



A rider splashes through a creek, cooling off. PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARDEN OFFROAD.

A Lingerin Impact

Epic desert motorcycle racer Scot Harden rejuvenates while riding Lincoln County's treasured trails

By Dianna Troyer

Undaunted by blinding sandstorms, relentless heat, searing sand, desolation and loneliness, professional motorcyclist Scot Harden raced across the Sahara Desert for days during the Dakar Rally.

"Dakar is the pinnacle of off-road motor sports," Scot says. "I had an unquenchable desire to be the very best at one of the most dangerous forms of racing in the world and succeeded."

A veteran of the world's most epic and treacherous off-road motorcycle races, Scot has multiple overall wins at the Baja 500/1000 in Mexico, gold medals at the International Six Days Enduro in Europe, and the Dakar Rally in Africa.

In 1987, he was the first American to win the Djerba 500 Rally in Tunisia—a marathon raid rally in North Africa.

"Desert racing is about lining up for a bomb run, and once the banner drops, twisting the throttle longer and harder than anyone else," Scot says. "It's about pounding mile after mile, hour after hour, at sometimes night and day across some of the toughest terrain on the planet and risking everything just to be the first rider to cross the finish line."

Retired from racing in 2007, Scot, 65, tells of his unforgettable experiences when he hosts the Nevada 200 Trailride, an annual event based in Caliente. The ride focuses on camaraderie—not competition—among off-road motorcyclists.

During the three-day gathering in early April, 200 riders traverse 200 miles of trails.

"I do whatever I can for the sport that has given me so much and made me who I am," says Scot, who is based in Southern California. "I've traveled an amazing road worldwide as a professional racer, team manager and corporate executive, and met wonderful people."

At last month's Nevada 200, Scot invited

two Dakar racers. Mason Klein, 20, the youngest competitor at the 2022 Dakar Rally in January, finished ninth in the storied race. The second, Skyler Howes, suffered a concussion after crashing and was unable to finish the Dakar contest.

Scot and a friend, Casey Folks, co-founded the Nevada 200 in 1985, craving a brief vacation from their racing careers. To rejuvenate and catch up, they chose Lincoln County because of its vast technical terrain.

Although their racing careers accelerated at full throttle, they vowed to meet annually in Caliente. They began inviting friends. Participation steadily grew.

"The scenery and trail network in Lincoln County is unbelievable, with literally thousands of miles of single-track and jeep trails, ranging from sand washes to desert and forested mountains," Scot says.

Scot and friends mark two routes: one for experienced riders seeking challenges and another for recreational riders.

"I rotate routes every year to keep it fresh and make it interesting for everyone," says Scot, who leads the technical ride.

Lingerin Economic Impact

Long after the April event ends, its impact lingers. The rally bolsters local businesses, funds recreational programs and emergency services, and ignites the imaginations of aspiring off-road racers.

It fuels tourism, too.

"We've put Caliente on the map as a riding destination," Scot says. "The notoriety of the Nevada 200 Trailride has led many off-road enthusiasts to circle Lincoln County as a bucket ride destination."

Since it started, the ride has infused \$600,000 into the county's economy, estimates Scot, who earned an economics degree in 1979 from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

During the ride, lodging is full in Caliente, Panaca and Pioche. Gas stations,

restaurants, and grocery and convenience stores are busy.

"We contract with local vendors and suppliers to keep the money in the county," Scot says. "Most of our support riders are local residents. We try to be appreciative visitors of Lincoln County and are grateful to residents for allowing us to be guests in your home."

The Nevada 200 not only has benefited businesses, it has helped local parks, fire departments and schools' athletic programs, with donations totaling \$50,000.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7114 in Caliente caters meals for the event, which is responsible for a significant portion of its annual budget.

"When we started the ride, people suggested we talk to the VFW about catering," Scot says. "At the first ride in 1985, they left an ice chest with food behind a tree on Oak Springs Summit for us. We love the gang from the VFW post and are proud to still have them with us."

