





SENTINELS OF THE SPORT

Inside The Second Annual Trails Preservation Alliance Colorado 600

Story By Chris Denison • Photos By Chris Denison And Kevin Foley

Some say that achieving perfection is an impossible goal, and up until recently I would have agreed with that statement completely. Until, that is, I found myself riding on what can only be described as the perfect single-track trail. Nestled high in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, this particular mountain route was a twisting channel of moist loam mixed with traction-boosting rocks, each varying in size from as small as a hand grenade to as big as a bike stand. The trail flowed effortlessly over the high-altitude terrain through stunning meadows and massive stands of aspen that gradually thinned as we neared timberline to reveal fluffy, cartoon-like clouds drifting across the ever-so-blue sky. As I roosted along the handle-bar-wide trail with an immovable smile on my face and a group of riding buddies in tow, it struck me as both ironic and fitting that the purpose of this trip was far greater than to simply take advantage of the epic conditions.

The truth is, we came here to save the sport.

Trails Preservation 101

Just two years running but already a staple summer pilgrimage among hard-core off-road riders, the Colorado 600 is not your average organized trail ride. Rather, the event serves as a multiday symposium to educate on the main issues impacting motorized recreation and to enable riders to better assist OHV recreation groups in protecting access to public lands. Put on by the Trails Preservation Alliance—a 100 percent volunteer organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the sport of trail riding—in cooperation with the famed Sidewinders MC, the Colorado 600 is essentially a weeklong symposium in how to become a responsible, influential off-road enthusiast. Of course, each day is filled with epic trail riding, with routes available for everyone from AA pros to mellow beginners and dual-sport riders.

The Colorado terrain is tough, but BRP's Jim Rios isn't scared to tackle the rocks.



Although *Dirt Rider's* participation at the Colorado 600 seems like a natural fit, the trip simply would not have happened without the help of a few key people. TPA's Don Riggle, a hardened Vietnam veteran with a passion for dirt bikes, made it clear several months before that I was going to be there to cover this must-ride event for the magazine. Similarly, Billet Racing Product's Jim Rios went out of his way to make the ride happen, not only offering up a pristine KTM 450 EXC to use but also decking it out with the necessary modifications, loading the bike and me in the boxvan and driving us all over a large portion of the square state. Last but not least to step up were Kenda and Cycra, two enthusiast-driven companies that wanted to contribute to the TPA's cause but couldn't physically be there to support the ride. Each showed their support for the sport by making valuable contributions in the name of *Dirt Rider*.



THE BIKE

Colorado 600 participants may bring more than one bike, but all machines must be 100 percent street-legal in Colorado with a 100-mile range and a 96-dBA maximum noise level. BRP supplied a KTM 450 EXC trail weapon for me to test, and the bike was an outstanding steed for the demanding conditions found on the ride.

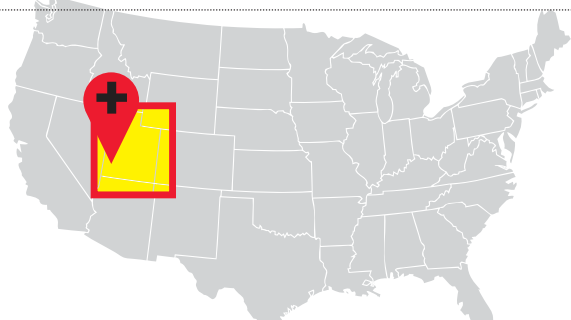
Visit www.brpmoto.com to learn more, and check out the full test of this bike on www.dirtrider.com.



A segment of the Colorado 600 poses on top of one of many scenic peaks along the ride.

