

Mount Saint Helens, Thar She Blows

When LAPD's Bob Hossfeld and His Own Self came up with the cocktail infused concept for an annual MMOC ride at the September 1994 Radisson Hotel San Diego Convention, many poo-poo'd our liquid brilliance as just hot air. One month later eight riders assembled on the central coast and blazed an inaugural 3 day trail, a double throw-down to the nay-sayers.

Fast forward 19 years to July 8th, 2012, and the evolution of our rides finds three of us "originals" pool side at the Quality Inn, Williams, California, basking in the warm afternoon sun as a prelude to our next 5 days of adventure touring. Let's talk about this year's cast of characters. Joining myself, my wife Rhoda and Broadmoor's Mary Ann Mann in our levity would be SFPD's Rene' LaPrevotte and significant other Susan Johnson, George and Barbara Firchow, Doug Foss, and just retired Chief Solo/Motor Training Officers Ed Callejas and Al Luenow. From Oakland PD yours truly, helicopter pilot extraordinaire Cliff Heanes and his wife Mickie Waid, Cliff's Honorary Member brother Jeff Heanes, and Kent Thornberry who retired from both Oakland and San Francisco PD's. Of interest, Mickie Waid's brother Joe and his son John, new Honorary Members both, joined us this year. Mark and Helen Murray represented San Leandro PD and Steve Armbruster, Bakersfield's finest. Bringing up the far south contingent, LAPD's Baron Laetzsch blew into town with girlfriend Josie Loughridge in tow, CK Williams' son Kenny and daughter-in-law Gwen were ever present and Pasadena PD's Past President of MMOC Terry Blumenthal brought soon to be Honorary Member Phil Ponzio out of Healdsburg. Herman Rellar of the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office brought his long time riding partner Armando Vasquez along too. As the retired Fleet Manager for Co. Co. County Fire, we would wonder if Armando's wrenching talents would be called upon; all for naught. Last but not least, current MMOC Director Bill Loveless of the CHP represented that fine agency.

The above Rogues Gallery has certain new players that deserve an extra dose of verbiage; allow me to spew forth: Mickie Waid watched her husband Cliff ride off into the sunset with suspect Homies for more than 20 years of *solo* tours, his Harley hoopties shedding parts from Arizona to Oregon, and she finally said, no mas! In 2010 she bought a 250cc Honda Rebel, took the MSF training course, beat and bashed that ride for a year, then stepped up to a 700cc Honda NT700V-twin 4 months before our ride. Through constant surface street, freeway and parking lot practice, she has developed a very good skill-set with a smooth and fluid style! Callejas and Luenow are from SF, remember, so I pick and choose words carefully, lest I offend them and half of the PC world. NOT! These two are attached at the hip displaying their years of instructor knowledge, ride like brothers from a different mother and bunked together on the ride. They had several daily "lover's tiffs"; emblematic of that liberal bastion across the bay, yet at day's end they each were seen sequestered out of ears' reach talking to their opposite-sex paramours. WTF? Joe Waid, Mickie's 6'6" 350lb brother, brought his LS2 6.0-L 425hp Chevy

powered 2008 Boss Hoss from Arizona and his not-too-small son John trailered a soft-tail Harley for those sections of roadway too tight for the Hoss. Almost big enough to carry the damn thing it was an amazing novelty seeing monster man and machine motoring down the road! Originally from Arkansas, I nicknamed these two “Big Bubba” and-not-so “Little Bubba”. Big has been in the nuclear power industry all across the states for decades, has but two Masters Degrees and is currently the Director of Training at Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station in Tonopah, Arizona. Little is a former Russelville, Arkansas Police Sgt. now working with his dad at the same nuclear plant as the Human Performance Manager. True southern gentlemen both, they were a daily revelation in words—some foreign to us west coasters, and always exuding charm and character. Terry Blumenthal and I both started our LEO careers in 1965. He rode motors and then, like Cliff, flew air-support helicopters for the PD, became President of MMOC in 1984 (two years before me) and retired in 1994. Catching up with our pasts since we saw each other last century, he’s been flying corporate jets and helicopters in the Bay Area since. Think Silicon Valley. His riding partner, Phil Ponzo, is a vintner out of Healdsburg who just happens to be a fixed wing jet-jockey corporate pilot too, stationed at Moffett Field. Phil’s hot-rodded ST2 Ducati was the smallest bike on the ride yet he managed to bring a weeks’ worth of exquisite vinos. Last but far from least is Herman Rellar who is a slim, trim 79 years old, started his law enforcement career in 1956 and retired off motors last year from Co.Co.County after 55 years of continuous service! Significantly, at retirement, he was the “senior” active motor cop in the state! We should all ride as good as he does, particularly on a 900+lb. GL1800!

