The Duct Tapes

Where Am I?

● MAP MAKERS, MOST OF THEM, ARE A STRAIT-laced group; they have the peculiar notion that north should always be at the top of the page.

The fellows who draw the location maps for off-road competition entry forms are much more creative; sometimes, for instance, they manage to put north at the lower left-hand corner of the page. Believe me, trying to get your mind wrapped around one of these maps while driving through a gusty crosswind in an old van with the aerodynamics of a barn is not conducive to improving single-vehicle accident statistics. To my addled brain, reading a map with north at the bottom of the page is like swimming at a place where the diving board is on the bottom of the pool.

Sure, you can turn the map around—but then all the lettering is upside-down; and when you flip the thing right side up to read, it's upside down for direction. When you've spent a lifetime conditioning your mind to recognize that east is to the left of the written word, the mental gymnastics involved in reading one of these maps is like looking at rose-colored glasses through the world.

Let me explain that none of this north roulette is done deliberately. What usually happens is this: someone cuts a circular section of the start location out of a big quadrangle. (For the benefit of those fortunate enough never to have been exposed to quadrangles, they are prepared by the Army Map Service presumably to help invading forces adjust artillery fire. They measure two by three feet and are printed on heavy paper that can slice your cheek wide open on a windy day. North is noted; magnetic north is noted—both face the top of the sheet.)

When our amateur cartographer lays the piece of quadrangle on a sheet of white paper to trace the necessary roads, north gets swung over toward Helsinki, Finland. When he slides the carbon underneath, north gets run up Mrs. Olson Street in Petrozavodsk. When he takes the tracing over to Fast Eddie, who used to be a sign painter and can letter neat, Eddie turns the sheet sideways because that's the shape of most signs. For the sake of neatness, Fast Eddie angles all his road markings at a 30-degree angle. When the printer gets the finished map, he assumes the lettering should read horizontally—and, presto—north ends up at the lower left-hand corner.

Bad as they are—with north floating all over the compass—tracings from quadrangles are 110 percent better than hand-drawn maps. At least the scale on the quadrangle is constant. I've seen freehand efforts with a scale of one inch to 50 miles on the outer edges of the thing and one inch to one inch near the center. Only a myopic defect could cause some of the distortion I've seen in these maps. You know something is wrong when you're sure it took one hour to drive the first inch on the map and two hours later, when you next look at the thing, you find you're already running off the border on the other side.

And you're fourth in line in a string of seven vans!

Another common—and frustrating—entry-map error is the listing of major highways by their local names. To me, this is the most understandable error: we have two major highways in South Jersey called *nothing but* the White Horse Pike and the Black Horse Pike. Naturally, they are listed on road maps only as route 30 and 42. We've seen competitors from out of state ask directions, remembering only that the road they want is named after "some stupid horse." Pour souls—as key time rolls around all that's in sight are pine trees, concrete, and a sagging fuel-gauge needle.

Traveling to strange countryside locations as enduro riders do, it's helpful to have some knowledge of vegetation; rural directions are often rooted in the soil. "Turn left at the next sassafras tree," for instance, has no meaning at all to a city boy who doesn't know his sassafras from a hole in the ground. One of my all-time vague directions was from an older gent who said, "Turn left where the old icehouse used to be." I once had another old boy spend two minutes describing an intersection ("Sunoco station on one corner, the Three Ways Inn on another, the firehouse on another") and then finish by saying "and when you get there you've went about a mile too far."

Sometimes the directions you get AFTER you reach an off-road event are worse than the ones they gave to get there. Case in point was the enduro I went to just to run gas for Jim Weatherhead. (I was recovering from a previous dumb move which still hurt to the tune of losing my vision every time I sneezed.) All I had to do was drive his van out to the gas stop—an easy job, I thought, until I discovered that Jim's van steered just a bit harder than the Eiffel Tower.

When I tried to get directions to the gas stop from the sponsoring club, they said the only man who might know was out pre-riding the course, and you can't get harder to find than that. The gas stop, however, *was* shown on the spectator direction sheet. The only problem with using that sheet was that it gave SEQUENCE directions, which meant I had to go to *all* the spectator points before I reached the gas stop. Thirty-eight miles later, thirty-eight miles and a few thousand gut-wrenching cranks on that steering wheel, and Jim had to pour his own fuel and tighten his own chain. I was ready to get a few estimates on embalming before I was pressed for time. And then, rather than take a chance on sequencing myself off the edge of the world, I backtracked the thirty-eight miles, subtracting all the mileage readings on the turns from the speedometer and using all the white margins on an Esso road map for my computations.

One of the neatest directions I ever got was a few years back just north of Williamsport, Pennsylvania, where I was detailed to a World's Championship Trials.

To take advantage of the fine riding in the area, I had towed my enduro bike along and enjoyed a tank of gas on the mountains the day before the event. In the process I dropped a six-inch pair of vise grips engraved with the name J. Penton, who I have never been able to identify. The fellow even had his girl's name, Lorain, engraved on the other side. When I returned to the area the next morning I unloaded the bike and went hunting for the squeezers with little hope; I've NEVER dropped anything off a moving motorcycle and found it again—myself excluded of course.

Knowing I was close to the Roaring Branch Park, I rode the bike down the highway until I caught up with a van that was wearing a trailer hitch and a Yamahauler decal.

"Hey," I yelled to the driver as I motored alongside, "how do I get to the World Championship Trials?"

The fellow took a long look at me, and a long look at my motorcycle, and said—"Practice, man, PRACTICE!!"

—Ed Hertfelder
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