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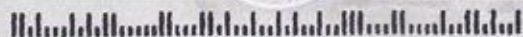
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JULY 2007
BMW OWNERS NEWS

Feasting on Asphalt



CATCHING UP WITH Alton Brown

By Stephen Burns #111334

The Owners News caught up with the creator of the Food Network's *Good Eats* and *Feasting on Asphalt*, the legendary Alton Brown.

Owners News: Many of these questions came from members on the BMW MOA Forum. Let's get to the basics. So what have you been up to lately?

Alton: I just came back from New York where I finished 20 new episodes of *Iron Chefs of America*, which is another series that I do on Food Network...I was there for three weeks and change. It's a huge undertaking. And I'm working right now on getting ready to start shooting another set of *Good Eats* episodes in about a week and a half that will take me almost to the end of the year.

ON: How did you become interested in motorcycling?

Alton: I've been into motorcycling all my life, I just didn't always have a motorcycle. I remember paying some obscenely small amount of money to a friend when I was a kid to buy this little

I turned 40, I went to motorcycle school and I still go back for MSF. Hopefully I'm going to chisel out enough time to start doing track day classes which I've not been able to. I've had to cancel about three times now because I just don't have the time for it.

ON: So you commute a lot then?

Alton: Everyday. If I can...my first day any place that I have to do, the first question is can I get there on a bike and how long will it take. You know, I would rather be on the road for seven hours than on an airplane for one.

ON: When you jumped back into motorcycling, did you purchase a BMW right away?

Alton: My first bike was not a BMW. My first bike was a Suzuki SV650 which I had for about four months before I had

was kind of superfluous; it wasn't sporty enough to be a sport bike and it really wasn't a tour bike. So, I sold that and I bought an LT and I'm really happy with that decision because the LT is actually a tremendously fun motorcycle to ride.

ON: So the LT, the choice after the accident? There wasn't much damage to the RT, was there?

Alton: There wasn't a lot...about \$3,000 worth. The fairing mounts were bent, and I ripped off a mirror. Nothing, you know, it was the fairing mounts that were the problem. The bike was perfectly operational.

ON: Did you leave it in Vegas?

Alton: I had to leave it in Vegas. It got shipped back to Atlanta because I had to keep shooting and there was no one to ride it and we did not know until it got



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beat up Benelli motorcycle. There was never a title or anything, you know. I had to hide it in a friend's barn because my parents wouldn't let me touch anything that was fun and had a motor; you know, go-carts, motorcycles, anything. Then I didn't own another motorcycle until I turned 40. I followed the sport. I kept up with it but I always kind of believed deep down that I would [get killed on a bike]. I thought, oh God, I'll just mangle myself so I'm this hideous, deformed monster, not that I'm that great to look at right now. I made a deal with my wife that if I still really wanted to pursue it when I turned 40, that I would have full blessing to pursue it with due vigor. The only kind of hard and fast rule that my wife had was that I had wear full protective gear at all times all year round no matter where I was or what I was doing, which I had no trouble with anyway. So the day

my first BMW. I had an R1100RT and then I bought an R1150GS while I still had the RT.

ON: So I hear there's a K12R in the barn?

Alton: At home right now is a K1200R and a K1200 LT. I traded in...I had - it was kind of a weird succession. I've gone through so many bikes. I had the RT and I had my 1150 Adventure and the 1150 I just kind of decided was just too big and heavy and I wanted something lighter. So I got a Ducati for awhile. And I rode the Ducati for awhile and had real problems with that bike. It just doesn't suit me. The engine generates way too much heat up through the seat in the summer time for Atlanta and I didn't enjoy it so I got rid of that and I decided to test ride the K1200R and immediately fell in love with it. But once I got it, I started sensing that the RT

back to Atlanta what kind of structural damage might have been involved. It hit pretty hard. So we decided nobody's going to ride this bike until it's been looked over by BMW of Atlanta. So luckily somebody from BMW Las Vegas came out, got it, and shipped it back to Atlanta for me. I had to keep shooting, so I had to ride in the car the rest of the way, which really pissed me off.

ON: Do you like to ride alone or in small groups?

Alton: I first and foremost like riding alone. Part of the thing that I like so much is it allows me to be as anti-social as I truly am. I'm kind of a lone wolf that way. I don't mind riding in small groups, though, because it allows you to be together alone which I do like. I don't ride in clusters. I'm not part of the hive, you know. But it's nice at the end

Alton Brown

of the day to compare notes and it's certainly nice sometimes in the twistlers if you're with a rider who's better than you or at least as good as you to have a little friendly sense of competition going. By and large I think what I appreciate most about motorcycling is the solitude.

ON: Does your penchant for cooking and kitchen gadgets and do-it-yourself solutions carry over into your riding and wrenching habits?

