

ON SUZUKI - OCTOBER 2014



ON SUZUKI

The Official Suzuki Owner's Magazine



OWN THE STREET

2015 Suzuki
GSX-S750

PLUS:

- + Around America on a V-Strom 1000 ABS Adventure
- + Meet The New Suzuki Racers
- + Take a Virtual Lap of Ryuyo



8 New
Models
Inside



Around America

“Adventures are to the adventurous.”

-English proverb

May 10

Jim “Capt’n” Kirkland, Suzuki Motor of America, Inc., Director of Service (below right), hands over the keys to a 2014 V-Strom 1000 ABS Adventure outside of Suzuki’s HQ in Brea, Calif. Other than the hanging straps, this is pretty much the load for the next nine weeks, or so.

This week, I’m taking a brand-spanking new 2014 Suzuki V-Strom 1000 ABS Adventure and starting an 18,000-mile journey around North America. The bike is one of the first on our shores “off the ship” from Japan.

I work for *Adventure Motorcycle* magazine,

and this trip is all about meeting folks, finding stories and lots of photography. I’ll be mostly camping and staying with friends on the route. What is “the route?” Read along as I ride. The route starts from Suzuki HQ in Brea, California.



► May 15

The destination was Prescott, Arizona; first I wanted to check out Highway 89, grab a few photos, and camp for the night. I racked up about 400 miles of the best riding conditions, even though it was in the mid-90s across lots of desert terrain.

I devoted the day to getting to know the bike. The more I ride this new V-Strom 1000 ABS Adventure, the more I love it. I'm also taking it easy on the engine until the first service (coming up in Phoenix next week). I'm accustomed to

my BMW R1200GS Adventure. But the V-Strom is far more maneuverable and agile. It's also a lot lighter. The V-Adventure's windscreen is smaller, but even though I'm in a tall seat, there's no buffeting or head whip.

The V-Strom's dash has an unusual feature, a real-time mpg gauge. I've been monitoring it in an attempt to determine average fuel consumption. So far, I'm seeing numbers as high as 60 and as low as 18 mpg. I'm averaging around 40 mpg at speeds of

about 70 mph (always obeying speed limits).

Braking is tight. But I haven't kicked in either of the two traction control settings, yet. I'm intentionally holding off until I really know the bike with TC off.

One thing I learned quickly on this route: the bike slices through the wind. You can almost feel the knife-like quality, unusual for any adventure bike. It's rock steady, too. I'm impressed and having a great time with this new ride.

PACKING

I do a lot of "adventure rides," and the packing varies depending upon the mission. In this case, I have to cart an "office" around, along with camping gear (I hate hotels), and clothing for several climate changes. I estimate about 60 pounds of gear.

I'm ready for rain; nearly everything is waterproof. If it's not, I'll pull over and put the contents into plastic bags before continuing on. I have a GoreTex riding suit, and just to be extra safe I'm carrying a rain suit that doubles as a windbreaker in case it gets a little too chilly, especially in the north around Alaska.

The standard rear rack on the new V-Strom is compact, capable, strong and easy to use. Integrated with the passenger grab bar, this storage aid makes it easy to carry items both large and small, and it looks good on the bike when not in use.



► May 22

Riding through Monument Valley was tricky, but awesome. Swirling dust was everywhere, and some spots along the road gave the illusion of a fire. My current riding companions had "bookmarked" a specific area they'd visited on a previous trip, and vowed they'd return to camp. It's Bureau of Land Management space and "free" for camping; all you have to do is get there.

We turned off the main road on to the dirt and gravel track of the Valley of the Gods. I'm not particularly comfy on dirt, especially with a new bike. But we all aired our tires down to 25 psi and off we went. I reckon we rode in about 10 miles before locating an ideal spot

Photos cannot tell the complete story of the awe-inspiring Valley of the Gods in southern Utah.

to pitch our tents. The sun was setting, it was really windy and we were poised on top of a hill with a spectacular view.

After staring at a star-infested sky and several shooting stars, we put down for the night. Ah! The silence!

