it well make it look easy and are like watching poetry in motion.
- **Importance of Physical Conditioning:** Because of the riding position (standing up), frequent body movement, and usually rough riding surface, off-road riding requires strong thighs and forearms.
- **Proper Technique is Everything:** Riders who perfect their off-road riding skills will expend less energy and have more fun. Effective technique is particularly critical on the heavier adventure bikes because they are not nearly as nimble and responsive as the much lighter dual sport bikes.
- **Riding Slow is Key:** Riding at a slow pace is always more difficult than riding fast, but it's often a necessity in negotiating off-road trails and terrain. The secret to doing it well is effective throttle and clutch control, which takes much practice.

My final piece of advice to anyone taking this course is to be physically fit before signing up, and don't be reluctant to take an unscheduled break if you become fatigued. The instructors realize that few (if any) of their students will compete in the Dakar Rally. They just want to help them become better riders. Contact BC Moto Adventures (Bill Conger) at bill.conger@att.net, (704) 904-4370 and find Engle Motors at www.englemotors.com. **RR**

*Reprinted courtesy of RoadRUNNER Motorcycle Touring & Travel magazine (www.roadrunner.travel). RoadRUNNER Magazine is a bimonthly motorcycle touring publication packed with exciting travel articles, splendid photography, route maps and other features that help ensure wonderful two-wheeled adventures. Subscriptions are available on our website and by calling (866) 343-7623.*

Immediate personalized coaching is key to progressive skill improvement.

Guiding the motorcycle with the rider's feet is an important technique when negotiating rutted trails.

Bill demonstrates the body positions that riders can assume for controlling the motorcycle in various types of terrain and surface conditions.