Alton: Yeah, it does. I demand so much out of the motorcycles that I ride and I think that's one of the reasons that I ride BMW's. I really enjoy the sense of engineering refinement and execution that I don't want to mess with the bikes. The only thing that I've really done to mess with motorcycles is finding ways to cook stuff on them, but I don't tinker with them much. I read about how they work. I like to understand how they work, but I really like the mechanics at my dealership. They're seven minutes from my house so I tend to not mess with it. I'll go watch them mess with it and I hang around in the shop a lot, but I'm not going to do it because I want it done right and I know I can't do it. I'll fix a tire, for gosh sakes. I mean, I'm not helpless by any stretch of the imagination. I can make on-the-road repairs if I need to, but by and large I like watching people that really know they're doing do what they do.

ON: What's your favorite motorcycle piece of equipment that you own, one of your farkles?

Alton: Whether it counts as a farkle or not, I really do love the Autocom communication system. That's a beautiful thing and when we're on the road like with *Feasting on Asphalt*, that was something that just functioned flawlessly.

ON: Do you use a radar detector or GPS?

Alton: No. You know what? I will use a GPS to get myself out of trouble; otherwise, I like getting lost way too much to follow a GPS. I will turn one on to get me out of something or if I'm in strange city I will use the GPS. I have a Garmin that I like but I will generally only turn it on if like if I'm in...I used it in St. Louis (on the way to Ted Drewes Frozen Custard),

for instance, trying to get to a particular place because I really didn't know the city and I got in at night and I didn't have time to really look at a map. When you get into a city, it actually becomes dangerous not knowing exactly where you're going. So that's about the only time I use them.

ON: Do you listen to music?

Alton: I used to. I don't anymore and I don't know why I stopped. For one thing it's illegal in Georgia but that probably didn't prevent me. For one reason, I did that for about a year and I kind of got out of it and I'm not really sure why I decided not to do that anymore. I don't let phone calls come in when I'm on there either.

ON: Do you think there's a link between riding and cooking?

Alton: I think there are certain cross-overs. A lot of the motorcyclists I know are very into food. They're also into a certain sense of independence which goes with my kind of cooking which is more based on self-reliance than relying on things like recipes or trends or anything like that. I think there's something deep down in bikers and people that are real cooks that appreciates self reliance. The part of me that is the best

cook is also the part of me that's a motorcyclist. I would say that in me those two things are highly developed parts of my personality along with being a dad and husband, hopefully, and not so much a businessman. I'm a pretty crappy businessman. So I think that's it's not unusual to see those things crossover. Very rarely do you find a motorcyclist who just says, ah, I don't like food very much. You just don't see that very often, certainly not in BMW riders.

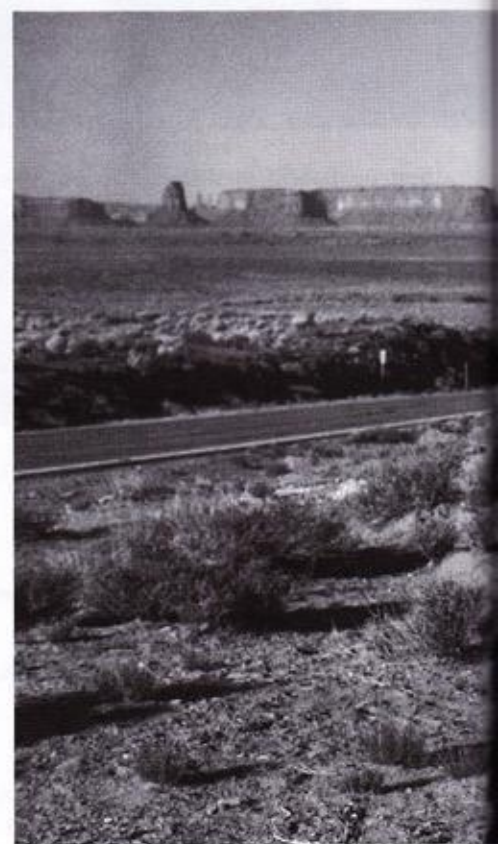
ON: Do you cook on the engine in the box?

Alton: Yeah, yeah, I do. As a matter of fact, I have a manifold cooker strapped to the headers on my K-bike right now because there's just enough clearance. I've got Akrapovic and pipes and the way the titanium pipes kind of come down and wrap over, there's a beautiful little space there. So I can take advantage of the heat coming off all four pipes.

ON: The Aerostich catalog arrives in the mail. How excited do you get?

