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BMW Motorrad International GS Trophy 2016. **Spectacular Southeast Asia!**

Munich. The fifth BMW Motorrad International GS Trophy, the 2016 Southeast Asia edition came to a close, after seven hard days' riding, with a spectacular finale on Saturday, March 5. With the competition still in the balance right up to the final special test, it was a tense finish – decided in favour of Team South Africa who kept their nerve to secure the nation's first victory in the event after twice placing runner-up. Let's have a look back on a week packed with high temperatures, offroad riding, friendly people and adventures in the jungle.

The fifth edition brought together 19 teams (comprising 57 riders plus 19 embedded journalists) representing 25 nations for a seven-day over-1300 kilometre trek through the forests, jungles and mountains of Northern Thailand. The riding was possibly the most technical yet, as the riders guided their BMW R 1200 GS bikes along single-track trails more akin to enduro racing than adventure competition. Temperatures matched those of the South African edition in 2010 – running into the high 30°C range – and with high humidity it was one of the hotter, sweatier GS Trophies!

The start came at the Rim Doi Resort, in Chiang Dao at 8.00am on the morning of February 28, and while unseasonal heavy rain had washed out the planned course for day one, the riders were still treated to some excellent off-road trails before hitting the first – and possibly physically the toughest – special test, 'Broken Bridge'. Such themes are by now familiar, long days in the saddle with always some challenging riding, combined with special tests that challenge the riders' teamwork, their problem solving skills, often their strength, as well as their bike riding. As ever, the riders would reach the nightly bivouacs well-exercised.

The 2016 edition again saw the event grow, with 114 motorcycles on the tour and an entourage of close to 200 people (riders, marshals, medics, caterers, organisers and more). As ever, the motorcycles – BMW R 1200 GS and GSA – were up to the task; occasional puncture repairs on the trail tested the practical skills of the riders while crash damage gave the BMW Motorrad mechanics a few



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hours work each evening; but the engines and chassis never gave up. The latest GS bikes were praised for their ease of use, great rider aids and sheer ruggedness. As before, the competitors were won-over by the bike's character as much as the sheer capability of these iconic machines.

Team South Africa wins.

Team South Africa has been one of the strongest teams in every edition of the GS Trophy since their debut in 2010. They missed out on the win then, by just one point, and came close again in 2014, so the win this year was especially savoured. Thorough preparation meant the team were always in contention – they were in fact the team to beat – but John Harris, Charl Moolman and Byron Coetsee were winners on every level, winning as many friends as points.

Team UK and Team Germany were their nearest competitors and the unrelenting efforts of the two teams kept the outcome of the event in question right up to the very last test. And while the strength of Team South Africa could not be denied, it was fitting that the runner-up position should be shared by these two great teams (Team UK having won in 2010, Team Germany in 2012).

Three new teams took part in 2016. Team China made an impact right from the start, having given up their international air flights and instead choosing to ride to the event on their own GSs! Four days in the saddle saw them ride up to the Shang-ri La Hotel in Chiang Mai for the official opening – along with some 60 supporters, most also BMW-mounted. They made quite probably the most impressive entrance to the event yet. And Team China proved a competitive team, too, strong and well-practiced they took an impressive 7th place on their debut.

Team Southeast Asia might have been less successful, but nonetheless brought much colour to the event, good humour, and found they enjoyed their 'home' course as much as the visitors.

The third new team were the International Female Team. Easily the most popular team in the event, Stéphanie Bouisson (France), Morag Campbell (South



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Africa) and Amy Harburg (Australia) showed bike-handling skills equal to the men (in fact sometimes superior). They would have finished higher if they hadn't been so punished by the strength-based tests, but as Amy reported, they were never defeated – not even in lifting the 238kg GS over a 1.5-metre tree trunk – it just took a little more time for them than for the men. The team was much welcomed by the men, and cheered-on all the way, but again as the girls explained, this was the same for all teams – every team supports everyone. It's truly a band of brothers – and sisters.

At the finish, Team South Africa's Byron Coetsee spoke for his teammates about their win:

"Relief is the first emotion, then happiness. With South Africa's record in the event – we've come second twice, even losing by just one point – then to finish like this is like the weight of the world has been lifted from our shoulders. We share this moment with Roger, Gerber, Warren and all the previous team members from South Africa!"