Each morning, the Colorado 600 begins bright and early with a wholesome preride breakfast followed by a quick presentation from a guest speaker. As 75 anxious riders shoveled down pancakes and eggs on the first morning, Riggle addressed the crowd with a little info on what the Trails Preservation Alliance is all about. A grassroots, 501c3 organization, the TPA is at the forefront of protecting trail access for OHV enthusiasts. Riggle and company keep relentless watch on current events and are constantly engaged in legal battles, trail maintenance projects and innovative efforts to raise awareness and educate more riders in the preservation of off-road riding. One point that was made obvious in hearing Riggle talk is that the TPA's aim is to engage the large numbers of enthusiasts who aren't doing enough or, worse yet, don't do anything at all. It's up to the current generation to protect what little public lands that we riders still have access to, and to do this with lawyers and consultants is not cheap—Riggle maintains that we're going to have to really fight to protect our rights. Later in the week, one of the TPA's volunteers recounted how Riggle had actually given *back* donations to riders who had sent \$25 donations to the TPA. "You drive a \$50,000 truck and own \$30,000 worth of motorcycles," Riggle told one potential donor. "If protecting the sport for the future is worth none of your time and only \$25 of your money, I think you're better off keeping this."

GENERAL INFO



EVENT NAME: Trails Preservation Alliance Colorado 600

Web addresses: www.colorado600.org, www.coloradotpa.org

Event sponsors and supporters: KTM, Touratech, MSR, Texas Sidewinders Motorcycle Club, FMF, Motorex, Dunlop, Smith, Butler Motorcycle Maps, Motion Pro, Spider Grips and Cyclo Active.

To learn more about the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition, the Trails Preservation Alliance and the American Motorcyclist Association, visit www.cohvco.org, www.coloradotpa.org and www.americanmotorcyclist.com

WHAT WE TESTED

1 Kenda Parker DT Tires: See your local dealer

One of the most dirt-friendly DOT tires on the market, the Kenda Parker DTs are an excellent option for riders looking for a street-legal way to tread off-road. Durability is outstanding, as the Parker DTs held up without chunking or unnatural wear through rocks, asphalt, mud, hardpack and gravel. The braking edge is increased when run in the "hard" direction, and the shoulder knobs offer great predictability and control, especially on the front. I had a few pinch flats that were caused by sharp rocks, though this can likely be attributed to running stock inner tubes. My only complaint about this tire is that the rear had more side-to-side slip on acceleration in wet conditions than I would have liked, but for a DOT tire the performance was more than satisfactory.



2 Cycra Hand Guards With Shield Stickers: \$109.95

Good hand protection is essential when riding gnarly off-road sections, and Cycra's were an outstanding solution to keeping my fingers from getting dinged up on the trail. Easy to install and simple to adjust, the Cycra setup fit perfectly on my stock KTM handlebar. I loved the full-coverage design and wide shield, both of which were more than capable of beating back tight trees and branches. The stickers gave the set a custom look, and even after a fairly big crash and several hundred miles of trail they still cleaned up to an almost-new condition. This is money well spent.



3 Ogio Dakar 1950 Pack: \$104.99

When carrying 20-plus pounds of camera gear as well as tools, snacks, water and miscellaneous junk, a good pack is crucial for enjoying a ride. Luckily, the Ogio 1950 is designed for people who overpack, like I do, and I was able to carry my gear with ease throughout the entire ride. The 70-ounce hydration bladder kept thirst at bay, but the real gem of this pack is the large main pocket that fit jacket sleeves, camera gear and a bottle to use for fuel transfers. I liked the chest and waist straps and was stoked with the build quality, although I put a small carabiner on the main zipper to keep my stuff from falling out. This pack can take way more abuse than I was able to throw at it, and that is plenty.





Yamaha's Kevin Foley tackles a high Colorado stream.



Something For Everyone

In order to accommodate the wide range of ability levels of all the riders at the Colorado 600, a handful of knowledgeable guides led appropriate routes, from easy dual-sport to EnduroCross-tough. My first day's ride was a snaking 115-mile run highlighted by jaw-dropping views and endless rocks, all led by local legend Jeff Slavens. A KTM suspension guru with a vast knowledge of the local trail system, Slavens made it clear at the start of the ride that there would be no trophies for first and no prizes for riding well, but there would be a jackass award given to anyone who did something stupid enough to require getting yelled at on the trail. Of course, Slavens was talking to some of the most trail-conscious individuals in the country, and there was not a single shortcut switchback, missed turnoff or breach in etiquette during the entire ride—or week, for that matter. Additionally, I was pleasantly surprised by how skilled the group was as a whole, and thanks to this we were able to cover a lot of difficult ground in a relatively short amount of time. Similarly, I spoke to a number of riders who were relative beginners on single-track who also had great experiences with being paired up with riders of similar abilities. That's the beauty of the Colorado 600; it covers riders of all types and skill levels.