The next morning after an oatmeal and coffee breakfast, we saddled up and rode out the rest of the way through the Valley of the Gods. My road companions were heading north, while I was off to New Orleans. I'm a couple thousand miles into a 14,000-mile road trip around North America that's already been an incredible experience, and this is only the beginning.



Lost For A Reason

Ron Grace here, founder of Lost for a Reason. I'm a carpenter from Arvada, Colorado. The inspiration for starting LFAR came from many great rides on the Navajo reservation (including northern Arizona and southern Utah). Along these rides, I couldn't ignore the reservation's poverty and other problems.

We started about one year ago, and we all share a common love for people and a desire to help. I have had to learn fast about non-profit rules and regulations. When we started, my business partner and I decided to use our

yearly advertising budget to do something different. Instead of the usual flyers and mailers that most people throw away, we decided to sponsor a work trip

to help the Navajo people. We purchased t-shirts and stickers to be sold as fundraising items, like seed money to grow something.

For example, a \$20 LFAR T-shirt costs \$7 to make and \$3 to ship (on average). We send the remaining \$10 to the Navajo reservation, or we buy building materials for a project. I'm a carpenter learning to be a non-profit organizer. We function on volunteer labor and we will give 90% to the children and families on the Navajo reservation.

Along his ride across North America, Paul Smith is spreading the word about Lost For A Reason.

Chris Kelly, Paul H. Smith and Ron Grace representing Lost for a Reason, the charity created to support the people of the Navajo Nation.



May 24

Back to solo riding and a day of "helmet time." Those who've ridden long distances know about this. It's just you, the bike and your thoughts. I'm thinking about this new V-Strom.

The bike is approaching 2,000 miles, so I'm beginning to open her up a bit. The suspension is a little looser and I'm experimenting with settings. The new V-Strom 1000 has remarkably improved suspension. It may rival aftermarket offerings.

The front brake will make this bike stop on a dime, it's so positive. I try to use it with just a couple of fingers. And the seat is proving to be a "100 miler." So many seats out there hurt after 50 miles or so. After several hundred miles, every day for several days, I'm impressed. And this comes from a guy who's a seat swapper – always trying to find something better.

Few places in the world are as uniquely beautiful as northern New Mexico. I arrived in Santa Fe just as the sun was surrendering to the evening's stars. The navigation system had run out of juice, and my paper maps weren't all that helpful. Fortunately my smartphone's ability to scour the web saved the day. While searching for a campground, the idea of staying at a hostel emerged. Years ago, when I backpacked around the world, hostels were the hub for many similar travelers. I was only a couple of miles from the Santa Fe International Hostel and after a silly amount of handmade paper-napkin-map juggling, I rolled in and the hostel had a room available; I couldn't believe my luck.

May 27

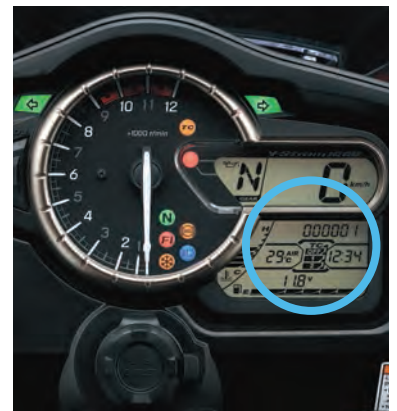
Coming from Southern California, I'd almost forgotten what rain looked like. But after leaving Clovis, N.M. on the way to Austin, Texas – one of my favorite towns – the skies opened up, and to say I got doused would be an understatement. It might be more accurate to say I swam there.

Riding in the wet stuff can be fatiguing. The next day I decided to take it easy with a short haul to Houston. To my surprise, it not only rained, it was all but impossible to stay on the road. Visibility was close to zero. Not even my waterproof gear could hold up to this drencher. But I discovered a long time ago that you just go with the flow (pun intended). What may seem an uncomfortable situation from afar becomes tolerable after you're in it. So I saddled up, rode through the flooded streets back into the barely crawling I-10 traffic, turned on my emergency blinkers and snailed it to Houston.