The BMW R 1200 GS - competition proven.

The BMW R 1200 GS proved more than up to the challenge of seven days on the trails in Northern Thailand. The 2016 R 1200 GSs featured the latest engine revisions, including a new heavier crank that makes for smoother running and Shift Assist Pro that allows clutchless up- and down-shifts. As well the riders had the code plug that enables the Enduro Pro mode to modify the rider-assist systems to suit sportive off-road riding. And with just the lightest level of crash protection, including the aluminium enduro engine guard and steel crash bars – plus the rugged Metzeler Karoo 2 tyres – the GSs were totally trail-ready.

The feedback from the riders was uniformly positive, most expressing delight in the ease of handling the bikes, their tough resistance to extreme riding, and engaging character.



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Here's what a few of the riders thought of the bikes:

Morag Campbell: "I loved the bike, the torque, the instant reaction, the maneuverability, especially the attitude! And so fast! I rode mine in Enduro Pro without traction control and ABS – and still it was so easy to ride. I love it, for all of us, every time and everyday it's the best bike!"

Francesco Catanese: "The BMW is a surprise, because in my imagination it was a big bad bike, but on enduro tracks, in the sand and the dust, the bike was completely perfect, no odd sounds, no mechanical problem, for me it was a surprise. Much power, perfect bike!"

Anton Vlasov: "I have ridden this bike several times, but I should say that this bike is great, I found out so many things about the handling, the engine, everything. This event shows us everything about this bike, it'll ride highway, then singletrack trail in the mountains, then you can ride relaxed with your friends. The event showed this perfectly!"

The GS Trophy in their words

Stéphanie Bouisson, Morag Campbell & Amy Harburg / International Female Team

Amy: "I loved it, it was definitely tough and some of the tests for us were really physical, but we got through them, only maybe not quite as quick as the men. But it was so much fun, so I loved the whole event."

Morag: "It's beautiful, the local people we met are extremely friendly, and curious, and open to us, and wanting to engage and that's really nice. From the physical viewpoint the scenery is stunning, it changes all the time, forest, mountains, rivers. I've enjoyed every bit of it. And the food has been great, too!"

Stéphanie: "The country is amazing. I've been travelling in Chile, in Morocco, in Europe. Here it's very different, the scenery, the people, it feels very safe and gentle. The people are everything. Amazing. What can I say? Peace and love!"



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Alfred Scheurer / Team Alps

“The country was very nice, we appreciated riding the small trails and being among the flora – banana trees, bamboo, palms – it was very nice. We had a good time, we made some mistakes when we were very nervous at the beginning and we didn’t work together as well as we’d have liked!

“All the same, in all it was a very nice experience. Normally I ride alone, but to work as a team in this, that’s very nice, it was a very special experience.”

Gastón Quiroga / Team Argentina

“It’s been a great week, we’ve enjoyed the beautiful scenery, the people and seeing so many things – elephants one day, water buffalo the next. And all these things wrapped around the most incredible riding, and the friendships that you make in the GS Trophy. It is an amazing experience. Everyday has been so big in experiences, it will take some time to remember them all. It is very special.”

Fernando Deneka / Team Brazil

“Everything is beautiful. It’s the dream to get to ride a bike like this for seven days. Team Brazil hasn’t done so well in the event, but our presence is very beautiful. Thailand is beautiful, the people here are beautiful, and the motorcycle the R 1200 GS, is spectacular.

The experience in my life, it is incredible.”

Cory Villeneuve, Danick Cyr & Scott McDonald / Team Canada

Cory: “It was pretty amazing, we had a good time it was a lot of fun. I think it surpassed all expectations.”

Danick: “It was a tough competition, but really-really great, nice country, nice people. And great competitors from 25 countries.”

Scott: “We loved the single track, we don’t ride single track so much and the concentration level that you have to apply is way more: 100% all the time. You make one mistake and you’re going to get hurt. And it’s not for just five minutes, it’s for a long time – hours! You’ll be thinking I can’t do this any longer, my brain can’t concentrate this hard for this long, I’m going to make a mistake. And then once you get out of it, you’re like, ‘Wow, I did it!’”

