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R1200 GS

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BATTLE



Strategic armor has always been critical to any successful battle campaign. The mighty GS is a formidable foe when well equipped.

READY

by Bill Drago



R1200 GS was first sold in 2005 and enjoys a long reign as the Gold Standard for adventure bikes. The liquid-cooled version was introduced in 2013, and with its feather-light wet clutch and revised frame design it approaches super-bike status on the asphalt—its comfort, power, and wind protection rival many single-purpose road bikes.

In 2015, the heavier crankshaft was carried over to the standard GS from the *Adventure* model, making it better than ever off pavement. From serving as an *Iron Butt* platform or RTW mount to conquering Colorado's toughest passes, the mighty GS has done it all. But like its human thrill-seeking counterparts, the beast is better suited for pushing the envelope after a little preparation. The GS is wide and heavy, yet well balanced and surprisingly nimble in skilled hands. Finely engineered accessories help arm the machine for battle.

My 2015 GS project bike has covered 13,000 miles, many of those well off the beaten path. Every accessory has done its job without fail. Here's why they were chosen.

FOUNDATION FIRST

Tires and wheels take a beating. Wider stock wheels on the new GS are more subject to damage than their predecessors. *Woody's Wheel Works* settles these concerns with their *Superlaced* wheels. Spokes are .040 thicker than stock, with *Excel* rims and *Superlite* hubs to handle the roughest environments. I chose the narrower oilhead rim size, facilitating more tire choices and exposing less of the rim to potential damage.

Shinko's 804/805 series tires have withstood everything I could throw at them and last at least as well as their competitors at nearly half the price.

Precision truing and jewelry-like componentry make *Woody's Wheels* a feast for the senses.


ARMOR UP!

Out of the box the GS takes falls surprisingly well, but a few exposed parts are predictable failure points when slamming over rocks. I've pressed *JB Weld* into service on more than one occasion on friends' bikes, patching busted valve covers and repairing engine casings where skid plates had been hammered through the sump. *Black Dog Cycle Works* (BDCW) skid plates have earned a solid reputation for preventing damage with sturdy, frame-mounted 5mm aluminum plating.

Hepco and *Becker* upper and lower crash bars were installed as a first line of defense. Their frame-mounted lateral strut and cross-front design wrap critical components and leave room for extra shielding over the heads. Hats off to *Moto Machines* for fast service as time grew short for our first test run.

With magnesium valve covers begging to be smashed, I doubled up protection by installing *Touratech's* aluminum guards beneath the crash bars. *Touratech* is a no-brainer for quality GS componentry and expert guidance on installation. After multiple low speed drops, the crash bars have flexed a little but never left their post. The valve cover protectors were nudged aside from the bar movement, but both stood their ground, preventing damage to hard parts elsewhere.

Factory hand guards offer little more than wind protection, but *Touratech* comes through again with their ultra-resilient plastic units. Experience with heavyweight bikes has led me to pick these over aluminum, which can bend into unusable positions, jamming controls and forcing a trailside repair.



When protecting your belly, more is definitely better. *Black Dog* has got you covered.


ROCKS, BUGS AND MUD

Touratech's headlight guard snaps off for cleaning yet stays put over the roughest terrain. A *Touratech* beak adds a bit of length, enhancing the bike's looks and the function of the front fender. And, their neoprene fork seal protector sleeves shield the *Telelever* sliders from grit. A *Maier* fender liner, also from *Touratech*, slips inside the rear fender to protect the shock from mud and debris. *Touratech* header pipe protectors shield the upper portion of the exhaust from rocks. Airborne stones can easily puncture a radiator; *BDCW* radiator guards are a wise safeguard and are simple to install, secure, and add almost no weight.



Like a starship force field, the protection pieces take their damage, leaving the bike unscathed.

COMFORT AND ERGONOMICS



Break your factory mirrors first fall? Cut to the chase. At \$120, the *Doubletake* mirrors are a bargain.

