

BAJA

Continued from A1

As Hauter zooms from the base of a knob to its summit and beyond in a handful of seconds he seems to be, if not defying gravity and other immutable physical laws, then at least giving them a good stretch.

Although there is no obvious pattern to Hauter's progress, he is riding on this gusty evening of Nov. 4 for a particular purpose.

Practice. In two weeks he'll be speeding through similar topography, at speeds up to 120 mph, more than 1,000 miles away.

On the morning of Nov. 18 Hauter, a 25-year-old Baker City resident, will jump onto a motorcycle very much like this one and start racing south through the desert of Mexico's Baja Peninsula.

He'll be part of a seven-rider team competing in the 54th Baja 1000 — the ultimate competition in off-road racing.

And in that instant when he starts rolling, Hauter will fulfill a goal that dates back two decades, to when he was a boy whose head wouldn't have reached the handlebars of his current Yamaha.

"It's something I've been dreaming of since I was five," Hauter said.

Back then Hauter rode a comparatively tame Honda 70.

But even on that modest machine his abilities were apparent, said Cole's dad, Mark Hauter.

"He was out jumping it," Mark said.

Mark and Cole's mom, Kristin, also live in Baker City.

Mark Hauter has joined Cole for this evening's practice ride at Virtue Flat, the area between Highway 86 and Ruckles Creek Road that was set up by the Bureau of Land Management.

Mark records his son's times around routes he's been riding for years.

Mark, who is an experienced motorcycle rider himself, recalls the first time his precocious son raced past him during a ride at Virtue Flat.

Although Cole Hauter grew up in La Grande and graduated from high school in Kennewick, Washington, he considers Baker City as "definitely home."

He moved here in 2016. But Hauter said Virtue Flat has been his favorite riding spot since the first time he twisted the throttle on that old Honda.

(Which he still owns; it's in his basement.)

Virtue Flat, which packs more than 30 miles of routes, and 71 named trails in its 5,000 or so acres, is an ideal place to hone skills on a motorcycle, Hauter said.

"It's got a little bit of everything," he said. "There are high speed areas, technical gullies. It's also free to ride, you just gas up and go."

Virtue Flat is convenient, too, being just seven miles or so east of Baker City.

Hauter credits his hundreds of hours of riding at Virtue Flat for preparing him for the culmination of his dream with the invitation to ride in the Baja 1000.

"It's why I'm where I'm at today," he said.

A shocking phone call

The invitation came from Dan Mastrude, a former Baker City resident who put together Team Cactus Warriors to compete in the Baja 1000.

Hauter, who recently finished his fourth year competing in a circuit of motorcycle desert races in Idaho, is acquainted with Mastrude.

About a month or so ago, Hauter got a phone call from Mastrude.

Mastrude needed a rider for his Baja 1000 team.

He offered the spot to Hauter.

Hauter's reaction — "Oh my God."

"He surprised the heck out of me," Hauter said of Mastrude.

Hauter, who finished sixth out of 250 racers in this year's race series, said he thinks Mastrude was impressed by his consistency.

The offer to join the Baja 1000 team, Hauter said, "lets me know I'm doing something right on the bike." Since he took that call



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Cole Hauter, a motorcycle racer from Baker City, at Virtue Flat on Thursday, Nov. 4. Hauter will compete as part of a racing team from Idaho in the 54th-annual Baja 1000 race on the Baja Peninsula on Nov. 18.

"It's something I've been dreaming of since I was five."

— Cole Hauter, 25, talking about competing in this year's Baja 1000 off-road race

from Mastrude, Hauter has been focusing on preparing for this greatest test in off-road racing.

Despite its name, the Baja 1000 usually isn't exactly 1,000 miles. This year's route down the peninsula covers 1,200 miles.

Hauter said he'll ride the second stage for his team, covering about 200 miles and starting around daybreak on Nov. 18. Although the Team Cactus Warriors has seven riders, there's only one motorcycle — each rider will hand it off to the next after completing his stage.

"It's one of the most exhilarating but also one of the most dangerous events out there," Hauter said.

The Baja 1000 course is largely in isolated areas where emergency help might

be hours away.

Riders have to cope not only with the punishing terrain but with the possibility of encountering livestock, wild animals and even local residents driving on parts of the route.

All while riding at speeds that frequently will top 100 mph.

"At those speeds you have to be so focused," Hauter said. "That's part of the adventure."

To prepare, Hauter bought the Yamaha YZ450FX, the same model his team will ride in the Baja 1000.

He said Tom Chandler of Baker City, a master mechanic who owns Tom Chandler Motor Cross (TCMX), prepared his new motorcycle.

Hauter's other sponsors are Barley Brown's, Premier



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Cole Hauter, left, and his dad, Mark Hauter, at Virtue Flat on Thursday, Nov. 4.



Cole Hauter/Contributed Photo

Tom Chandler of Baker City is Cole Hauter's motorcycle mechanic.

Auto Body, Les Schwab, Outlaw Motorsports in Enter-

prise, FXR, EKS Goggles, Yamaha and the Team Cactus Warriors.

Hauter loves his new Yamaha.

He said he trimmed 30 seconds from his fastest time around a seven-mile circuit at Virtue Flat the first time out.

Hauter, who works as a rafting guide in Hells Canyon during the summer and also remodels homes, left Baker City on Thursday, Nov. 11 for Mexico. He and his team will "pre run" the Baja 1000 route — traveling it to get a sense for the particular challenges they'll face.

And then he'll wait for that moment when the stage one rider arrives, hops off and turns over the motorcycle to Hauter.

He'll be ready.

Hauter said he played many sports and participated in lots of other hobbies while growing up.

But the bond he formed with that old Honda 70 never diminished.

"I always end up back on my dirt bike," he said.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Cole Hauter at Virtue Flat. Hauter, of Baker City, credits his hundreds of hours of riding at the site east of Baker City with honing his motorcycle skills.



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Cole Hauter races along a curving trail at Virtue Flat on Thursday, Nov. 4.

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