

My Dark Experiment – Redux by Gary L Mace

Although I am not new to riding, I have only been a Goldwing owner for just under three years averaging about 21k/year on it. The past few years I have been dark-curious. Huh? Wait... what... you say... You see a Darksider is the nickname many motorcycle riders give to those who dare challenge conventional wisdom and use a car tire on the rear of their motorcycle. The reasons for doing so vary. Lower cost tire, higher mileage per tire, smoother rider, higher weight rating for those who pull trailers, and heavier construction for rough roads. My reasons for the interest are the two latter. We tow a very heavy tent camper. Plus, on last year's month-long tour of the US, I had a rear motorcycle tire blow out shortly after hitting some big potholes. I suspect cord separation. With a trip to Newfoundland coming up soon where the roads will be flat, mostly straight and in some cases in very poor condition, I felt now is the perfect time to try this Darkside thing. Please understand that this writing is not meant to condone nor condemn this practice. Only to share my experience in trying it. The tire being tested is a Bridgestone Driveguard run flat tire in size 195/55R16

Why redux you ask? Well last week I started out to do an initial ride on this rear car tire. I checked the air pressure as I always do before a ride and it was good. Unbeknownst to me when I did so, I cracked the old OEM rubber valve stem and the tire began immediately to lose air. Almost from the beginning of the test ride the tire felt squirrely. I assumed it was the way these silly car tires must feel. I continued up the road for about 12 miles at 60 mph all the



while thinking... "I don't like this damned tire at all" At one point I needed to swerve around something and in doing so... felt the bike react very badly. Not to the point of crashing, but not a good feeling at all. I decided to pull over to add a bit more air to see if that would improve this stupid car tire only to discover it had ZERO tire pressure. So, this test was immediately

aborted. It did however show me how a run flat tire feels at 60mph and zero pressure. 😊

So fast forward to today. I have since installed a new all metal valve stem and installed FOBO Bluetooth tire pressure monitors to supplement the Goldwing's anemic idiot light based TPMS. I started the day with rear tire showing 66 degrees and 33.5lbs of pressure. The first road I tried was a lightly travelled straight and flat divided highway. As might be expected, on this type of road I could feel no difference. I did try a few practice panic stops and swerves since traffic was so light. I could feel no difference in the braking test. The swerve test did have a

slightly different feel. Not better, not worse, just a little different. Nothing that would ever cause me a problem.

I then decided to try a mildly curvy country road that I ride often. It is a 45mph road that I normally ride between 50 and 55 mph. I made it a point to ride the same speed and the same outside-inside-outside line I normally do. Again, I really could not notice any real difference. Maybe... MAYBE a slight bit more pressure needed to initiate the turns, but I am not really sure about that. At the end of this road was Jefferson City where I stopped for gas. At this point it is still very early, a beautiful day and the world-famous Tail of the Dragon only 70 miles away. So, I pointed my GPS to the western end of the dragon and decided to really see how this car tire compared. Although the dragon is not one of my favorite roads due to far too many tourists, I do end up riding it about 10 times or so a year so this should tell me if this tire will have a big effect on my riding.

On the way to the dragon, I had to pass through Knoxville, TN and ride about 8 miles of I-40. Anyone who has been through Knoxville recently knows that I-40 in this area is several years overdue for a good resurfacing. Here was my first big pleasant surprise. That car tire absorbed the harsh road conditions noticeably better than my motorcycle tire did. And not just a little better, but a lot better. This I like!!

I'm now at the beginning of the dragon heading east toward Deals Gap. Now I am no Ricky Racer, nor am I a Grandma Moses. I enjoy a lightly spirited ride but by no means have an adrenaline addiction. I was anxious to see how much this tire would hinder my style. For the first half of the dragon I would say I ran it a bit slower than normal. Not because I needed to, but because I was on a totally unfamiliar tire and didn't want to tempt fate. But about halfway through I realized I was feeling very little difference and ran the second half about the same pace as I normally would. Not setting any speed records but not crawling either. I wasn't passed by anyone... 😊 At Deals Gap, I stopped for my Dragonburger and did notice my arms felt a little more tired than usual. However, to be honest, I do not know if that was caused by the tire, or the fact I wasn't riding as relaxed as normal because of the unknown tire. This will be answered I think in more time, but one ride... I just can't say for sure. Tire pressure note. During the dragon run I saw the highest temperature and pressure on my rear tire. It got to 113 degrees and pressure increased from the starting 33.5lbs to 40.5lbs. Probably useless data... but there it is. Until now, I never knew pressures changed that much.