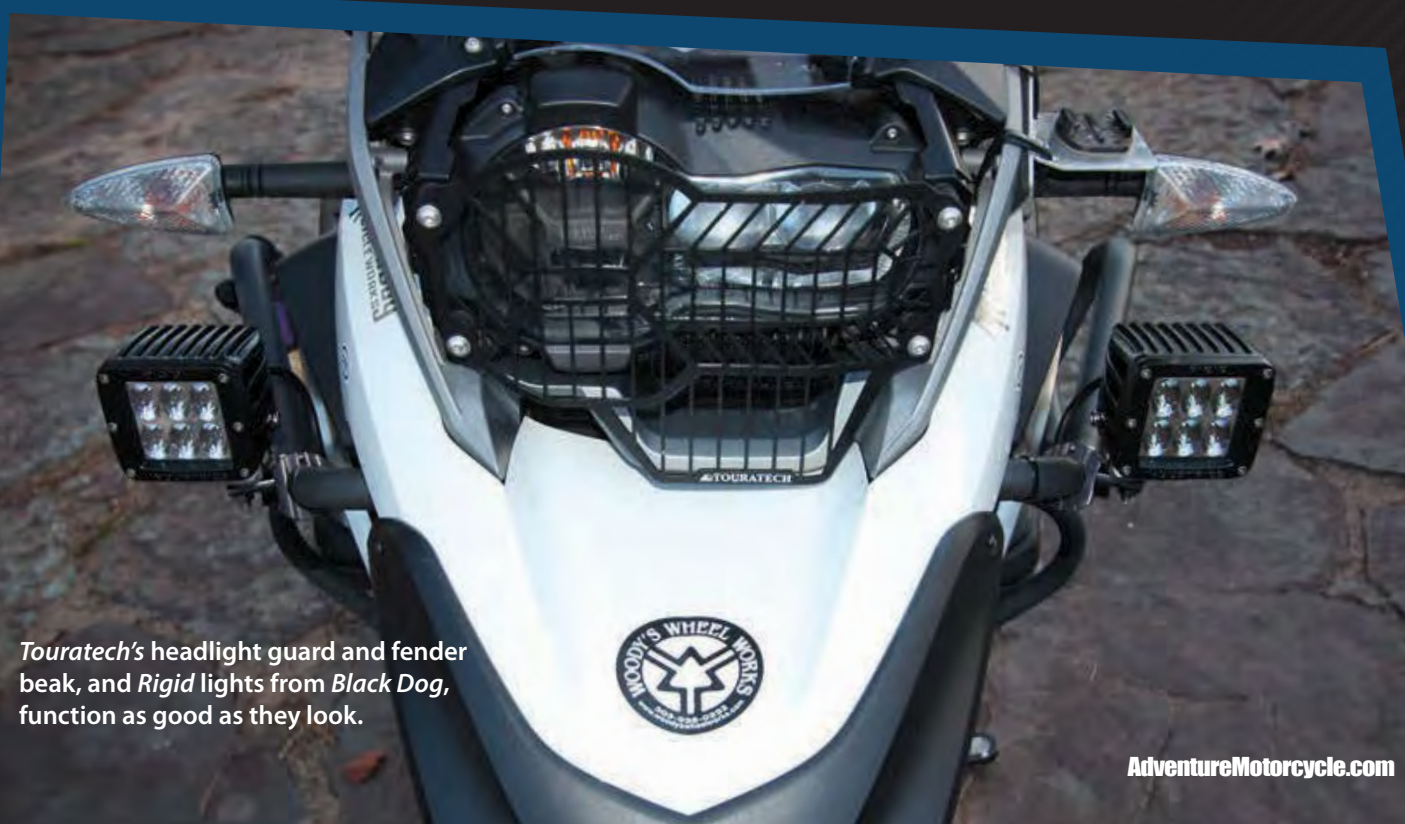
Factory mirrors are vulnerable when big bikes go off pavement; they're often the first casualty in a fall. *Dakar* racer Ned Seusse's redesigned *Doubletake* mirrors utilize a *RAM* mounting system coupled to his specially designed mirror heads. The mirrors stay put, don't vibrate, are crystal clear, unbreakable, and fold flat when desired.