Cory: Everything is perfect, everything is beautiful here, BMW Motorrad have done a great job this week and I’ve really enjoyed the GS Trophy, I’m very thankful, it’s been amazing.”



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Jan Zlabek / Team CEEU

"We had a lot of fun, riding a lot of fun tracks, with a lot of challenges, everything went alright, except for a few accidents, including mine on tarmac – my own fault as I'd turned the traction control off!

"We enjoyed Thailand a lot, the views, the people, but this was no tourist trail; we were riding and riding and riding, and the evenings were busy with planning, meetings, eating, results, so you don't have so much spare time during the GS Trophy, it's all go.

Wen-Gao Liang / Team China

"We have enjoyed the GS Trophy very much. I've personally owned a GS since 2006, so this is a wonderful celebration of the past ten years for me; I knew I must come to this event. With all the riders from around the world, it's so special; it's every GS rider's dream.

"As a team, we chose to ride here, rather than fly, it was four days to get here, but that helped unify us before we started. We love Thailand as well, all the people are smiling, the people in China call Thailand 'the smiling country', it's a special place."

Sébastien Saphores & Marc-Antoine Peltriaux / Team France

Sébastien: "It's a beautiful experience, the temperature was very high but it's been beautiful, very nice. The third day may have been the best, just 160km but to ride crossing the river back and forth is so beautiful, we can't do this in our country, it is forbidden."

Marc-Antoine: "We are a happy team, no problems, all is perfect. Laurent, our journalist, is a crazy but beautiful guy and the movies he makes are very important to us because it's wonderful for our families to see what we have been doing here, it's life and so beautiful, but it's a hard job for him, because even after one day he has so much work to do. 'Lolo' is our hero!"

Peter Kopf & Steffen Rahn / Team Germany

Peter: "We enjoyed the week, everything was good, we were definitely in it for the competition. Most times we did well, our teamwork got the results. We tried to win, but didn't. But we knew also that this is an event that comes once in your lifetime, if you are lucky, so there's so much more to it than just whether you win, to be in the event is the main thing – the best feeling!



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Steffen: "Thailand is the perfect country for enduro riding and for the GS Trophy. The highlights for us were riding the difficult stages, the Hò Chi Minh Path, the Helicopter Trail, the loop around Mae Sariang – tough riding is the highlight!"

Francesco Catanese / Team Italy

"It's been a strange week for us in the competition. We are all enduro and motocross riders, so this has been different to our usual riding, when we are racing. We thought we'd do better, but in fact 'gas' is just a little part of the competition. If we'd known this was the way we'd have done more specific training, but still it's a wonderful experience.

"And we loved the country, the jungle, the forest, the mountains – an amazing experience. In so many ways, perfect."

Tsutomu Morohara / Team Japan

"I think Team Japan got most enjoyment from the GS Trophy. We came not for a good time, but for the best time. For me, definitely this has been the best time in my life!

"We've enjoyed Thailand, it is very good, sometimes like Japan in summer, more excellent tracks though – good people, good culture. And we've had good guys for company.

"In Japan we have many manufacturers, but they only make motorcycles – BMW Motorrad make motorcycles and culture. Especially in the GS Trophy – the best of culture. To participate in the GS Trophy, this has been my dream and it has come true!"

Felipe Horta / Team Latin America

"For us it's been an amazing experience, the Latin American team is from different countries: two guys from Columbia, one guy from Guatemala and me from Chile. It was a first time for us to ride together, so from the competition perspective it is difficult because the event is extreme and emotional and we are not as prepared, we haven't practiced the teamwork, as have the other teams. But our guys are very good people, very quiet but happy every day. And whether, in the competition, it was good news or bad for us, we were every day very happy.

"Our appreciation is the event is a very-very nice idea, for the marketing for BMW surely, but it's also very close, very warming, for the riders it's an amazing experience."



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Jorge Marroquin Bascos & Leoncio Reynoso Sosa / Team Mexico

Jorge: "This has been an excellent event, I'm proud to be here, I'll never forget this GS Trophy in my life, I've meant so many guys from all over the world and we hope to be in touch with them, everything was perfect.

Leoncio: "I saw elephants, that was amazing day, but every day the nature was very good, it was a very amazing event with BMW. I am just 18 years old but this will be a memory for the rest of my life. If I could, I would do it all over again."