After my burger and a nice talk with a fellow Goldwinger from Florida, I decided to go try the Cherahola Skyway and see how this tire did with higher speed sweepers. This time I would say I ran a bit more aggressive than normal. I was passed by only two sport bikes and I passed another Goldwing and maybe 6 or 7 slower braaaaap machines. Again, I really have not

noticed much difference in riding. I ran the same lines as usual. I kept expecting to feel that “transition” from flat tire to edge of tire that so many have mentioned but I simply did not feel that one time. Maybe those folks ride harder than I do, who knows.

After Cherahola, I set course home which again took me through Knoxville. After leaving the city, I found myself again on a country road. I ran the bike up to 75mph a few times and did some practice swerving maneuvers and yet again, only very minor differences felt from this and my motorcycle rear tire.

After a 300 mile day pushing the tire as much as I will likely ever do, I must say that there is a possibility I may not go back to a rear motorcycle tire. There are still a few scenarios I want to try with this tire. 5 and 10 mph switchbacks, rain, and dirt/gravel roads for example. The one thing I did notice leaving a gas station is slow speed parking lot U-turns might be a bit of a challenge. Or, it could simply be that I need to practice those using this tire to get used to the difference. Either way, that scenario did not feel comfortable to me.

Speedo note. Some have reported that the 195/55R16 size caused their speedo to be off. But for me at 60mph GPS, my speedo was reading 61 mph, so that’s close enough for me!

Well, that’s my very first experience with the Darkside. I am confident enough that I will for sure use this tire on our month-long trip to Newfoundland and back. Depending on that experience this may very well be how I roll from now on.

***** Update Second day *****

Went on a ride with some friends. This time Lisa rode with me. I lowered the cold pressure to 32. We rode country roads for two hours, then rode the southern section of the Blue Ridge Parkway. That felt OK but not quite as sure footed as yesterday. After dinner, we rode RT209 (The Rattler) on the way home. Road condition was poor which prevented nice clean lines. It downright wore me out. It was not a good feeling and leaves some doubt that I want to keep a CT on for my local riding. I am going to bump cold pressure to 36 and see if that feels better. I've read where many use higher pressures for twisty riding. Jury is still out.

***** Update – Week Later *****



Today my son and I did a 420 mile ride. We hit Foothills Parkway, Dragon, Cherahola, Rt64 through Nantahala Gorge, then to Cherokee, over the Smokys and then home. I aired the rear Driveguard RF to 36 lbs. cold this morning.

So, what did I think? Car tire? What car tire? I'm not sure if it is just me getting used the tire, the tire 'breaking in', or maybe I finally found the sweet spot for my riding style in twisties, but I

honestly did not feel anything today that seemed odd or uncomfortable.

Now to hook up my tent camper and hit the interstate to find the best pressure for that riding.

***** 8000 mile update *****



After logging 8000 miles and a trip to Nova Scotia/Newfoundland/PEI towing a tent camper I am now certain that I will continue running the car tire. The tire is not yet half used up. It handled the very rough roads of maritimes Canada outstandingly. At 36 psi, I rarely even think about it being there. I still notice when I run on uneven pavement, I can feel the bike pulling more than with a MC tire. Making slow u-turns in parking lots is still harder for me, but I suspect if I

practice that more, that will become less of an issue.

I also added a Battleaxe BT45 rear tire to the front in proper direction and 40 psi. This is often referred to as “double dark” The benefit is a tire with higher weight rating on the front. It shows almost no wear at 8,000 miles and grip has been confident. Only issue I have noticed is that about 6,500 the BT45 tire has become quite noisy despite there being no signs of cupping.

