

# *Snow, Turkey Feathers & Sand*

By Matthew Allan



OK, let's get the burning question out of the way... what do turkey feathers have to do with motorcycle riding?

Well as the story goes... I was riding in a very remote part of the West Virginia Alleghenies in January doing the twisties, running along rivers and traversing some very cold passes. So riding down along the rivers where the chicken and turkey farms are located, I came around a curve to confront an eighteen wheeler hauling turkeys to market. In his slip stream a wave of turkey feathers wafted along. I took an early breath to pass through the cloud of feathers flitting by and tried not to wave my arms or do anything else foolish. Turkey feathers were strewn all along the road. For miles I followed the turkey feather trail and finally tracked the rig to its point of origin. (This was not especially challenging but there was little else to occupy my attention.) I didn't think the turkeys were very warm losing their feathers in the open trailer but I don't suppose it mattered given where they were headed. Is it why turkeys are always frozen in the supermarket?

On the West Virginia map, there was a village with the name "Navy Base". I didn't think much of it until I was passing by the gate where multiple sentries stood posted with their carbines. This was strange. For reasons of [probably] national security I will not share the exact location but there was only a small river running through it and the fleet was definitely not anchored there... what could such a place be? I chose not to approach and ask given my black leathers and remnant turkey feathers would have suggested tar and feathers to these armed custodians. I didn't need their suspicions or abuse.

Few of us start off a ride in the snow (I do know of some such characters in Colorado) but sooner or later a flurry will hit you along the way when you are riding in January. This is not always a bad thing. It can be other worldly. It is only becomes a matter of concern when it bites into your face, accumulates on your windshield or the road. Sometimes when it snows the air will actually warm up a bit but this is hard to detect cruising down the highway. The wind chill is always mind numbing in the winter.

The most dreaded substance on the road is certainly not turkey feathers or even snow. It is probably sand. It is the indirect product of snow because the highway crews only lay it down when it snows. In the immediate aftermath of

a snow, the sand will be wet and you pick it up under your tires to create a nice layer of grit on the motorcycle undercarriage. It is always a chore to remove it. If it's warm enough to get a hose going the problem can first be washed away. Finally, it comes down to getting under the bike to wipe off grit clinging to the frame especially the moving parts.

Of course, navigating mountain curves coated in sand is suicidal unless you wait a day or two until other vehicles have cut pathways... just follow the lines. It means making sure you manage your turns so centrifugal force doesn't force you out of the lines and into the sand mounds running along the center line and shoulders. It is a good exercise in smooth riding and that is the key to safety according to Reg Pridmore – AMA Hall of Fame<sup>1</sup>.

The only risk I consider taking is whether to venture out on extended trips during winter. I am driven to do that if rationale concerning road conditions and weather will allow it. If I head out for multiple days then I try and keep it to just a few. It's all good if you make it back in good repair.

Safe travels. Life is best just cruisin'.

Matthew Allan is a moto-journalist living in Colorado and West Virginia. He keeps a ride in both places to placate the road demons that haunt him. He is the author of *The Zen Guide to Motorcycle Riding*.



<sup>1</sup> *Smooth Riding*, Reg Pridmore, Whitehorse Press 2004