The *GS* is a starship, effortlessly consuming miles at warp speeds across cow pastures or continents. But riders differ significantly in size and comfort requirements. The factory adjustable-on-the-fly windscreen is a giant leap forward, but bar height is a tad low for riders approaching six feet. At 5'10"W, I'm on the edge of needing taller bars when standing. *BDCW* comes through again with simple, sturdy risers that don't slip.

Grandpa always said I had a good understanding, but it was a long way from my head, referring to my big feet, I suppose. Adventure bikes also need a good platform for the pilot. *BDCW Platform* foot pegs are 2.5" x 4.5" of aircraft grade alloy, and are 1/2" lower than stock for better ergonomics. They include traction cleats and a built-in bottle opener, and these wide, stable perches make peg-weight steering effortless. Big feet are also helpful when parking on soft soil. A *BDCW* sidestand enlarger helps here. The form-fitting footprint slips tightly over the stock pad and doesn't rattle.

LIGHTS

I tested a pair of *Rigid D2s* against some of the most expensive and well known lights on the market several years ago in the Arizona desert. They not only outshined their competition, they blew them away. Since then, I've added *Rigid* lights to every *BMW GS* in my fleet. I have yet to experience a single failure. Each *D2 Driving Beam's* 3,096 lumens of diamond-white clarity cast better-than-daylight visibility from ditch to ditch. *BDCW* offers a tidy package of *D2s*, mounts, switch and harness.




Touratech's headlight guard and fender beak, and *Rigid* lights from *Black Dog*, function as good as they look.

CONNECTING THE VOLTS

Electrical power is essential to virtually everything on a modern motorcycle. A *Braille Lithium ML 14C* carbon fiber case battery pushes more than ample amperage through the factory *Can Bus* system, *BDCW's FZ-1 Fuzeblock*, and two *Powerlet* auxiliary outlets. At half the weight of the original battery, the *Braille* produces 827 peak cranking amps and is rated at 5,000 DOD or discharge cycles, 10 times that of a lead acid battery. Now in its third *GS*, the *Braille* is still going strong.

Each circuit on the *FZ-1 Fuzeblock* can easily be configured for switched or constant power by installing the fuse in one of two locations. *Powerlet's* dual USB adapter makes it a snap to charge cell phones and other USB devices. *RAM* mounts secure whatever needs securing, wherever you need it. I find the handlebar bolt ball system coupled with their proprietary component mounts to be clean and well positioned for my cell phone, GPS and *SPOT* tracker.



A well-equipped adventure platform is confidence-inspiring.


GOLDBLOCKS AND THE THREE BAGS

Luggage is an adventure all by itself. There are no clear rules about what is best for everyone, but a few outstanding companies have set the bar high.

On my 2015 *R1200 GS* project, *Touratech's* trail-tested pannier mounts double as muffler guard and support their *Zega Pro* or *Mundo* aluminum boxes, or virtually any soft luggage system. With secure subframe and tailpiece mounting points and a cross strut between sides, they deliver both peace of mind and utility. As a mounting surface for my tail bag, winch, and *Rotopax* containers, I chose the *BDCW Helo Pad*. It's sturdy, versatile and looks cool when not covered up with gear.

Touratech's Zega Mundos are a medium-priced aluminum pannier system with the convenience and security of their top-of-the-line *Zega Pros*. Removable lids are useful as trays for dining or trailside repairs, and enable easy access for hammering out the boxes when smashed by a rock or stump. Strong enough to withstand moderate hits, the *Mundos* are flexible enough to crumple in a hard strike, reducing risk of subframe damage. That malleability also makes them easier to repair trailside than stiffer panniers.

But with all their benefits, rigid panniers can be a hazard in challenging terrain. A leg caught beneath a hard pannier can bring a ride to an abrupt and painful end. Riders should consider terrain, load, and skill level before deciding to use hard panniers. Soft luggage is harder to use than aluminum panniers and may have less capacity. It takes longer to pack and, often, to install and remove. But it is also less likely to break a leg or transfer



Quality soft luggage like the *Wolfman Overland* duffel and the *Rocky Mountain* system packs tight and tidy.

impact to a subframe in a fall or strike.