By far one of the most powerful talks of the week came from John Bongiovanni, Chairman of the Board of the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition, or COHVCO. An articulate, intelligent off-roader with a background in information technology, Bongiovanni understands the challenges that riders are facing and has a clear grasp of what must be done to grow the effort. "It's bigger than just awareness," Bongiovanni explained to his riveted audience. "We have awareness in a small group, but what we need is the leverage of a larger group who should care—for example, the 200,000 riders in this state alone who use and enjoy the trail systems. We have a smaller number than that signed up as members of COHVCO, but we need more people to make it work."

Bongiovanni then introduced the concept of Pressure Politics, which can be described as "a constant, consistent message from people who are astute enough to know the vocabulary and can write an articulate message stating that OHVs have as much right to land as those who would try to take it away." When asked if off-roaders have any hope of winning the land-access battle, Bongiovanni didn't hesitate to answer in the affirmative. "It's very workable, and the reason I'm so confident we can do things is we've got the leverage of new technology and social networking that allows us to broadcast messages more quickly than we ever have before. Five years ago the concept of Facebook was so new that it wasn't anything, but now a single celebrity can make one statement on Facebook and generate \$1,000,000 in a day. That's leverage. We need that same kind of voice."

The Riding

Great guides like David Lykke and Scott Bright, two AA pros who have both represented Team USA at the International Six Days Enduro, made the riding at the Colorado 600 all that much better. The fourth day began with a quick breakfast and no briefing—everyone



David Lykke stretches his AA legs and gets back up to speed on two wheels.



was determined to get right out on the trail. Our group started with 15 riders, but after a few flats and difficult trail splits, that number shrank to 12 as a few riders bailed out to take more fun routes home. Shortly after lunch we headed into a menacing rainstorm and had four more riders take off when lightning struck almost on top of our heads (several of us were shocked through our levers!). At the next split, a group of six sopping riders decided to forfeit the tough way home in favor of returning to the hotel for cold drinks in a hot tub, leaving just myself and Bright to tackle a notoriously tricky section with an unsuitably easy trail name. We started off into the rain and immediately hit several miles of Erzberg-like rocks leading up and over a high pass. Somewhere near the top, I had the misfortune of collecting yet another pinch flat that forced us to do another tire change. Kneeling in that rock garden holding down the bead of the tire while Bright worked the rim, tire irons in hand with lightning popping all around us and rain pouring on our heads, is something that I will never forget. We quickly got back on the trail and spent another two and a half hours bouncing off of wet rocks, logs and roots before hitting a dirt road and charging 15 miles back to town in the frigid rain. Cold, wet, hungry and tired, neither Scott nor I could wipe the grins off our faces as we parked the bikes after such a rewarding day.





12,968 feet above sea level is a loooooong way up!



Starlight, Scott Bright, first Gas Gas I've seen tonight.

Making A Difference

It was clear the Colorado 600 is more than just six days of epic trail riding; it truly is a symposium where riders can hear from experts in advocacy, learn about current issues and develop skills that can lead to a more positive future for the sport. Plans are already underway for the Third Annual Colorado 600, but the TPA has stated that the 75-rider cap will again be enforced. Whether or not you have any intention of ever participating in the Colorado 600 or riding in the state, I challenge each and every one of you to get involved in one way or another. Be proactive. Increase your education. Influence your sphere. Join the AMA, COHVCO and the TPA, and stay up to date on the current threats to your right to ride. Make no mistake: The threats are greater than they ever have been before.