Alton: It's like being an 18-year-old boy and getting a hold of your dad's Playboy. Maybe not the same end results but pretty gosh darn excited. To me it's like when I was a kid we all got the Sears Ro-

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buck catalog before Christmas time and you go through the toy section and kind of think over your strategy for what you were going to ask for and circle things, then erase things, then dog-ear pages, then categorize and number. That's me with the Aerostich catalog.

ON: *Since BMW riders tend to be ride-to-eaters and long distance ones at that, do you use travel as a way to seek unusual regional dishes and food made from remarkable local ingredients?*

Alton: Absolutely. It is the great joy of travel in a way because you can ride somewhere and see a sight that tells you about the geography and perhaps a little bit about the culture, but nothing tells you more than food. And nothing connects you to people better than food. I mean anywhere or anytime I travel, I'm looking for not just the unusual and the novel, but the authentic. I am very interested in people that make something that is authentic, and I don't care what it is. I could never own a Japanese cruiser, for instance, because it's inauthentic to me.

ON: *In riding we often say that the ride is the destination. Would you agree that this is similar to cooking that the preparation of the meal is where the real*

enjoyment occurs or is it just about the eating?

Alton: It is absolutely true. What ties true cooks to motorcycling, which is the sheer act of doing it is the destination; it is its own reward. I would cook even if I never got to eat what I cook because of the process and that's why I tell people, look, you know, even if it's a week where the only motorcycling I got was commuting, I have the best commute of anyone on earth because I'm on a motorcycle and it doesn't matter where I'm going. Every time I do it, it's a wonderful thing. I think cooking should be the same way.

ON: *What is your preferred method for making coffee when camping, and what is your favorite roast of coffee.*

Alton: I've moved away from dark roasts. Our culture's been so overwhelmed with the Starbucks approach: take a bean, burn the bean, grind the bean. I'm far more of what we'd call a city roast which is more of a medium roast kind of guy. When I'm riding I like percolators, and they're the slowest. It's definitely the most kind of demanding from resources standpoint, but man do I love percolated kind of cowboy coffee.

ON: *Were there any behind-the-scenes*



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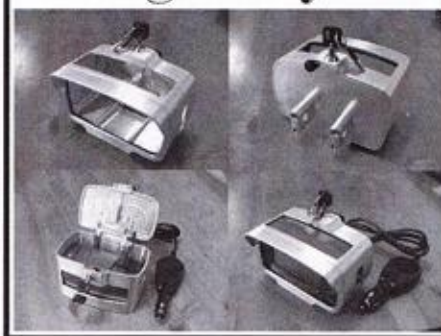
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Alton Brown

mishaps or maintenance problems that the team encountered that we didn't get to see?

Alton: They're all in the show. The only two things that happened see up on Pikes Peak, one of the guys with the GS's fuel connect broke. We had a spare so it was no big deal. There was one flat tire the whole trip, on the first day. Then there was my little mishap in the gravel. That was it. No reliability issues at all.

ON: I'm curious of the demographics of your viewers on Good Eats and their reaction to the motorcycle episodes.

Alton: Um, pretty huge. It was a real

I don't have data from the motorcycle community.

ON: You had the support of the folks in the BMW MOA Fourm.

Alton: I was on the bike for the right reason. I do believe that it's the best way to see this country. I do believe in safety. It would have been a lot easier to photograph smaller helmets, you know. I've got a showy J-Wing. If I'd worn that, a lot of things would have been easier but we wanted to take responsibility for portraying the kind of motorcycling that I believe in - fun but safe. With the accident I just decided, look, this is what happened. I've got footage of it and I'm going to show it. There were some folks that disagreed with me. They said it

bog in the gravel. I was up on the pegs and as I got down in there, I accelerated a bit to help get me up. My front end came up out of this little baby ditch. My back end slid a little bit as I gave it the extra throttle, scooted a little bit to one side and then I sat down. The second I sat down, the front end actually came up off the ground for a moment and then when it hit, it just snatched out to one side and dumped me hard. I was shocked at how hard it was I hit the ground because I wasn't going very fast. It was only like 15 mph.

ON: "If you can read this, the odds are I'm about to scream." Discuss.

Alton: If you're that close to me, everybody wanted to come up and they would



“With the accident I just decided, look, this is what happened. I've got footage of it and I'm going to show it. There were some folks that disagreed with me. They said it would make me look like an amateur. It's the story and so it stayed. I'll occasionally have people that will just come up to me that are motorcyclists that will come up and they just want to talk about the accident.”

demographics rating victory for the Network in August which is typically just a deadly month. It hit where you would think it would hit, you know, kind of anywhere from 18-54, you know. It did skew toward males, but not unusually male. What was kind of the surprise of the whole thing is that older people responded very strongly to the show, people that you would seniors for lack of a better term. The *Good Eats* demographics were all over the place. I mean we had viewers from age 6 to 60. It's a strange universal demographic and it almost skews right down the middle, male/female. *Feasting on Asphalt*, of course, went more in the younger and male audience but it was also appreciated by those outside the target demographics so it was well received, which I'm very glad for. The only people I don't know if it was well received by is the motorcycling community because

would make me look like an amateur. It's the story and so it stayed. I'll occasionally have people that will just come up to me that are motorcyclists that will come up and they just want to talk about the accident.

