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Get Off
The Road

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Geezer With A Grudge

by Thomas Day
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When I was a kid, barely into my 20's, I moved to west Texas for one of the worst jobs anyone ever suffered. A pair of the few upsides to that miserable experience was that I discovered new ways to play with motorcycles in one of the biggest motorcycle playgrounds on this continent. And I met Karl.

[My kids were born in that awful place, so at least two other good things happened there. I thought I should mention that.]

Karl was a sixty-something machinist who was a Texas lifer; other than a 3-year aerospace stint as a Lockheed machinist in California dur-

ing WWII. Karl and his brothers were west Texas motorcycling legends. When he was a kid, between the two world wars, Karl and his four brothers rode Indian Scout V-twins. Back then, there wasn't a decent road between Hereford, Texas and Amarillo, so the boys rode their Scouts cross-country. As best they could, they rode straight from their parents' farm to where ever it was they wanted to go in "the big city" and, after doing whatever it was they wanted to do in Amarillo, they rode straight back home. Every day I worked with Karl was spiced with stories of west Texas at the end of the cowboy days; or his adventures in California during the war.

Karl was more than a machinist, as much as that talent is undervalued. He was an inventive mechanic who was as likely to make his own re-

placement parts as use what the manufacturer's provided. He had a decent, if old fashioned machine shop in his home and turned out all sorts of tools, parts and marginally-artistic pornographic novelty bits. Working with him gave me practical skills and insight into design and fabrication that was, for a long time, key to my career.

In 1971, Karl still had one of the family Scouts in his "barn," along with a WWI biplane fighter turned crop-duster, a couple of old Ford coupe hotrods, two 1940's Ford-Ferguson tractors, assorted pieces of obsolete farm equipment, and a late 50's Cadillac Eldorado. Of those possessions, the only ones that were in any sort of usable shape were the airplane and the Indian Scout. I saw him fly the plane, once, after a party at his neighbor's house where he and my boss finished off a pint-and-a-half bottle of Everclear and got into a pissing match over who could do the dumbest thing at that very moment. My boss, Arnold, tore off in his company pickup, bragging that he would bust 100mph before he made it to the highway. Karl ran to the barn and fired up the plane, planning to strafe my boss before he made his destination. There was a gun on the old plane and the chances were pretty good that it still worked, but Karl probably didn't have ammunition for it so Arnold was relatively safe, although he ran the pickup into a ditch on the way back from the main road. Karl didn't manage to do much more than circle his house a few times before he put the plane down in the field behind his house. The next day, he towed the plane back into the garage and I suspect it never moved from that spot for the rest of Karl's life.

Karl's signature moment came after he had a heart attack. He dropped to the ground on a trip

to the local hardware store. Paramedics arrived and began CPR. They got him to the hospital barely alive and the ER doc put the paddles on Karl and whacked him several times before his heart restarted. Karl told me that it hurt like hell and that he'd been pretty comfortable with dying before being rudely brought back to Texas and 1973. He told every doc in the hospital, "If you ever do that again, I'll shoot you between your beady little eyes." When he got out of the hospital, he bought a little .32 pistol and kept it in his pocket in case he ever woke up in a hospital again. It's hard to argue with a living will that is enforced by a loaded gun.

A fellow employee, Charlie, a kid who had been a pretty good local motocrosser before he was drafted into the Army in 1972 and went to Vietnam. Charlie came back pretty emotionally and physically damaged in 1974. The last story I heard about Karl was he and Charlie had redesigned a Honda street bike that could run on diesel, naphtha, or practically anything that would burn and Charlie was riding all over the remaining open Texas fields and across the state smelling like French fries, an oil stove or himself. From what I heard, Karl and Charlie had worked out a pretty effective rehabilitation plan.

By the late-70's, I'd lost track of the few Texas friends I wanted to keep. I'd moved my career across three industries in five years and the internet was about 20 years from becoming a useful resource. If he's alive, Karl would be a little over 100 and that seems unlikely. But if he's still around, I bet he is still packing that .32 and scaring the crap out of Texas doctors.

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Gear Review

Aerostich Kanetsu Electric Warmbib

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It took me 61 years to buy my first electric vest. Something about "new fangled contraptions" and "losing my macho" kept me from joining the 20th Century until we were into the 21st Century. Early in 2008, I bought an Aerostich Kanetsu Airvantage electric vest and wore it for several months, extending my fall comfort range right up until ice began to stick to the streets. In 2009, I discovered another warm electric product, the Kanetsu Electric Warmbib. At \$67, even a cheapskate can justify mobile electric heat. Like all things Aerostich, the construction quality of the Warmbib is exceptional. Mr. Goldfine wants me to say that my test product was "1st generation" and that the current version is improved. I haven't seen the improvements, but my bib is terrific.



photo courtesy of Aerostich

This is what the Kanetsu Electric Warmbib would look like on a naked Invisible Man

My only complaint about the Airvantage is that it's fairly bulky. I'm either committed to wearing it or it stays at home. I was too cheap to buy the sleeves for the Airvantage, so that's a problem, too. The biggest reason I wanted to test this product was because I hoped it would fit under my Darien liner and that the self-packing feature would allow me to stuff the bib into my tank bag. Both assumptions were accurate.

For example, on a moderately cool March weekend, I decided to make a run across town for some computer gear. I tossed my Darien over whatever I'd been wearing around the house and hit the road. About two miles from home, I realized 45°F on the bike was a lot colder than 45°F in the sun in my backyard. I stopped, pulled the Warmbib from my tank-

bag, strapped it on (without having to remove my jacket, helmet, or gloves), plugged in, and hit the road in near-instant comfort. With only the Warmbib and my liner-less Darien gear, I was polar bear toasty for the rest of the trip.

The Warmbib is held in place only with a hook-and-loop patch that is the end of the stretch fleece collar. You just pull it around your neck and push the collar on to the hook patch and you're set. The Warmbib uses the usual Aerostich wiring gear, including a lighted switch or not, and I simply plugged mine into the wiring I installed for the Airvantage. The slick Gore-tex® Windstopper® material on the front allows the bib to slip under your jacket while the fleece at the back of the bib does a fine job of holding the bib in place. Compared to typical heated vests, the Warmbib's 2.5A, 30W consumption is 66-250% less demanding on your bike's electrical system. That's worth considering for dual purpose or scooter applications. In fact, I installed wiring for the Warmbib on my Kawasaki KL250; a bike that has a limited electrical system capacity.

I was worried that I'd really miss the heat my Airvantage applies to my back, especially on below freezing days, but that hasn't been much of a sacrifice. In use, the Warmbib might even be a diet device. I'm not kidding. The bib heats your chest and stomach, but the heat on my gut isn't much different from the warm after-glow of a big meal. As a daily commuter accessory, the Warmbib does the job effectively. I include mine on any spring or fall ride that has the slightest chance of turning cold. Now that cold weather is upon us, it's back in my luggage and I'm ready for winter.

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