

Here is another lively writeup of our Romanian trip from Steve Altman entitled “The World’s Greatest Driving Road”.

Another Version of the Trip - by Steve Altman

When Paddy, a childhood friend of a buddy of mine, called a while back and said, “I am planning a motorcycle trip to Romania to check out the Transfagarasan Highway. Jeremy Clarkson from the TV show Top Gear called it ‘the world’s greatest deriving road” I have it all lined up. Sergiu at MotoRentals in Bucharest has a fleet of BMW GS1250s. You in?”

That was a Hobson’s Choice or rhetorical question to me. My immediate response, “What are the dates? I’ll look into flights now.”

So, here’s what happened. Four or so months later, after a zoom call or two, the day before Memorial Day, off five of us went. Me, my dear friend Ed with whom I have traversed the U.S. on two wheels over the last decade plus, and two guys (Paul and Mike) from Arizona our team leader Paddy knew. Having ridden from my home on Long Island (New York that is) to Montana, NY to Atlanta via the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountains, slayed the Tail of the Dragon, traversed through the San Jacinto Mountains from San Diego to Indio (California), West Texas Hill country, and flown around New England numerous times - me almost always on a Ducati and Ed on some Harley (they all look the same to me) - we were no strangers to long distance motorcycling and twisties. In other words, novices we were not.

How did Romania stack up you ask? The Carpathian Mountains are nothing short of motorcycle nirvana! The guys on Top Gear were right. The Transfagarasan Highway is breathtakingly spectacular in every way.



Even the roads leading into and away from it are among the dreamiest we have leaned into and sped

through. Narrow winding switchbacks along the rivers through quaint country towns, ultimately rising above the tree line for turn after turn after turn after turn after turn (you get my drift).



It was literally the ride of a lifetime. Careful to avoid the numerous horse-drawn wagons, sheep herds, pigs, farmers walking cows on leashes and foxes. We were told definitely don't feed the brown bears in the mountains even though they seem to be quite passive as they approach the errant fool hearty picture taker.



Truth be told though the Transalpină Highway is even better! Transalpină runs parallel to Transfăgărășan about 120 kilometers to the West, with Sibiu, a city centrally located at the northern section between the two highways. Completely re-paved and much less traffic. Transalpină is truly heaven on two wheels. Some highlights from our Romanian journey follows:

- **DAY 1** Arrive in Bucharest and met Sergui at MotoRentals and head out for a lovely warm up ride to the Hotel Brasov in, you guessed it, the town of Brasov. “Where the heck is Brasov, Romania?” All I can say is it’s about 180 kilometers northeast of Bucharest.
- **DAY 2** From Brasov we took off to Piatra Neamt via E578, 12C and 15. A ride that on any other day would have been considered outstanding, which it was thought paled against what was to come. Dinner across from the Central Plaza Hotel and a hearty breakfast in the palatial dining room there the following morning.
- **DAY 3** Off we went West to Cluj-Napoca traveling 15C and 15D and the Northern section of E578. Cluj-Napoca is a lovely town where we stayed at the Hotel Transylvania. Much of our travels were in the area known as Transylvania. We were told though to skip Dracula’s Castle (touristy and not much to it), which we did.
- **DAY 4** We rode the incredible Transfagarasan Highway to Ramnicu Valcea. There we stayed at the Ramada by Wyndham, where they were very accommodating allowing us to park the bikes on the sidewalk right in front of the otherwise busy entrance.
- **DAY 5** We rode the famed Transalpina Highway enroute to Sighisoara. A lovely town where we stayed at the charming and quaint Mercure Hotel and Spa. A thing about the prices in Romania. The currency is ‘leu’, ‘lei or L’ , if plural, or ‘Rom’ and everything is almost absurdly inexpensive. For example, the massage at the Spa at Mercure was 130 lei, which is about \$25 (US). The masseuse wanted lei, which I didn’t have. But I was fortunately able to convince her with Google translate and some help from the front desk clerk to take \$50 in US dollars.

- **DAY 6** Sibiu was our destination on this day, and it definitely merits a return trip. The city, particularly the Grand Square, has been meticulously restored and is pristine. Paddy, born in Dublin (of course) insisted we sample the local Scottish Pub, so we did before a terrific dinner and stroll around town. We stayed in Sibiu at the stately Continental Forum Hotel. Only issue there was we had to cajole a snarling parking attendant to squeeze us in among cars gathered for a Porsche Club event the Corvin Castle. Couldn't visit Romania without touring at least one castle, right? Formerly part of Hungary it has quite a history, not surprisingly including kings and knights and torturers.
- **DAY 7** Our final day and a much-needed gentle ride back to Bucharest. We returned the bikes, bid farewell to our now brothers from Arizona and stayed conveniently in the Old Town - Sector 3 at the Hilton Garden Inn. Then capped off the trip with an authentic dinner at Caru' cu Bere joined by Sergiu.

Finally, a bit about the bikes. I am strongly Ducati partial though I have ridden and love the BMW 1000RR the California Superbike School provides. Ed, as mentioned, is a Harley maven. The verdict on the GS1250? Outstanding! Sergiu set up mine with the extra low seat to accommodate my not quite 5'8" body and it was perfect. Rev high, rev low in all gears. Plenty of pull and smooth as silk at speed (will not say how fast) on the short stretches we did on the freeways. Bottom line gentleman and ladies - put Romania on your bucket list and, if already there, move it up.



Flag of Romania