

By Garry A. Nelson #62034

# Basin Motorcycle Works: The Unplanned Stop



Harry has a busy place, currently with a beautiful R69S being restored and two Airhead GS/PDs on the other two racks. In the corner stood a toaster and a K100 waiting for some of Harry's free future time to be another project. Basin has a nice parts department, tires and maintenance supplies, and they perform regular maintenance on new motorcycles sold to customers in the southwest Colorado area. I spent a few minutes discussing my BMW issues with Harry and his mechanics, Keith Ystesund, Norbert Horneff and Mitchell Haupman, picking their knowledgeable brains on problems that I am having with two of my three Airheads.

Harry talked fondly about his first BMW, a \$400 BMW purchased in the late '60s and ridden to Florida. Sometime later, Harry and his friends watched *Easy Rider*, and soon after Harry and his BMW headed to southern California.

The next few years found him working in independent BMW shops on the West Coast. He left the BMW trade for other occupations that kept this perfectionist busy and away from the Teutonic machines for 30-plus years. A 2004 restoration of a 1976 BMW R75/6 reminded Harry how much he enjoyed working on these fine machines; this /6 became the catalyst for the idea of opening his own shop. He did some market research, talked to western Pennsylvania's Gary Smith and Al Vangura about his ideas and soon after opened his business in Durango. After a few years he moved to his current Mancos location.

In combination with the mechanical work and restorations that he and his people perform in Colorado, Basin also has a division called "AdventureRiders Outpost."

The back of an "Outpost" T-shirt outlines its mission: "Information, Accessories and Comradery." This part of the business is a clearing house for all questions that the riders of adventure, dual sport and dual purpose bikes might have in planning their future exploration of the unpaved roads and trails in the Four Corners area.

**WE WERE DRIVING ROUTE 160 WEST** out of Durango, CO, to Mesa Verde National Monument when Susan observed, "There is a motorcycle, a BMW, on top of that building." I glanced up, observed same, and immediately hit the brakes to make a quick right onto the north frontage road in Mancos, CO. It was one of those stops that could have been easily missed but for a great girlfriend who can recognize an airhead BMW sitting atop a building at 60 miles per hour. We had stumbled upon Basin Motorcycle Works, a private BMW shop.

After we entered the shop, I was greeted

by the best looking parts manager that I have ever seen, only to find out Jane Burk was the office manager, who kept the shop running in a professional manner. Harry Hill, the proprietor, soon came out of the workshop and we started discussing BMW motorcycles. It became clear that we had many things in common, including the fact that I live in Pittsburgh, PA, and Harry and I grew up 25 miles apart, I in Blawnox and Harry in Apollo. We also had common BMW friends, including guru Gary Smith and machinist par excellence Al Vangura. The BMW world is indeed a small place.

The Adventure Riders Outpost folks can advise on all aspects of the adventure riding experience, from setting up a machine for off road duty and what gear is necessary when escaping into the Rockies. Harry and his crew are familiar with the Colorado Rockies, Utah's canyon lands, New Mexico's scrubland plateaus and the rules to follow when planning trips into the various Indian reservations and Bureau of Land Management areas that are so frequent in the Southwest. They are concerned in covering the back country in a leisurely pace while enjoying the sights and visiting the Four Corners' out-of-the way wilderness areas.

We had a nice 90-minute visit, during which I observed his people at work and their commitment to the BMW motorcycle community. I was glad that he was doing what he wanted in a location that needed his assistance. We all shook hands, told a few last stories about past motorcycle adventures and said our goodbyes.

I was sitting in my car thinking about the great southwest and the riding opportunities that it provides when Harry came to my car door. He wanted me to see his nicely appointed living quarters, which were contained within the Basin Motorcycle Works building. We again shook hands and I left Mancos, even more jealous than before.

On the plane home I was listing all of our stops in my Moleskin travel notebook: Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Taos, New Mexico; Durango, Silverton, Ouray and Telluride, Colorado. Combining these interesting cities with the national parks, petroglyphs, Bandolier, Pecos, Mesa Verde, Monument Valley and the Four Corners, I concluded that with all of this history and natural beauty, I had enjoyed the one stop that I will remember without referring to my notes—90 minutes spent with Harry Hill and his staff at his Basin Motorcycle Works, Mancos, CO, <http://www.basin-motorcycleworks.com>.

May I come back on two knobby tires. ☺



The staff at Basin Motorcycle Works.

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