Honestly, I don't know how the V-Strom took the constant pounding of rain, wind and lakes of water I rode through. And the Bridgestone Battlewing tires clung to the road. I'd kicked in the bike's new Traction Mode and she hung

on like cat claws on a carpet. Amazing, to say the least! It took six-plus hours to make the 150-mile run from Austin to Houston, not bad for zero visibility and riding with several pounds of water saturated into my gear.

Now that I've been here for a day, everyone is asking about the bike. It's a chance to talk about the riding long distances, my thoughts about the bike, and to discuss Lost for a Reason. The idea of riding a motorcycle thousands of miles is more appealing than I would have thought. But for some reason, it's still considered an unusual way to travel.



June 2

I left New Orleans in more rain. Several fellow travelers at the hostel asked, "Are you really gonna ride in that stuff?!" Yep. It's taken years of practice. Two wheels and wet surfaces demand about 4,000-percent more attention and a constant "red alert" style of cautiousness.

Rain riding tips: When you're dry and warm, you're more likely to be alert,

responsive and aware of the surroundings than if you're cold, wet and uncomfortable. I pack a separate rain oversuit because waterproof riding suits won't shed the wet stuff the way a rain oversuit will. Material like Gore-Tex is breathable, but if you hit it with enough water, it'll eventually become overwhelmed, not saturated like normal cloth, but wet nonetheless.



I had just enough dry weather in New Orleans to snap this picture of the V-Strom Adventure on famed Bourbon Street.

June 3

Suzuki's engineers may be building the most reliable motorcycle engines ever made. This thing hasn't even hiccupped since I first hit the starter in Brea, California – highway speed for hours, stop 'n go traffic, blazingly hot desert riding, sticky red sand and gravel from Utah's geological wonders. You can't even drown the V-Strom!

I made it to an amazing motorcycle campground called Two Wheels of Suches (Georgia). It's perfect for everything from individual riders to rally groups. It's also very clean and well thought out. And the road there is like a little bit o' heaven, non-stop twisties, banked curves and tight switchbacks. The scenery is gorgeous, too. It's green, green, green, with little lakes, white fluffy clouds, and nicely cared-for properties. No wonder this is one of North America's motorcycle riding Meccas.

Last year I rode these curves on my BMW R1200GSA, so this gave me a direct comparison with the V-Strom Adventure. Lighter and a bit lower, the V-Strom is much more at home on roads like these and

considerably more fun to ride.

The roads are challenging and technical – no room for daydreaming. This is exactly the riding I love, and a good place to experiment more with the bike's new traction control system. It has three settings: off, 1 and 2. In traction control modes, there's a discernable change in the way the bike handles and responds.

On these twisty and unforgiving mountain roads, I found the high-traction mode gave me more perceptible control. You can ride with it on or off, but it felt like I could get further into lean angles, and braking was more positive. I'll experiment with the other mode later, on gravel roads.

I was looking forward to visiting Riders Hill in Dahlonega,

Geo., a new Suzuki dealer not too far from Suches. Their location is a hangout. They have a snack bar, and the obligatory porch lined with chairs inviting riders to relax, watch the comings and goings of others, and chat with buddies. It's all done with a unique southern style that we don't see very often on the West Coast.



Georgia's Two Wheels of Suches motorcycle campground is recently renovated with clean and comfy facilities. It's a perfect motorcycle escape frequented by friendly riders and surrounded by great roads

» June 9

Last year while in this area, I stayed at Willville, a motorcycle-only campground in southern Virginia. It's the kind of place you look forward to visiting. This quaint and one-of-a-kind location is situated a few miles south of Roanoke near an entrance to the Blue Ridge Parkway – one of the prettier sections of the 450-mile stretch through the stunningly gorgeous motorcycle country.

Willville is owned and operated by Will B. His casual manner and laid-back style add to the fun. He's also a wealth of information on nearby roads and motorcycle-related events, and he knows virtually every rider within hundreds of miles.

Will and George, a couple of expert riders, asked if they could test ride the V-Strom Adventure. I was anxious to hear what they had to say. Both were suitably impressed and rather surprised by the

bike's capabilities – especially its handling and low-rpm acceleration. They were both considering upgrading.