VFW Quartermaster and Past Commander Jack Horner says the event "is our biggest fundraiser. It's a lot of work feeding more than 250 people, but we've learned how to be efficient. It's an enjoyable tradition for us, too. It's always a pleasure to meet the riders and hear about their experiences."

Racing Inspiration

Lincoln County Emergency Manager Eric Holt, 39, says the Nevada 200 inspired him to complete the grueling Baja 1000 for the first time last fall.

Racing 1,000 miles on the California Baja Peninsula's desert, he placed third in the Pro Moto Limited Class (less than 450cc engine) with a time of 34:08.

He hopes to compete again this November. "I grew up watching the ride and always wanted to be part of it," Eric says. "Last year

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was my first time to ride as support.”

Last month, he led sections of a route for recreational riders.

“Grey Dome Single-Track is a memorable, intense technical rocky hill climb,” Eric says.

Riders navigated sand washes strewn with rocks of various sizes.

“The faster you go, the smoother it is,” Eric says. “You wouldn’t think so, but it is. Being cautious and going too slowly works against you. We’ll go 30 to 50 miles an hour in some sections of the washes, depending on how big the rocks are. At other sections of the routes, you can safely go 70 to 80.”

Eric says the Nevada 200 and hearing stories and advice from the pros is a great experience.

“Scot is willing to share his knowledge about setting up your bike and planning strategy to deal with the terrain,” Eric says.

Dakar Rally

For Scot, a yearning to race motorcycles off-road started in childhood. It soon became as natural to him as breathing.

“I was in awe standing at the finish line of the Barstow-to-Vegas desert race watching riders,” says Scot, who grew up in Las Vegas.

He pestered his parents for a dirt bike. They bought him one at age 11. In 1971, he launched his racing career as a 15-year-old.

When he heard about the first Dakar Rally, which started in 1978, he dreamed of competing in it one day.

“Nothing compares to Dakar,” says Scot, manager and a rider for the Red Bull KTM U.S. Dakar Rally team in 2004 and 2005.

“I’ll never forget the emotion of seeing the finish line at Lac Rose in Dakar. It was the culmination of almost 40 years and hundreds of thousands of miles of racing to get to that moment.”

In 2005, at the advanced age of 49 for a desert racer, Scot was the 17th motorcyclist out of 250 to cross the Dakar finish line.

Named for the capital of Senegal in West Africa, the Dakar Rally follows different routes every year and traversed almost 7,000 miles the year Scot rode.



Timed stages—as long as 600 miles every day—test riders’ nerves, endurance and machines.

Shortly before starting each stage, riders receive a road book or map. They rely on GPS to navigate the route.

“You get up in the middle of the night, get on the bike and are frozen for three to six hours, just to get to the start of the stage,” Scot says. “You go for as long as it takes.”

The Dakar Rally moved to South America in 2005. Saudi Arabia is its current home.

Scot’s accomplishments have been recognized. In 2008, he was inducted into the American Motorcyclist Association Hall of Fame. He also is in the Hall of Fame of the Trailblazers, Hot Shoe and Motorcycle Racing Association of Nevada.

Today, as president of Harden Offroad—a company he founded in 1987—Scot provides business development consulting services for various companies.

“I also donate about one-third of my time to advocate for motorcycling, help bring new riders into the sport and keep riding areas open,” he says.

At the end of any ride, Scot never says goodbye.

“We always tell each other, ‘See you down the trail,’” he says. ■

Scot recounts his epic races at www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4UzZkjUpD0



ABOVE: Scot and his wife, Kristi, welcome people of all ages and expertise to the trail ride. **MIDDLE:** Lincoln County Emergency Manager Eric Holt rides a difficult section of the Nevada 200 Trailride, a three-day event based in Caliente. **TOP:** Riders listen to a description of the trails they will ride.