

## 1mlost: MotoGP in Austin, TX



In the past year I've become enthralled with MotoGP: the top level of motorcycle track racing in the world. This sport is uniquely European, although they race on tracks in 5 continents. This road show comes to North America just once a year in Austin, TX. I am determined to attend this year. I needed to see the speed, hear the 115 db motors and smell the gasoline fumes. So one night after drinking a whisky or two I book it all: the discount flights, the cheapest airBnB, general admission, tickets, and a motorcycle rental.

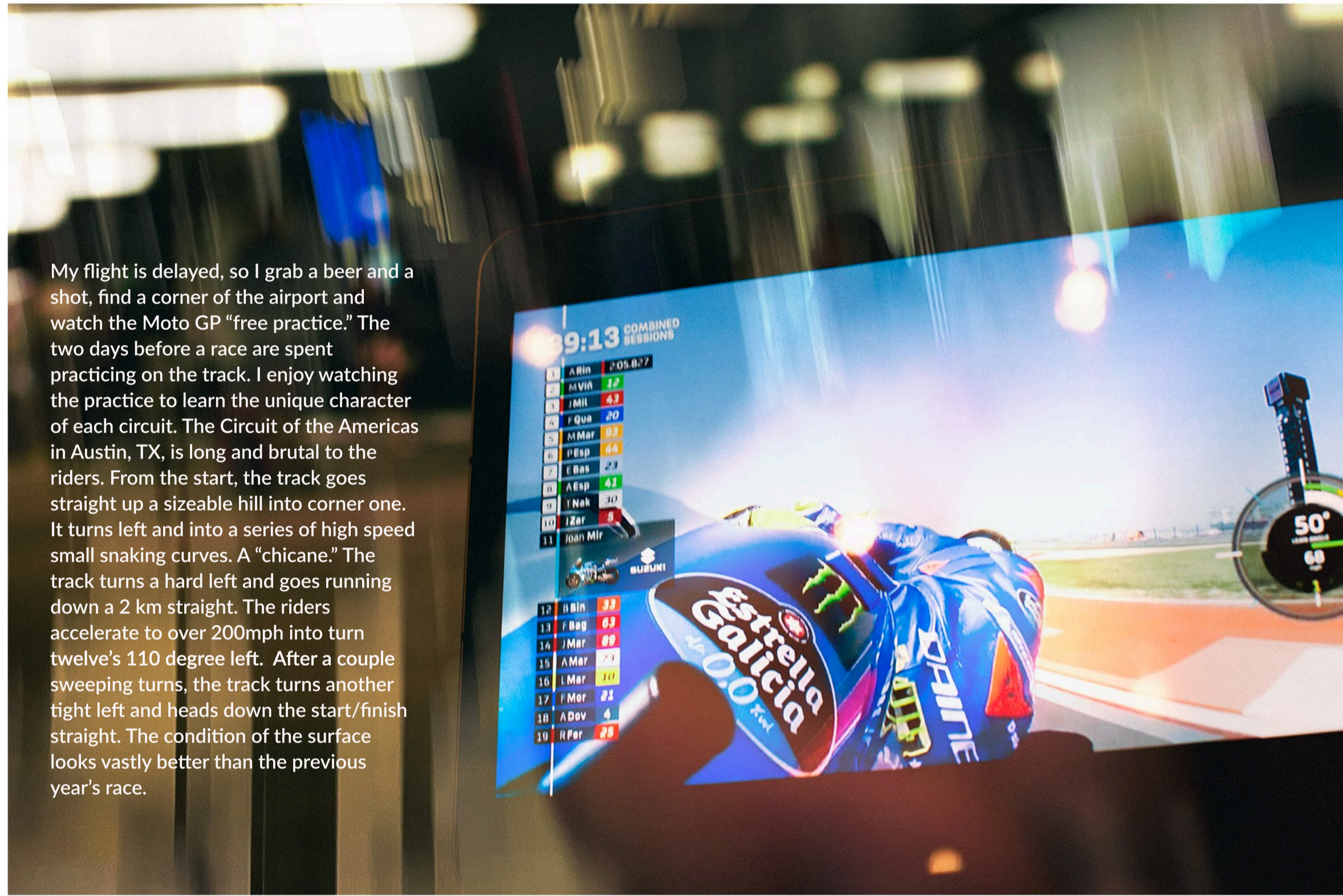
It's the eve of my trip. At the start of a well planned trip, there are so many things to anticipate. I aim to enjoy every last moment. Right now, I'm most looking forward to tomorrow's 60 degree ride through Jersey to Newark International. 42-09-15-80-287-24-78-95. The rest could be a blur.