After the demo rides, I packed up and hit the road. The Blue Ridge is so picturesque and fun to ride that you don't want it to end. But if there's a snake in this Eden, it's the deer. The guys back at Willville said to stay off the Parkway around dusk because it's infested with deer. On my run I passed

many of them grazing along the roadside.

I also took the chance to get the bike in for its 5,000-mile service at the Manassas Honda-Kawasaki-Suzuki dealership. I ended up spending the day there, and it was great getting to know Diana Edwards (owner), Greg L'Heureux (service) and Mike Schelin (tech). They reminded me once again that this trip is really about the people along the way.



While camping in Willville, I ran into Julia Burns on her DR650. She's a recent convert into adventure motorcycling, and she's planning a trip to Bolivia.

» June 14

On the road to Rhode Island, I hit mostly drizzling rain and fog. I chose a route that cut through Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut. In the mountain passes outside of Gettysburg, Penn., I hit 100 straight miles of pea soup fog (glad to have LED tail lights). Still, brief glimpses of the mountain landscape made it all worthwhile.

I avoid fast food chains. But on this segment, just after a harrowing foggy ride, I grabbed the first dry and warm place I could find – McDonald's. Normally I would rant about this stop, but something unusual happened. After my oatmeal and coffee, I was saddling up in the rain when I heard someone shout, "Mister!" The gal who'd served me ran out carrying a bag of cookies she prepared for me in case I felt hungry later. Oh, the wonderful folks we meet out there.



» June 15

I couldn't help but notice now that, with some miles on it, the V-Strom seemed to handle even better. Some of that might have been my increased familiarity, but I was impressed by the bike's flawless performance through hour upon hour of pounding rain and scary road conditions.

I made it to Syracuse, New York, at twilight. My rain suit kept me dry, but the boots filled up with the wet stuff. Just as I pulled through the tollbooth of the I-90, the rain stopped. Still, it was far too soggy

to camp, and the hotels were out of my budget. The Syracuse International Hostel was another gem of a find – only \$28 for a dorm bed and all the facilities, kitchen and Wi-Fi in a charming old mansion.

Rising at about 5:30 a.m. I re-packed so my passport and other ID would be readily available at the border. It was only about 250 miles to London, Ontario, Canada, including a pass through Niagara Falls – something you have to see to believe. It defies description by its sheer size and power.



The staff at Rosenau Powersports in Dearborn Heights, Mich., They did the 6,000-mile tire swap to keep the V-Strom running smooth through the rain.



➤ June 28

My next destination was Arvada, Colorado, to visit Ron Grace, the founder of the “Lost for a Reason” charity. By the time I got to Chicago, the rain was really coming down again. Crossing Indiana, Illinois and Iowa turned out to be both wet ‘n dry as I passed through several storms on my westerly route.

Heading west across Nebraska the next day, I was hit by yet another power storm. The cloud formations were crazy and they moved fast! The rain came down so hard I couldn’t see the road, and then golf ball-sized hail pounded the gas station where I was seeking relief below a flimsy overhang.

Just then, a couple in a van parked nearby called me over to “get in!” They were members of a local Harley-Davidson riders club, and their kind offer of shelter came at the perfect time. The storm passed soon, and I gassed up the Adventure and continued on.

The next stop was near Fairplay, Colo. It took me a couple of hours, and the last few miles were on gravel/dirt roads that were fun and also gave me another chance to test the Suzuki’s traction modes. It seems that Traction Mode 2 is best for that type of surface.

My local friend Chris Kelly and I rode from there to nearby Buena Vista, and outside of this town, high up in the neighboring mountains, we found snow and the Continental Divide.

In this Nebraska storm, I just barely made it off the road in time before the wind would have blown me over.



To read the rest of this adventure, log on to SuzukiCycles.com/News to see how Paul made it through the Rocky Mountains, Canada, and Alaska before returning to Southern California. ■

The twisty and tasty switch-back route was great, and the view near the Continental Divide was even better.

