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So you think you can ride do you...

Words by **Watty Watson**, pictures by **Jaco Kirsten**

So you think you know how to ride a bike properly... But, oh, how the bubble bursts if the contrary is proved! It was a real wake-up call for me when I was invited to a BMW off-road course recently.

Let me put you in the picture: I received an e-mail from BMW Motorrad SA with my itinerary, starting with an introductory course on the Friday, followed by a proficiency course on the Saturday and ending by Sunday lunchtime. The correspondence stated that the venue will be Mountain Pastures Private Game Reserve and San Valley Mountain Retreat, luxury accommodation and fully catered - does this sound cool or what?

I left home at 7am, waving 'Her Indoors' and the Bulldog goodbye with enthusiasm in anticipation of the adventure to follow. The day started off at 25°C and things could only get hotter.

Prince Albert Pass is stunning at this time of the morning and serves as a good warm up ride. Mountain Pastures is situated between Avontuur and Uniondale on the De Hoop road, and when I arrived at the venue I was not warmed up, but rather boiling over from the heat.

I met the instructor and my fellow 'I-know-how-to-ride' students and we had a lekker breakfast, a bit of a lecture, and then all hell broke loose.

We were taken to the practice track to start, what was later dubbed, 'basics'. The instructor was Jan 'Staal' du Toit - I'm sure this ou was a "korporaal" in the army...



Jan 'Staal' du Toit

The course focused on technical ability and balance - we had to stand on the pegs for an awful long time, and as someone had to be first to fall, I duly obliged by going over while trying to negotiate some cones. And so a weekend of picking up bikes off the dirt started.



Negotiating the cones

By the end of the day we were huffing and puffing from picking up bikes that weigh 250kg plus. Everyone, although dead tired, was satisfied and learned a great deal after the first day.

Saturday morning greeted us with stiff arms, legs, etc. (like the proverbial honeymoon). The day carried on much along the same lines: lots of falling, sweating and swearing, and let's not forget the huffing and puffing.

Staal taught us to jump and ride through dongas, sand, water, klippe and the likes. By the end of the day I was so knackered, I could hardly walk. I must say that this was the most physically demanding thing that I have done since my basic training in the Navy.

Saturday evening was a subdued affair, without the partying of the night before. On Sunday morning we went for an outride to test our newfound skills. For the first time we could enjoy the venue, spotting eland, zebra, and springbok, among others.

A brunch for the troop was laid out under a poplar bush - once again of the finest. Back at the lodge we received our certificates, and exchanged business cards with all the new mates to mark the end of a great weekend.

All participants, except one, had a spill - but that did not last long, as the new skills took over and on the way home we picked Riaan up on a corner where he over-cooked.

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