Family possesses a magnetism. It's hard to leave them behind, but certain adventure is only possible solo. My wife is not happy I'm leaving. I can feel it. She doesn't want to voice it so she's just cold. The magnet is flipped, and I need to get away quickly for both our sakes. It's Friday 5:50. I strap down my touring bag, my camera bag and depart. Holy shit. I'm on my way. It's a beautiful 60 degree spring evening and hopes are high. I arrive at Newark 3 hours before the flight. For some reason, motorcycles park for free at the airport for as long as they want, so I claim my spot up on the sidewalk in P4.



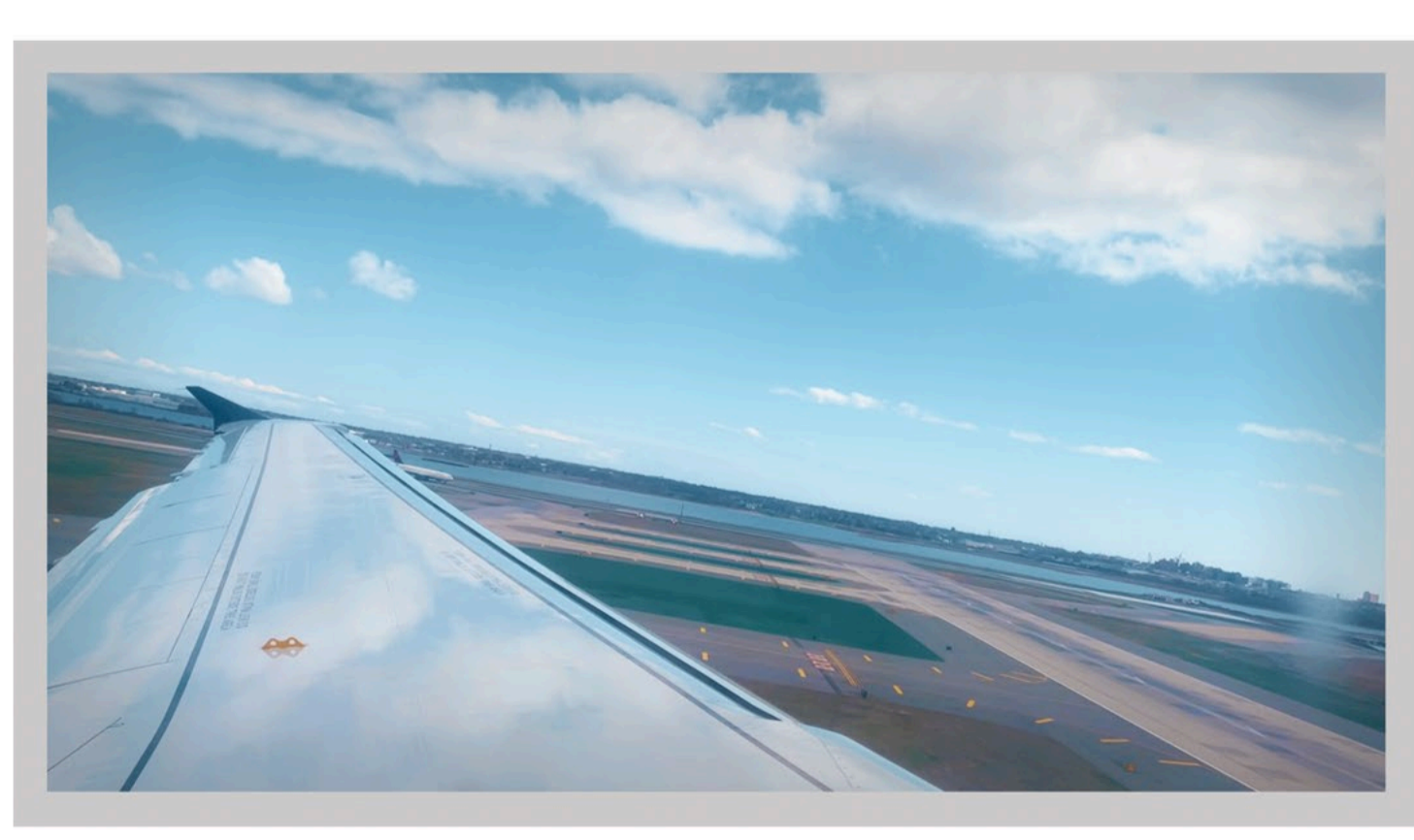
On the shuttle from long term parking to the airport I meet Yasdan. First, I notice her shaking hands on the handle of her luggage then notice she is crying. I ask if she's ok. Her boyfriend was in a "carting" accident in Dubai and she's headed to the hospital. It's an ominous start to my trip. We have a 7 minute ride together and I tried my best to calm her down. I don't know what to say. I tell her that her boyfriend is in the best place possible. Before we depart she actually looks at me through teary eyes and very seriously says, "I'll never forget this." She goes to Emirates, I go to Spirit. I feel I've done a good deed and cash in the karma at the checkin counter when my bag is only 1/2 a pound over weight.