Monday morning dawns early, too early for some, but at our requisite “Road Etiquette” meeting this year we review a new concept electronically bantered around amongst the participants for the preceding 3 weeks: Two separate groups of riders, one consisting of *Sport-Touring* and the other, *Touring*, each with 2 chase vehicles and everyone possessing turn-by-turn route sheets with noted fuel, food and rest stops at 90 to 125 mile intervals. I would lead the first group, Cliff Heanes the second. No peer pressure, no expectations; you pick and choose yer poison and at final tally, it was 9 riders per group. Twists and turns beckon, let’s go for a ride.

My diabolical mind says it’s far too easy and fast to jump on the super-slab from Williams to Medford so let’s detour up to the of 8512’ summit of Mount Lassen State Park via Ca. 36 and 89, but not before breakfast. Thanks to Mark and Helen Murray we stopped at the M&M Ranch House in Red Bluff and what a find! Great food featuring locally produced meats and fare, we ate like kings. If you’re in the area give ‘em a try! Onto the mountain, we *were* to meet up with Cliff’s group at two locations in the 34 miles of park roadway. Well the best laid plans of men and mice would dictate that His Own Self would hammer past both because the sweet song of horsepower and apex prevailed. No traffic; pristine, clean and undulating tarmac would dictate to my little-kid inner-self: “Go for it Fool, don’t need no stinkn’ break, we can stop later.” To say

that my powers of observation were overridden by emotion would be an understatement and this would become a common occurrence on the trip, duly noted at least daily! An hour ahead of schedule we took a half-hour break at the park exit but the second group didn't show so on to our next stop 95 miles distant, the town of Mt. Shasta. GPS listed 3 different addresses for the Black Bear Diner and gas station next door; 401 Lake St, *East, West and Court*. Guess what, we practiced hot-laps, U-turns and no-turns around a town you can spit from one end to the other before we found the joint and what's worse, I've been there twice before! Observation donchano, or as Big Bubba would later note: "You po-leece sure get lost a lot, boy!" Gassed and fed we left as the *Touring* group arrived, a final 95 mile sprint to the Medford Red Lion that brought to end a 345 mile day.

Poolside, from the *Sport Touring* group, I got verbally trashed for my powers of observation or lack thereof *and/or* lack of restraint, and from the *Touring* group, praise heaped on me for splitting into two groups thereby allowing the wonderment of Mother Nature to soak in. Hmm, they all trying to tell me something?

We have more than 360 miles to cover this sunny and cool Tuesday and with a 7am departure I'm not feeling the love from the grumpy and squinty-eyed throng. Breakfast awaits us in the small berg of Chemult, Oregon, 112 miles distant at a compass heading of north-east. Within 40 miles the country road dotted with many small towns and hamlets along the Rogue River has given way to sinewy tarmac through the Umpqua National Forest in the Cascade Mountain Range. We own the road this day and for the next 70 miles it is pure bliss. Ever mindful of deer we tilt the horizon at mach 9 on the endless curves and elevation changes of smooth roadway. Verdant and endless stands of Cedar, Hemlock and Douglas fir ensure the sun seldom peeks through the tall canopies of this wonderland on the back side of Crater Lake. At breakfast we are all in awe of the green paradise we just rode through!

Oregon State Route 58 is bordered by the Umpqua and Deschutes National Forests and is an 84 mile green belt-way curving through a mother-nature-carved canyon. It's beautiful, scenic and brings us back to I-5 and a sprint to Albany to top-off and take a break. Our final trek to Kelso, Washington, loomed on the horizon. The antiquated bridge system through Portland and Vancouver over the Columbia River and several tributaries ensures stop and crawl, but we persevere and arrive at the Red Lion in time for the requisite cocktail hour and pool-side debriefing with the usual barbs thrown in. The two groups now together and domiciled at the same hotel for the next 3 nights we let our hair down, just a little. A respite from daily packing and early morning departures bodes well to all so why not tell lies and war stories until we're kicked out of the pool?

Our goal this Wednesday morning at 9am, July 11th is to "*casually*" ride to the amphitheater at the Windy Ridge View Center of Mount Saint Helens and then continue on the only route

