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BUILDING THE

***“IF YOU BUILD IT,
THEY WILL COME.”***

In reality that's often BS, but for a team of dedicated racers and officials in the U.S. and Mexico, it's becoming true.

by Carl Parker | Images by Shogo, Nishant Verma and Diego Gomez



BAJA RALLY

Starting from scratch more than three years ago, the *Baja Rally* was billed as North America's only *FIM*-style rally raid event for motorcycles, and the very first of its kind for the Mexican state of Baja California. General Director and *Baja Rally* Founder, Scotty Breauxman, explains the trials and tribulations of developing a foreign style of racing in an equally foreign country:

"For an American to show up in Mexico with grand plans to stage a first-time rally event is a bit of a fantasy. We had to make it a Mexican event with real Mexican citizens representing the interests of the racers and sponsors. Now, our board is composed of Mexican nationals and Americans who understand the complex nuances of doing business in Ensenada and Baja California. But after the *Baja Rally* became a local event, everyone we needed help from began to take us seriously."

According to Breauxman, what's equally important is that the hosts truly believed the good intentions when they were present. "I've seen land owners and government officials completely change their attitudes once they realized we are not here in Baja California to harvest profits. From the outset, our mission has been to help the people of Baja California by introducing this sport, teaching culture and promoting return visits. This is the three-legged stool that defines our mission."

Major challenges have come in several forms. Mother Nature, environmental



hurdles, logistics, and regulatory scrutiny have all presented uphill battles for the *Baja Rally*. Less than two weeks before the 2014 *Baja Rally*, "Odile," a category three hurricane, struck the peninsula with a fury that erased any semblance of tracks in some areas. After that problem was resolved, another big one arrived in the form of the government blocking the *Baja Rally* just two days before the start.

The hurricane was something they managed around with lots of man-hours and re-routing. But the environmental resistance came purely from a lack of understanding by the officials. When they finally had their day in court, the regulators and enforcement agencies approved the routes and found the rally was actually much easier on the environment than the typical off-road races that Baja has hosted for five decades. The key was using facts to compel regulators to not only approve the event, but also to actually help promote this cleaner style of racing in all of Mexico.

The logistical challenges of fuel, food and engineering requirements added to the regulatory hurdles and permits needed to execute a five-day event. According to Breauxman, "We start with a general course and choose the overnight stops for each day. Then we ride our bikes for weeks on end, trying to avoid overused areas (whoop-de-doods and silt) that are beat up. When we find sections of smooth road in remote areas, we get to work imagining the fun routes for future racers."

"It started because I was fired up about the *Dakar Rally*," says Scotty. "I learned rally navigation from Jimmy Lewis, who challenged me by saying it could NOT be done in North

America. He said it with such certainty that I had to accept the challenge. Of course I never told Jimmy what I was up to until we had our team and infrastructure up and running."

He goes on to say, "It's an obsession for sure. The most memorable thing is winning support from Mexicans at every level. We secured an unprecedented grant from the Federal Tourism Board and that was a triumph. Gaining permission from lone ranchers in the middle of the desert was equally satisfying. Our team has climbed a very steep learning curve and we've built alliances and friendships every step of the way."

Breauxman finds himself explaining to outsiders that travel in Baja is extraordinarily safe relative to the general perception that persists. He credits the hosts. "The one thing first-timers misjudge is the genuine hospitality and friendliness from the locals, including law enforcement. As an American guest, I'm treated with respect and courtesy. As a legal resident of Mexico, it's the same. They're genuinely great hosts and friends of ours; one can learn a lot of humility from this experience."

The toughest hurdle has been ecology, and they've accomplished their goals to brand the event "eco-adventure tourism." Early in the process, the door was mostly closed to present a new race idea. However, after the data was presented and a paper trail of their previous attempts to disclose, the tune changed and they were seen as problem solvers rather than being the problem.

Along with problem solving is the fun of winning support. They've had to sell the idea of the *Baja Rally* over 100 times to many people. It's when they get a signed permit, or a stamped



filing that they know they're not alone. Having hundreds of people in their corner after starting out alone is quite an accomplishment.

Scotty spent over 100 nights away and thousands of riding miles last year working on the project. "It can be tough being away from home so often. If I didn't love *Baja Rally* I wouldn't have sacrificed those first two years for our team and the riders."

The Big Picture

Scotty concludes, "We see a festival, a cultural party that attracts thousands of international riders to watch and follow the *Baja Rally* in a safe and enriching way. Two years from now, we'll have six days minimum of racing and hope to have international fans come and follow the rally on their ADV bikes. We're on our way with *BMW MC of Escondido* hosting a VIP ride to chase the rally. And we're modeling our spectator experience after that pilot program."

ADVMoto continues to support and follow the *Baja Rally*, and we're looking forward to seeing what blossoms from the efforts of this great team.

BajaRallyMoto.com **ADV**