My flight is delayed, so I grab a beer and a shot, find a corner of the airport and watch the Moto GP "free practice." The two days before a race are spent practicing on the track. I enjoy watching the circuit to learn the unique character of each circuit. The Circuit of the Americas in Austin, TX, is long and brutal to the riders. From the start, the track goes straight up a sizeable hill into corner one. It turns left and into a series of high speed small snaking curves. A "chicane." The track turns a hard left and goes running down a 2 km straight. The riders accelerate to over 200mph into turn twelve's 110 degree left. After a couple sweeping turns, the track turns another tight left and heads down the start/finish straight. The condition of the surface looks vastly better than the previous year's race.



At 10pm they cancel my flight. No reason given. I will spare you the details of my interaction with the airline and simply say that I booked a new flight with a new airline for the following day. The final destination for today's travel would be the Newark Airport Marriott Lobby Bar. The company at the bar are all stranded travelers from various places. This is the modern version of a medieval roadside tavern and inn.



I celebrated my luck and the start of my trip a little too hard. Getting out of bed is a little rocky. My flight is at 1pm from a different NYC airport, so I unpack all the moto gear, put it back on and head across 2 islands. At 228 feet above the water, crossing the upper level of the Verrazano feels like flying a motorcycle across the sky. Everything goes smooth this time and I'm wheels up on time. I'm 8 hours behind schedule and about \$800 dollars lighter, but I'm on my way to Austin.

It's Saturday and my delay means I won't make it for the track for the qualifying sessions: two 15 minute timed sessions that determine the starting order for the race. I land at 4:30. Check into a camper I rented on airBnB. Uber north 45 minutes and meet a guy named Joel, who has agreed to rent me his 2013 BMW 800GS. We connect in a parking lot in front of Trader Joe's. We each complete an odd ritual of taking photos of the bike and each other's IDs and suddenly, I am a new motorcyclist. I do a couple loops around the parking lot to get the feel of the bike. Joel has big block off road tires fitted. He says he takes the bike bear hunting in the backcountry. I'm off to The Revival Cycles Handbuilt Show.



The Handbuilt Show normally coincides with the MotoGP race weekend. It's an exhibition of some of the best custom built, one off motorcycles in the world. This year Revival has almost 200 bikes on display in The Austin Station, an empty industrial space, once used to print newspapers. I find these machines very beautiful. Fixing even a small thing on a motorcycle is always a headache, so the dedication shown in these bike projects is a wonder of the world. I was determined to shoot some good photos of these creations and managed to acquire a press pass with a few emails. A motorcycle publication is offered to publish any photos I'm willing to donate for free, so I'm feeling very "official." At the request of no-one I write an article of my experience to accompany the photos.

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