that circumnavigates the entire mountain. Having been on the two accessible sides of “the mountain” twice since she flipped her lid May 18th, 1980, this south-side route is the most challenging. We’re off to Sr. 503 at Woodland on this balmy morning. Muggy and humid yet cool, a lush paradise of ferns and moss covered conifers down to the roadway render a pictorial paradise. The various state, county and forest roads that wend their way easterly from I-5 are diabolical with few straight sections longer than 400 feet. There are perhaps 50-75 180 degree switchbacks on this posted 35-55 MPH, one-hundred mile steep ascent. And did I mention that more than 50 miles of Forest Roads were in *LOUSY* disrepair with frost-heaves and pot-holes ever-present? Do the math and that leaves 50 miles of corner carving, very frequent shifts and braking too with judicious throttle control required. Nobody said it would be easy and with no desire to throw away a perfectly good and beautiful Nippon bride of 20 years or a Teutonic BMW of 7 years for that matter, we ran a 7/10’s-8/10’s pace at the front and made great time to the.....CLOSED GATE AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE FINAL 10 MILE, 1,000’ ASCENT TO THE TOP!!!!!! Wendy Ridge *always* opens on the 1st of July but apparently not this year due to heavy snows as recent as the week before our arrival! (Note: the road opened 4 days after our visit!) We bivouacked in the nearby parking lot for 45 minutes and as the *Touring* group arrived and looked at the closure I explained to Sir Heanes that the Park Ranger closed the gate in back of us after “our” tour of the Ridge. Sez I: He turned us around at the top due to inclement weather coming in. With a look of inquisitiveness, a wry smile and noting the clear skies above, Cliff’s Tourette’s momentarily kicked in, “You got to be S%*+*ING me! No way.” Way, and with that said the *Sport Touring* group beat-feet, spewing hydrocarbons in their face for fear of a fight breaking out!

Fourteen miles of Forest Road 25 had us in Randle for gas. At the station Rhoda asked me if I noticed she had been standing on the passenger pegs at times in lieu of sitting on the seat during the rougher sections of “road?” Having *never* ridden two-up on a “road” best described as an “Enduro Course” I assured her she instinctively did the correct thing—she’s that good of a pillion passenger! Seventeen miles west on SR 25 is the very small and quaint logging town of Randle. Big Bubba met us there at the Plaza Jalisco Mexican Restaurant as he had scheduled conference calls this morning and there’s NO cell service from whence we came. Inside, and for all to hear, he made a hilarious and “twangy” observation of our two groups riding styles over the last few days and as we approached this restaurant: “The *Sport Touring* group always looks in perfect formation, fluid and smooth; the *Touring* group on the other hand is a mess of waddling baby ducklings.” Howling accolades, high-fives and pointed barbs aside, we were all in accord about this restaurant. Situated in a new, small and quaint shopping center that basically constitutes the visible town, they offered up fantastic and varied fresh-mex home-cooked cuisine that was phenomenal! Sixty miles later we were pool side, those of us “Fonzi-cool” savoring Big Bubbas eloquent words, the Daffy Duck contingency, licking their wounds. Peer pressure’s a bitch, donchano?

We have one conquest this last day of the ride; visit the Johnston Ridge Visitor Center on the north side of the mountain. State Route 504 from I-5 climbs 4264 feet from Castle Rock to the dead-end at Johnston Ridge, 52 miles distant. It is absolutely beautiful high-traction tarmac with no tar strips, mostly on-camber and a continuous peg scrapping cork-screw! Much like the vaunted Laguna Seca race track in Monterey that some of us poseurs have ridden during Moto GP weekend intermissions, 504 offers unlimited sight-lines and an E-Ticket challenge to your sensibilities coupled with a seemingly never ending ribbon of roadway to the clouds. At the top we had our requisite photo-op with St. Helens looming 4,000 feet higher in the background, viewed a 15 minute movie produced by a politically correct tree-hugger Hollywood-type and then beat-feet for our steeds. Let's partake of the nirvana again; down the mountain we go spewing hydrocarbons to the beat of RPM and erasing sidewall chicken-strips. At lunch in Castle Rock, to a man, er, person, everyone seemed to echo my sentiments: What a ride!

Last night as a group and what's left to do but recap the ride, cast stones, utter accolades or offer criticism—constructive or not. As luck would have it *EVERYONE* seemed more than thrilled with what *they* perceived as a great time. Perfect weather, absolutely wonderful and scenic country and a very cohesive group of like-minded riders with no thin skin, braggadocio or attitudes. That's a major accomplishment with 28 participants! And I would be remiss if I didn't give a BIG shout-out to Cliff Heanes, for it was he, in his affable and steady manner, which contributed to the success of the *Touring* group and thereby ensured harmony amongst the ranks. His "waddling duck" minions loved the steady pace and resultant visual and aural gains. As Sir Heanes would later say to me: "Kudos to you on your choice of routes this year. Every year I think to myself there is no way to equal or surpass your previous choices, yet you did it again. Beautiful scenery and some insightful history, to boot. I'm really proud of Mickie too, for this was a long and very challenging ride for her group-riding maiden voyage. I felt a little anxiety for sure, but the guys at the back of the pack really did a great job looking after her."

Then there's George and Barbara Firchow, Mary Ann Mann, John Waid and Mark and Helen Murray who contributed immensely as the chase vehicles. Without their efforts it would not have been as much fun! They truly provide a great service on and off the road. Let's "unlax" and reminisce until they kick us out of the pool (again) and perhaps discuss where we're going next year!

Thanks one and all for a fun-filled five days on the road. You made me proud to spearhead this MMOC ride; Rhoda and I had a blast!

I remain His Own Self

Dennis M. Brown