Soft luggage quality reflects the maker's experience. More expensive luggage is usually more durable and has a more advanced system for securing it to the bike; however, *Wolfman Luggage* is moderately priced and manufactured in the U.S. by a lifelong designer and rider. Few scenarios are not anticipated by Eric Hougen because of his vast experience with research and development. Every strap, hook, loop and stitch is there for a reason. I have yet to see a failure on my *Rocky Mountain* bags in four years of hard use. Two straps suspend them from the tailpiece and four simple buckles hold each bag in place. Compression straps tighten the load and a roll top and liner system keeps contents dry. *Wolfman* offers products for

every conceivable purpose, from trail riding to the *Dakar Rally*. New products like his multipurpose *Overland Duffel* testify to his ongoing dedication to adventurers.

Mosko Moto is the new kid on the block with their flagship *Backcountry* pannier and duffel systems. They are leather-tough and use a quick release system which is even faster than most hard luggage mechanisms. A simple twist frees each bag for transport. As with most soft luggage, they are still fussy to cinch up, but features like their external "Beaver Tail" flap for stashing small items, built in quick-stash pockets, and beautifully designed mounting system may just be the sweet spot between hard and soft panniers. Although the company is relatively new, founders Pete Day and Andrew Bryden are old hands at backcountry travel and gear design and it shows in their products.

Goldilocks found her perfect bed in three tries. Choosing luggage that is "just right" for you might take a bit of research, but consider your primary use and think about the extremes. Is ease of access more important than a soft place to land in a fall? Can you leave your panniers on the bike overnight? How much do you need to carry and how far will you go? How important is it that you lock up your gear? Do you switch



Mosko Moto's Backcountry pannier system approaches the ease of use of aluminum panniers while providing the safety and durability of soft luggage.

luggage from bike to bike? In some cases you may choose to keep both hard and soft luggage for different kinds of travel. Careful consideration will help you find what's "just right" for you. **ADV**



*Bill Drago is an active adventure rider and journalist and a professional riding coach for the Motorcycle Safety Foundation. He also operates adventure riding schools in Bolivia and Norman, Oklahoma. **BillDragoo.com***

PRICELIST

Black Dog Cycle Works (BlackDogCW.com)	
Ultimate Skid Plate, Radiator Guards, Platform Foot Pegs, Side Stand Enlarger	\$706 (package)
Helo Pad	\$315
40mm Bar Risers	\$115
Rigid Lighting: Two D2s (various beam options), Brackets, Wiring harness, Motorcycle-friendly pendant switch), 1" tube crash bar mounts	\$299 (package)
FZ-1 Fuzeblock	\$84.95
Braille Battery (BrailleBattery.com)	
ML14C	\$1,312.49
Doubletake Mirror (DoubletakeMirror.com)	
Adventure Mirror	\$120.00 (set)
Mosko Moto (Mosko-Moto.com)	
Back Country Pannier Kit	\$624.99
Back Country Duffel (30 liter)	\$189.99
Back Country Duffel (40 liter)	\$199.99
Moto Machines (MotoMachines.com)	
Crash Bars: Hepco-Becker Engine Guard	\$279.51
Crash Bars: Hepco-Becker Tank Guard	\$266.14

Powerlet (Powerlet.com)	
Dual USB Adaptor	\$49.95
RAM Mounts (RamMount.com)	
Mounts	Various
Sargent Cycle Products (SargentCycle.com)	
World Adventure Performance Plus Heated Seat and Pillion	\$899.95
Shinko (ShinkoTireUSA.com)	
804/805 Big Block Tires	\$172.13 (pair)
Touratech (Touratech-USA.com)	
Aluminum Cylinder Head Guards	\$191.40
Neoprene Fork Seal Protectors	\$76.10
Stainless Steel Rack System	\$399.00
Zega Mundo Pannier System (includes racks)	\$1,099.00, \$24.95 (optional locks)
Wolfman Luggage (WolfmanLuggage.com)	
Rocky Mountain Saddle Bags	\$441.99
Overland Duffel (45 liter)	\$159.99