ON: It was well analyzed in the BMW Forum. They analyzed everything.

Alton: Did they?

ON: They put it in slow motion to catch everything.

Alton: Did they? Was there a conclusion because I'm still not 100% sure but I'll tell you this. The reason that it really happened, and you can't tell this in the shot because the way it was shot from the truck which is a long ways back, it kind of flattened down the road. There was a dip and when I saw it I thought, well okay, that's no big deal. But there was a sharp little incline and I didn't want to

see my arm and pat my shoulder. "Oh, how are you?" So I decided to write something dramatic that would slow people down long enough to think about, huh, that doesn't sound very good. I think I'll go away. On top of that when I wrote that on there, I was writing backwards in a mirror, so I'm lucky that I didn't misspell everything. I was quite medicated at the time.

ON: Will the series ever be on DVD?

Alton: Everything is being released with a massive amount of bonus material just in time for Christmas. In fact, there is for each show there's about an equal amount of bonus material. Not all of it's great but there's a lot of bonus stuff and certainly more motorcycling stuff, to be sure. Next year I'm going to do it again only it's not going to be four episodes; it's going to be six. At this point, there are two routes that are potential right now. I'm leaning

toward one over the other. The northern route is ruled out because it would just be ugly, too many sticks, you know. There's not enough foliage. So there are two possible routes. One is the Pacific Coast from Mexico to Canada. The other one, which is actually more interesting to me, is the length of the Mississippi River from the delta in New Orleans all the way to the head waters in Minnesota. Of course, I realize that when I get to Minnesota there'll be nothing but sticks but at least I will have a variety of geographical terrains on the way there. I love the idea of that trip because I think the Mississippi River was the original road in this country and there's so much amazing history and a lot of great food history that comes out of that. It's a ride that I've always wanted to do. The California and Oregon and Washington trip, while beautiful, I don't think there'd be as many surprises on it.

ON: So, by the sound of it you say there may be two more installments of *Feasting on Asphalt*?

A: Well, who knows? I mean this next

one will be six episodes. I would certainly consider continuing it both in this country and outside of this country. I would like to do a *Feasting on Asphalt* in the UK, for instance. In that case, I'd probably have to abandon BMW's. It just wouldn't be right to go on. I'd probably do it on a Triumph. The only other brand of motorcycle that I really love, even though they're nothing compared to BMW's from a mechanical standpoint. I do like the tradition of the European ride. Of course, if I were happen to do one in Italy, well, you know, when in Rome. I don't know if I'd go Ducati or Moto Guzzi. I've always had a soft spot for Moto Guzzi. Why not cover the bases, right?

ON: What's down the road for Alton Brown?

Alton: Next year will be another 20 episodes of *Good Eats*. It looks like there's going to be a *Good Eats* book that we've been negotiating that for a while, figuring out what form that would take and what that would be like. That'll probably be out near the next...end of 2007

or beginning of 2008. They'd love me to make Christmas time, but I don't know that I'm going to. There'll be six more episodes of *Feasting on Asphalt* next year. Then I'll continue with there'll probably be another year of *Iron Chef America* which takes a good bit of time. That will probably be it for next year. My contract runs out at the end of next year.

ON: Well, I'm sure they'll renew it.

Alton: Well, you never know. *Good Eats* has been almost nine years now, been in production nine years so it's one of the longest booked shows on Food Network. In fact, only *Emeril Live* has been on longer than *Good Eats* has at this point.

ON: The guys would love to see you at the next rally.

Alton: You know I see notices about them and I get e-mails from friends that have gone to rallies and I'm like, ah man, I want to do that really badly. Then something comes up. You know, there's always something that comes up work wise that make hay while the sun shines kind of thing. I hope to go next year.

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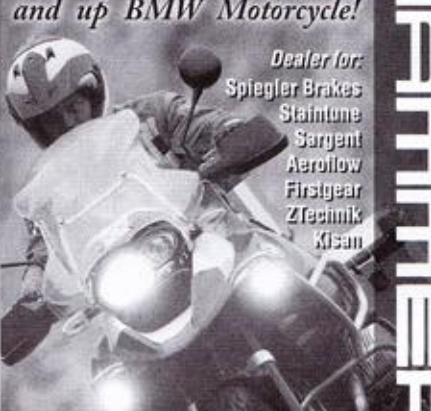
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