



Embracing the Unfamiliar



One Man's Experience in the Dakar Rally 2013

While most people who are close to a milestone birthday throw a party. Bill Whitacre of Boise, Idaho, knew he wanted something different, something meaningful that would both challenge him and benefit others. That goal translated into taking the "ride of [his] life" last January by participating in the Dakar Rally—a 4,300 mile ride on a motorcycle, while simultaneously raising funds and awareness for one of his favorite charities.

"This fit the challenge, the adventure, my interest in Dakar and my passion for adventure motorcycling," said Whitacre. While preparing for the ride, an idea came to him to use the ride as a platform to raise funds for a charity near and dear to him, the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Idaho.

"At the same time, my friend, Jim Hyde of RawHyde Adventures was putting together his team of riders, so it all just came together," said Whitacre. He was in good company—Hyde is an off-road endurance expert. His company runs off-road training centers in California and Colorado.

Traveling off-road for 15 days through three countries on a motorcycle requires a lot of tenacity, patience, and endurance. And those who rode in the 2013 Dakar Rally have plenty of all of that.

But according to Whitacre, that's nothing compared to the courage families need to overcome the challenge of a desperately sick child. Many of those families are helped by the Ronald McDonald House, which provides resources, comfort, care and housing near the hospital where the children undergo their treatment.

The thought of helping Ronald McDonald House help families in need fended off a case of the nerves. Whitacre was committed, excited even, to face the fear of the unknown.

"I'm attracted to the unfamiliar and the uncertainties. This mix just worked," he said. "I just didn't know what it was going to be like and 'allowing for not knowing' was very exciting."

*Whitacre with one of the massive trucks
BMW 1200 GSA*

Fun Facts

- Miles Riding: 4,300 miles
- Average MPG: 39.8
- Average Speed: 39.7 mph
- Days Riding: 15
- Average Da/7y Mileage: 286
- Dollars raised for the Ronald McDonald House: \$27,145
- Families who will benefit from donation: +600

"After seeing the children of Peru, Chile and Argentina, I'm a believer...if we



Whitacre took this photo of two small Dakar observers along the route.



There were days, and particularly nights, of riding where the heat, rain, sand, dust nearly overwhelmed Whitacre, but it was still always exciting, he said. "Every day delivered something new, but the overall theme was consistent with the 'adventure' of it all."

Hyde's experience and expertise made the ride flow smoothly, with the RawHyde support crew moving the team's gear, equipment, and mechanical every day along the route.

The Adventure

Whitacre's biggest eye-opener of the Dakar was to experience the back world of Latin America. "Moving every day with The Dakar was huge and it was fantastic, but the places that I got to see and the faces that I

had smiling at me became an equal part of the experience," he said. He took particular interest in the small villages and their citizens, who lined the streets to cheer on the Rally. "Everyone was so appreciative and excited," he said. "They loved meeting anyone with the Dakar and getting their pictures taken with us."

Throughout his adventures, Whitacre was constantly reminded of his goal: raise \$18,000 for the Ronald McDonald House. Before, during, and after the ride, Whitacre rallied his friends and family to donate. He posted daily updates and photos on his blog, www.wheresbillwhitacre.com so followers could track his accomplishments, both in miles finished and dollars raised.

"Every single day, the experience was unbelievable to ride with Dakar, experience the people, see dramatic

Starting Out

Resolved to raise \$18,000, equivalent to one year of food and household expenses for the Ronald McDonald House, he shipped his BMW 1200 GSA to the beginning of the ride in Lima, Peru. The bike's 8.5 gallon tank, knobby tires, GPS, electronic suspension, and fuel injection are ideal for long distances of grueling terrain like the route of the Dakar.

Starting in Lima and ending in Santiago, Chile, Bill traveled off-road on his bike with his team through three countries and rugged conditions including high altitudes in the Andes, sand in the Atacama Desert, rain, dust, wind, and traffic.

The required day-to-day endurance left him exhausted, yet exhilarated throughout the brutal routes.

"Every single night I went to bed totally wasted of energy and every single morning, I was thrilled to get started all over again," he said.



The Route :

In the end, Whitacre ushered in his 60th birthday by completing the "ride of his life" and raising \$27,145 for the Ronald McDonald House.



backcountry of Latin America, and watch the donations come in for the Ronald McDonald House," he said. "It was fantastic to have this happen every single day. From the seriously sick children, their families, again, thanks so much for the support. After seeing the children of Peru, Chile and Argentina, I'm a believer...if we get the children right, we get the world right. The health and welfare of our children are a primary and foundational need of our world. Ronald McDonald House is moving around the world meeting these incredible needs."

Observations on the Final Stretch: In Whitacre's Words

"Our last day of this 4,300 mile, three-country nomadic Dakar adventure ended today. It was everything that I had expected, some that I never expected and a refreshing perspective on experiencing worlds that could only be imagined.

The last timed event or 'special' was to be held a couple hundred miles north of Santiago. The ending was just outside of a small village and the crowds came out to watch. It was a great setting with the locals camping,

picnicking, grilling and cheering. The Dakar is this connection where their world is part of the biggest stage in racing. With the last event in the bag, the racers took extra time to entertain and sign autographs. Anyone and everyone had their chance to have 'uno photo' with a racer! There were even the showmen, like Robby Gordon, who got on top of their car and tossed what looked to be players' cards, with his photo, into the crowd!

As I stood and observed all of this, I noticed a young mother with an 8-or 10-year-old son in a wheelchair. They were back out of the crowds, consuming the bright sun and dust, just taking everything in. The young boy had a look of amazement and the mother seemed to be content with being just back from the mayhem of the fans. I observed them for a while and went over to a street vendor that was selling Dakar decals, purchased one and handed it to the young boy. This Dakar decal helped complete his day. His mother must have pushed his wheelchair through rock, silt, and sand for at least a mile, but she was going to give her severely challenged son the experience of The Dakar. Their expressions at first seemed to reflect confusion, and then quickly switched to genuine de-

light and appreciation. There was no verbal language but all three of us understood what just happened.

I walked back through the crowds and watched the trucks come in for just a few minutes and then headed back to my teammates. The boy and his mother were gone, but I didn't get a photo because it didn't fit the moment. Still, I will never forget this.

Editor's Note:

This Article was written by Sydney Sallabanks, who works for Bill Whitacre. You can read more about Bill's adventures riding the Dakar from his blog at:

<http://wheresbillwhitacre.com>