Anton Vlasov & Ivan Chekov / Team Russia

Anton: "That was fun, definitely. Our expectations were to have fun within our team then make new friends in the other teams, to have a nice experience in Thailand. It measured up, it was hot, it was fun, at times quite hard. Maybe for the first few days we had a strong feeling that we wanted to compete, but then over the last few days we realised that the important thing was to have fun, so then we let it go, it was time to have fun."

Ivan: "The strongest memory – perhaps of day six on the Hò Chi Minh Path, that was tough but we made it as a team, helping each other. It was a really good experience."

Byron Coetsee & John Harris / Team South Africa

Byron: "It's definitely a close call for me, between wanting to do well in the competition and enjoying the experience. So between the special stages I ran my GoPro a lot, because you're concentrating on the road, thinking about what's going on and so you miss the insane scenery that's about you. So I ran the Go Pro, so I can watch back again later, and I tried to look at everything, as much as possible."

John: "I have to agree with Byron, I'd see the Japanese team and they'd be running last or second last but we are actually jealous of them. We rode with them and their spirit, the fun they had, in terms of getting the most out of the trip, those are the guys who are the real winners, they've had the best time ever. I envy them for that!"

Tommy Lee Boon Jun / Team Southeast Asia

"We are enjoying the GS Trophy maybe a little bit too much! We were very serious initially, but we made lots of mistakes, so after that we just wanted to enjoy the event. It's been great to meet similarly minded people and with the riding skills so similar it makes for really enjoyable riding. We've had a wonderful time."



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Du-Yeol Choi / Team South Korea

"Thailand is a very good place, everybody is so very friendly and always smiling. And Thai and Korean mountains – and many places – look the same, very similar, so we are very happy here, we enjoyed the riding and felt comfortable and safe.

"We had many special experiences, and many funny ones. We loved the slow race, we'd practiced it often in Korea, but then when it came to the race here we were so nervous we were all finished in 30 seconds!"

James Berrill, Oliver Twigg & Gordon Blackley / Team UK

James: "It's been better than I expected by far, it's not just the competition. The trail riding and the scenery has been amazing, the competitors, everyone, even the journalists and the story tellers!"

Gordon: "The feeling after the first two days was amazing. We were just buzzing. The trail riding up the mountains was really good fun, we enjoyed the views, enjoyed riding in the jungle. And the fact you get to ride with different teams each day is great, you don't become insular, you get to know everyone."

Oliver: "There's real camaraderie, some banter, but competition as well. Riding with the Germans we had a puncture but they fixed it. We could have fixed it but they insisted on fixing it for us. It's that balance that the event seems to have. But there's still that edge – I'll help you but I really want to beat you! Oh, and it's been my first time camping. I hadn't even thought about it, but the cold showers – yes, you even get the hang of those!"

Charles Lucht & Dennis Godwin / Team USA

Dennis: "The whole event is everything I expected and then some. The accommodations are incredible, the food is off the chart, the riding is even further off the chart, everyone is cool, we're busy all the time, the special tests have been ingenious, fun, interesting, it's really been a great-great experience."

Charles: "The bike is awesome, if I had remembered to reactivate the ABS and traction control I'd not have crashed on day one that was 100% operator error, I ran out of talent! I have an 800GS – but I'm changing up to the 1200GS now, this has been the best test drive I've taken in my entire life!"

Dennis: "What else is really interesting here is whereas almost everywhere in the world you find you come around a corner and it's 'oh-no there's a truck'. Here there are no cars out there, just motorcycles, just scooters, always on their own side of the road. That it's just motorcycles out there, that's so cool! What an amazing place. This has been an amazing event."



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BMW Motorrad Int. GS Trophy 2016

Final results

1 South Africa	299 pts.
2 Germany	268 pts.
2 UK	268 pts.
4 CEEU	254 pts.
5 Latin America	244 pts.
6 Brazil	242 pts.
7 China	234 pts.
8 USA	229 pts.
9 France	208 pts.
10 Italy	200 pts.
11 Argentina	188 pts.
12 Mexico	181 pts.
13 Russia	180 pts.
14 Canada	176 pts.
15 South Korea	146 pts.
16 Japan	138 pts.
17 South East Asia	138 pts.
18 Alps	117 pts.
19 International Female Team	116 pts.

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