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## Mack Daddy

I was riding fast on interstate 70, just east of the Colorado-Utah border through the warm August night. My red and white Yamaha FJ1200 slipped through the starlit high plains. I sliced the darkness with a sharp headlight beam, carving my way towards my father. He was sleeping soundly in a hotel bed 150 miles away. He arranged to meet me at the Concours National rally in Avon, Colorado. After work that day I dropped what I was doing, packed my bike, and stole off into the night. The thought of a rendezvous with my father was the electricity that kept me alert on the long 500-mile night ride.

I dug deep under the left sleeve of my Aerostitch and found my watch. "3:37A.M, Right on time!" I thought to myself. "Dad will be impressed at how closely I can match my ETA." As a boy, on long rides sitting on the back of his Yamaha XS650 or XS1100, I learned to compute ETAs. He gave me a calculator, a set of maps in a zip-lock bag, a digital stop-watch, and a set of formulas. Each formula figured things like distance traveled, average miles per hour, average miles per gallon and the most important formula... ETA. Nothing was as critical as our ETA. At any given time on a trip, he might holler back to me and say, "Brian, at exactly what time will we reach Podunk, Nebraska?" I would work vigorously on the assignment. First, I timed the distance between two-mile markers. Next, I figured our average velocity. Then I would scan the maps looking for Podunk. Soon I could estimate the time of our arrival into a town, right down to the minute. Sixteen forty-seven!" I would reply in military time, trying to sound as official as I could. He would nod his helmet and watch the clock. I checked and rechecked my calculations, making sure we were on schedule. If we made it on time, my reward was a slap on the knee and a point to his watch as we rolled

past the Podunk city-limit sign. I felt an incredible bond of teamwork and pride in a job well done. He kept me involved, not just because he had an obsessive need to arrive on schedule, even when we had no place to go, but to teach me things: accuracy, attention to detail, and the importance of doing a job right, even when the job itself wasn't important.

The sound of my engine turned from a high pitch whine to a low growl in an instant. Vibration seeped through the chassis and into my feet, hands and seat. I knew something was wrong. I eased on the throttle and the engine bellowed like a sick cow. The throttle was numb, no response. "OIL LEVEL WARNING" flashed on my instrument panel. I looked behind me only to see a deep cloud of billowy smoke. "That's it!" I thought. "It's done, I blew the motor!" I hit the engine kill switch and pulled in the clutch. The sick cow was instantly silenced. The only noise I could hear was the 120-mph wind. I coasted from 100 mph to 80.

"Mack 1 mile, Exit 11" The sign popped up just in time. The conveniently placed off ramp led me into town. "Welcome to Mack, population 50, unincorporated." Sixty mph... fifty... forty... I eased into town, just under the speed limit. Finally rolling to a stop, I put the kickstand down and stepped off into the desolate street. I flipped my visor up and scanned the ghost town landscape. I spotted a pay phone at a nearby mom and pop gas station and diner. I took my helmet off and began to push the heavy machine. Straining, I rolled it down the side of main street, through the empty parking spaces and under the yellow street lamps, into the station parking lot. I picked up the phone and dialed home. "Hi hon, no I'm not there yet. I blew the motor and I'm stuck in Mack. It's a town about 10 miles over the Colorado border on I-70. Yes, could you please? I'm on the main street, at a Sinclair gas station. Trust me, you won't miss it. Yea it's Exit 11. Thanks babe. Love you too."

I pulled the scrap of paper from the forearm pocket that held the phone number for my Dad's hotel. "Hi Dad, sorry to wake you. I just wanted to let you know that I can't make it. Well, I think that I blew the engine, but Bes is commin' to get me, so... I'm in Mack, Colorado... Yea on I-70. No you don't have to. By the time you get up... But I don't want you to miss the ride with the guys tomorrow. I know. All right. I am excited to see you too. About 6:20? All right I'll hold you to it. Yea. Thanks Dad. Love you too."

I took a granola bar from my tank bag and sat on a picnic bench. I began to ponder the last time I saw him. We were on an 8000-mile trip in the Northwest and Canada. On that ride, we shared great adventures and special moments. We separated in Idaho. I would go South to Utah, while he headed East to Kansas. It all ended with a firm handshake, then a back slapping manly hug, followed by another firm handshake, then we rode our separate ways. I was in awe. My father was going to make the effort to come see me. We couldn't ride together, and we weren't going to have any wild adventures. He prizes his once a year opportunity to be with his Concours buddies from around the country. Yet he was still willing to drop it all, just to sit on that lonely bench with me. I admired his loyalty. I lie back on the bench and stared at the stars. Feeling loved. I smiled.

The sound of a motorcycle pulling into the parking lot woke me. I sat up dazed and excited. I looked at my watch and it read 6:17A.M. "Right on time," I said as I walked up to meet him. "I'm a little early, I expected you to be harder to find." He said mumbling through the full-face helmet. I hugged him before he could remove it. "Thanks for coming" I said smelling the saddle soap on his leather jacket. The same jacket that I clung to as a child, navigating America's highways. He removed his gear and walked directly to my motorcycle. He knew the engine failure might have been a result of my recent overhaul work. He was sensed my wounded pride, and turned his attention to the tires. "Hey,

those are nice lookin' tires!" He said. I knew what he meant. I knew what was on his mind. He could have easily said, "What did you do wrong?" Or "How fast were you going?" Instead his reply meant: "Hey, sorry about the engine. I know you do good work. Let's not dwell on it." I was thankful for his compassion.

Soon the Sinclair station opened. We strolled inside and each filled a Styrofoam cup with fresh coffee. We migrated back outside and soaked up the warm morning sun. We discussed our lives, business, and school. We spoke of old times, and trips taken. We laughed and sighed, wishing we were on the way to some place magnificent, right at that moment. But the truth is, we *were* someplace magnificent. We were alone, sharing time, right there, in the middle of Mack, Colorado.

The hours slipped away and soon my wife arrived in the truck. We knew our time together was ending. After a brief struggle, and a little more teamwork, we managed to get the wounded machine loaded. I watched as he filled his bike with fuel. I missed him already. Bes and I got ready to head west, while my dad prepared to go east. He rolled the foam earplugs between his fingers and I quickly grabbed a hug. He pulled his helmet over his head, and started the engine. I just stood there. I wanted to climb on the back and play navigator again. "Be careful Dad, and thanks." He nodded. I could see the smile in his eyes. Dad mounted his machine, and lowered his tinted visor. He reached his hand out for one last firm shake. He clicked the bike into gear and my heart felt the clunk. With smooth precision, he pulled onto the street and headed East. Bittersweet tears welled up in my eyes. "I love you too." I whispered. "See you next year."