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Confessions of a Testosterone-Drunk Jackass

Pat Sherwood isn't lost in Central America and doesn't want your god-damn help.

By Pat Sherwood

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Ian Wittenber

“Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of experience comes from bad judgment.” —Seen on a bathroom wall in a mom-and-pop breakfast diner in Alpine, Wyo.

1 of 3

Mistakes made and lessons learned.

As I write this, we have been living on motorcycles for 64 days and covered nearly 8,000 miles across seven U.S. states and nine countries. It has been amazing and overwhelmingly positive. I could lie to help my pride and say that we've been prepared for everything and nothing has gone wrong, but that's just not true. So, I'm going to open myself up to the Internet world of experts by being honest about some things (not everything) I've messed up.

Know When You Are in Over Your Head

On this trip, I've been lost in a city and unable to find a CrossFit affiliate or hostel even though I had the address. This has happened several times. We'd ride through a city only to find out we'd gone 20 minutes in the wrong direction. Of course, it was usually raining and all we wanted to do was find shelter from the storm. At times like those, I'm reduced to an angry child. I hate getting lost. I just want to scream, take my toys and go home. This happened just yesterday trying to find CrossFit Quito in Ecuador. I felt like a loser. How the hell can I navigate across the entire country on back roads, find the city, and then not be able to find the damn affiliate? I had to ask for help. I swallowed my pride and asked a taxi driver to guide us to the address. We followed the taxi on our motorcycles and paid him when we arrived. Worked like a champ.

Perhaps the biggest near disaster caused by my amazing male pride happened on the outskirts of Cali, Colombia. After some time on a dirt road, I got a nail in my rear tire and it went flat. Ian Wittenber and I were stranded on a desolate road in a very bad area, and it was getting dark. Changing the tire in the dark with a headlamp would have taken me a couple of hours or more. The Colombian police passed by about 10 minutes later and stopped to offer us help. They said that they could get us a free tow truck and bring the bike to a tire shop in a small town about 5 km away. The shop would have it changed and we would be back on the road light years before I could have us mobile again. What did I say to the cop? "No thanks, I will do it myself."

Why would I say that? Because I'm a jackass and full of testosterone. Luckily, the cop—who knew we would likely get robbed or killed hanging out on the road for hours in the dark—refused to take no for an answer. He asked about five more times until I finally said yes. Thank God we accepted help. We were fucked and I knew it. I just did not want to admit it. We got the bike towed, and we were back riding in no time.

While I'm being honest, here's another huge mistake on my part: I did not practice changing a tire on the Kawasaki KLR-650s before we left on a 100-day trip. Yes, I know this is beyond stupid. Please feel free to remind me in the comments. The other bikes I've had used tubeless tires, so taking the actual wheel off, breaking the tire free of the rim, changing the tire, resealing the bead, etc., was something I've never done. Ready to laugh at me even more? I watched YouTube videos on how to do it before I left and said, "Well, that looks pretty straightforward. We should be fine." Truth be told, it is straightforward. But that does not mean it does not require practice to execute efficiently. I was an idiot.

Proper Gear Would Be Helpful

I knew we would be riding through a "decent" (massive understatement) amount of rain on this trip. Due to the time of year we chose to travel, it was going to be the rainy season in several countries. I'd ridden in the rain before in the U.S., so no worries, right? However, in the U.S. I usually have the opportunity to get off the highway at the next exit or easily pull over somewhere to seek shelter from the storm. Plus, I was never really that far from home or a place where I could get warm and dry.

The gear I bought was similar to what I use in the States. The riding jacket is mesh for the hot days and has a zip-in/zip-out waterproof liner. Excellent. We also got high-quality riding pants that were water repellent, which is not waterproof, but I figured we would be good to go. I've ridden bikes for years, and I love to ride with Chuck Taylors on my feet and Mechanix gloves on my hands. And yes, I know the Chucks will not help my ankles in a wreck, but they are comfy and I like them. So, I brought my Chucks and Mechanix gloves.

We've been in conditions from hot as hell in the desert of Mexico to freezing cold in the Andes at 9,000 feet or more. The relentless freezing-cold rain had us soaked to the bone in no time. The gloves offered no protection from being cold and wet. My hands lost sensation and became dead and numb, and it's tough to operate the clutch, gas and front brake when you can't use your fingers. The Chucks got soaked, and my feet turned to blocks of ice. The water found the seam where the jacket met the pants, and after an hour my lower body was soaked to the bone as if I was riding in shorts. My legs were jackhammering from the cold.



Proper gloves would have prevented frozen hands, but proper gloves are for sissies.

All of this happened day after day in the middle of nowhere. There was no exit on which to pull off. There was no shelter to seek. Often our shelter was another four or five hours away. Our only option was to ride in the cold, pouring rain. We would pull over when we lost sensation in our hands, then put our hands in our armpits until they warmed up enough again to press on.

We tried to be “tough” and rode like this for a few countries and several thousand miles, until we finally admitted one day that we could not endure it for the rest of the trip. We had hit our breaking point. It was too miserable and hard. We went to a fancy motorcycle store and bought high-quality rain gear built for torrential rain, including gloves and boots.

The next time it rained, instead of enduring it like a couple of tough guys, we put on our fancy rain suits. I thought we looked ridiculous. As I suited up the first time, I felt like we weren’t being rugged adventurers anymore. We were one step closer to being the old dude riding the Honda GoldWing with a radio and cup holder. All those feelings disappeared immediately once it began to rain and we actually stayed bone dry. Holy shit! Riding in the rain no longer reminded me of jack hammering in the cold ocean during Hell Week! It was amazing! Why did we not do this sooner? Because I’m a slow learner and pride is a bitch.

Work Smarter, Not Harder

I tend to try to run around the wall instead of through it as the days tick by on this trip. What you can endure for a couple of hours or even a couple of days might prove unbearable for a longer duration of time.

The overall lesson? Don’t wait until you crash and burn to make a necessary change. Assess your situation, look forward and make the appropriate decisions.



About the Author

Pat Sherwood works for CrossFit as a flowmaster and member of the Media Team. He’s done just under 200 seminars all around the globe for CrossFit HQ and competed in the 2009 CrossFit Games. He hates HSPU and loves ice cream.