

The Western Spirit

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North to Alaska

Block couple rides the rough road on two wheels to America's last frontier

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While Paola sweltered in a heat wave, Mr. and Mrs. Leland Prothe, R2 Paola, made their getaway. Mounting motorcycle gear, camping gear and motorcycle helmets they traveled over 10,000 miles on a motorcycle to Alaska.

Their recent five-week trip took them through rain, drizzle and over 1,200 miles of rocky gravel roads. They set up a tent every night except two when temperatures dipped below 40 degrees.

Yet for the husband and wife team the excursion was not that out of the ordinary for them.

Leland and Sila Prothe have been riding over 100,000 miles all over the country on their motorcycle since 1975 when they joined a motorcycle club.

Mr. Prothe had been riding his motorcycle into Kansas City every day for about seven years, when the two decided to join the BMW Motorcycle Owner's of America club.

A BMW motorcycle is not like any motorcycle. It costs as much as many cars and does not resemble the dirt bikes seen on city streets. BMW's average about 45-50 miles per gallon. After the purchase of their first

BMW, from there the throttle was full speed ahead.

The club has national rallies every summer someplace in the United States and regional rallies about 10 times a year.

Since they joined the club in 1975, they have attended all rallies, which took them to every corner of the United States, except the Southeast.

The club is a way for owners of BMW motorcycles, the Cadillac of motorcycles, to share experiences. Members just pitch a tent at camp sites and visit with members of the club from as far away as Mexico or Guatemala.

"You make friends, see them the next time and before you know it, it gets in your blood," according to Mr. Prothe.

Recently they were named one of the 20 ambassador teams which encourage people to join the about 10,000 member club.

The rallies gave the Prothes something to plan their vacations around.

The last rally in Pineville, Ore. gave them a chance to extend their trip to make the trek to Alaska.

Traveling on the Alcan highway in Canada, though, could make any automobile's ride less than smooth.

The stretch is known for its rocky

stretches which often leave windshields shattered and cars dented.

Yet, Mr. Prothe said the trip caused them little hardship.

He explained that the roads are watered down and given a salt solution before they are graded.

"They can be just like blacktop when they are in good shape," he said.

However, when the roads are in less than good shape, Mr. Prothe said they were driving as slowly as 5 to 10 mph.

When they made the trip in 1972 with their camper he said they experienced more trouble than on their motorcycles.

They haven't experienced much mechanical trouble since they began their travels, but he said they go prepared.

They take along extra parts so when they get stuck in the middle of nowhere, they'll be able to fix the motorcycle themselves.

"If I didn't know anything about how to fix them, we'd be in trouble," he admitted.

While traveling in Alaska, a traveling companion's wheel bearings were causing trouble and Mr. Prothe's condenser went out. But with the help

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Alaska trip

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of some tools and parts, they were back on the road again.

Another time, the Prothes heard their companion yell to them on their citizens' band radio that his windshield had just fallen off on the gravel roads.

Brand new batteries also gave them trouble, when they shook loose on the bikes and had to be refastened.

"We were right out in the middle of nowhere," he said.

Their only accident came in Juno, Alaska when a woman hit their parked motorcycles. However, the damage was slight.

When mechanical difficulties are few, the weather causes the hardships.

Mr. Prothe said rain does sometimes put a damper on their trip, but he said they don't stop and wait for the rain to let up.

"It just makes us miserable," he said.

The two not only travel to national rallies, but spend many weekends on the motorcycle.

When the weekends roll around, they often will leave on an all-night

ride to Texas or Colorado.

"I know it's kind of crazy, but we'll just ride from tank to tank," he said.

Mr. Prothe said he's lucky that his backseat rider doesn't mind the trips.

Mrs. Prothe said on the highway she will often sleep.

"It's just like sleeping in a chair," she said.

She said she enjoys riding on the motorcycle because she can see what is going on around her.

That's also why Mrs. Prothe said she remains just a passenger. She said she will often see women riding motorcycles, but she said it's not for her.

And, Mr. Prothe, agrees with her idea.

"I don't know how I would feel riding on the back," he said.

Their next trip will take them to Tennessee for the national rally and then on to travel the southeast corner of the United States. Someday they would even like to travel in Europe after purchasing a BMW motorcycle from the Germany plant.

Because for both, their excursions are enjoyable.

"Some people like flying airplanes. We love motorcycles," he said.

On the road

Silva Prothe watches wild sheep on the Alcan Highway above. At right, the Prothes pose on their BMW motorcycle after they returned from their trip to Alaska.





Alcan casualty

The infamous Alcan Highway through Canada to Alaska claims another victim. Leland Frothe of Black here helps a motorcycle friend from Louisa repair a wheel. Leland and Silas Frothe,

veterans of many cross-country cycle trips, completed their 18,000-mile adventure up north last week without any major mechanical problems. Silas took this picture early this month.