



Momento

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It was a warm, late summer morning when the white tour van dropped us off at the local BMW dealership. I had finally bitten the bullet and decided to take a European motorcycle tour. The array of models to choose from for the tour was impressive, but I soon whittled it down to the most modest of choices: a 2007 F 800 S. As a solo rider, it made perfect sense. Small, light and able to carry just enough luggage to hold my belongings, it promised a no-frills ride through the Alps for two weeks.

As our two-wheeled Teutonic tour group rolled down the highway, I was pleasantly surprised. For a sport(y) bike, it was amazingly comfortable. The saddle was solidly softer in nature than many motorcycles I had ridden, and the ergonomics were decidedly more touring than any sport bike I had ever ridden. Approaching our first pass, the 8/10 liter bike dove into corners with barely a flick of the bars and had enough grunt in the engine to throttle out of any corner, deftly snapping the chassis upright with a quick twist of the wrist. While the small, semi-rigid soft cases were modest in volume, combined with a smaller top case, there was more than enough storage for an average asphalt adventurer like me. The biggest surprise was the mindbogglingly thrifty nature of gas consumption. Averaging 65 mpg proved the norm, and in petrol pricey countries in Europe, this feature impressed me beyond measure. As the tour wound down like an old fashioned pocket watch, I realized that I had truly discovered a gem of a bike. Indeed, if I were to locate one stateside, I felt it would make the ideal weekend canyon carver.

On the long but pleasant Lufthansa flight home, I began to seriously consider buying an F 800 R. The following summer, I finally jumped, and began combing online listings for my old friend. Unfortunately, while a fair number of F 800 ST (the sport-touring variant) models were available, the F 800 S proved to be a vexingly elusive beast. By pure luck, I located a fairly nice model languishing in a

water sports dealership about 50 miles away. The dealership, which was much more confident in selling Sea Doos than motorcycles had taken it in as a trade, and was having as much trouble selling it as I was trying to find it. A quick meeting with a motivated salesman resulted in an easy transfer of ownership. It's low mileage and pristine condition were impressive. On the ride home, even on the monotonous drone of the So Cal super slab, a twinge of remembrance crept from the bike into me. Baby—welcome back!

We soon settled into a smooth relationship. Saturday mornings I would don my leathers and mount my motorbike. Day trips led to several overnight trips, though my R 1200 GS was much better suited to that role. However, as the years and miles rolled by, and newer technologies appeared, my once beloved back road burner had its flame turned low. Newer bikes came, and the F 800 S slowly but surely moved to the back of the garage. After 9 years I had a harsh awakening—in the past year I had ridden it exactly three times. Washing it had long ago devolved into a dusting. Yet—I couldn't bring myself to sell it. My friends were mildly shocked when I showed up for a ride astride it. And I was too. I began to realize that what was holding me to it was not the bike itself, but the memories attached to it—and to me. It had been transformed into a memento—a token to remind me of a rosier period of previous time.

This fall, I finally traded my little red devil in for its grandson—a new F 900 R. The sheer performance and technology progression was incredible. Though a distinct familial lineage was carried on through its parallel twin engine, there remained little to tie the two together. I know the F 900 R will be many things the F 800 S was: canyon carver, trip taker—but it will never possess the one thing that kept the F 800 S in my garage and heart so long—an imprint to a time in my life that shines today as brightly as it did a decade ago—a memento.