

## Chronicles of the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual MMOC Ride

OR

### How We Defied Gravity...Mostly

Waiting in the lobby of the Comfort Inn and Suites, Three Rivers, California this Monday, July 7, 2014 for nearly 2 hours due to their strictly enforced 4:00 PM check-in time has us physically and mentally steaming. Considering we're the only bodies in attendance, our 20 motorcycles and 3 chase vehicles the sole modes of hydrocarbon-spewing transportation in the parking lot, and housecleaning staff bid adieu shortly after we arrived just adds to the angst. Our room reservation and assignment packets sit prominently on top of the reservation desk for all to see, beckoning us much like a beat cop zeros into the local donut shop. We're domiciled, *almost*, and need to commence with our annual practice of telling lies, expansive and embellished war stories and swilling cheap beverages, donchano.

Who are the grumbling, sweating, collective we on this 95 degree day? From Oakland my wife Rhoda and yours truly; husband and wife duo Cliff Heanes and Mickie Waid; Larry and LaRene Hodson; Nick Nicosia; Doug Wayne and Ed "Dewey" Presnell. Bordering city San Leandro found Mark and Helen Murray in attendance. Alameda County was represented by Mike and Jeanie Rores and Broadmoor by Mary Ann Mann. San Francisco's Al Luenow and Ed Callejas blew into town, too. San Jose was represented by Rich Bailey and Kim Wirht and out of Healdsburg Phil Ponzo. The Southern California contingent: Pasadena's Terry Blumenthal, LA's Baron Laetzsch and the brother trio of Buzz, Ken and Ryan Williams. Cliff Heanes' brother Jeff from Beaumont was present, too. And last but not least, Mickie Waid's hilarious foreign-tongued Arkansas born "Bubba Brothers" Joe Ray and Lynn Allen Waid, now from Arizona and Ohio, respectively, saw fit to grace our presence.

The chronicles of our epic adventure soon to follow (I promise), buoyed bulbous and svelte bodies eventually bobbed in the pool, much like the cork of Two Buck Chuck. We've got 185 miles to cover tomorrow, the first 135 of which are in Sequoia National Park and Kings Canyon National Park within the Sequoia National Forest and Sierra National Forest respectively, wholly contained in the Giant Sequoia National Monument (government speak for more federal \$) which is divided by Tulare County on the south, Fresno County on the north and bordered by Inyo County on the east and a mere speck of land on the western flank of the ginormous 400 mile long, 60 to 80 mile wide Sierra Nevada Mountain range. You got that, Bunkie? I know that when I spew my geography lesson to the hapless souls foolish enough to follow me in the morning, their grey-matter will be sizzling like a grilled Swiss-cheese sandwich!

An hour after sunrise over 14,494' Mt. Whitney, the tallest mountain in the contiguous 48 states and directly due east, we've concluded our riders meeting and it's time to enter the belly-of-the-beast this Tuesday. U.S. Forestry and AAA maps show an unending 135 mile succession of squiggly lines through the two parks on Ca. 198 (The Generals Highway) and Ca.

180 (Kings Canyon Scenic Byway), but their relief can't accurately depict the 4,000' elevation changes we'll experience *multiple* times or the thousand or so high G-load sweepers; nor, frankly does it foretell of the many sphincter-clinching kinks, predominantly with less than 100' apex to apex! Throw in a crazed carnival of 6-12% uphill *and* downhill rollercoaster grades with numerous blind and decreasing radius curves (thankfully on-camber, yet often causing wildly dilated eyes!), all married to excellent asphalt that serves to test suspension, brakes, and rider stamina. How many sets of undies did you bring, His Own Self?

We came for visual acuity too, and it's here in spades. Depending upon elevation, the two parks are predominantly mixed conifer forests that include sequoia, white fir, sugar pine, yellow pine and incense-cedar. Sprays of colorful wildflowers stand in sharp contrast with evergreens throughout numerous meadows and groves. General Sherman, the world's largest living tree, is truly a sight to behold, and when I reduce it in my mind to toothpicks, there's enough for every man, woman and child in the universe. In stark disparity, greyish-white granite gleams in sunlight at higher elevations. Sheer 2,000' ascending walls almost touch the right shoulder on the thousands of eastbound curves to the end of Kings Canyon. The other shoulder? A disastrous precipice and plunge a thousand or more feet to the South Fork of the Kings Canyon River trickling *far* below! At the park turnaround, we hydrate in the shade of dense tree canopies on Gatorade and water after multiple temp fluctuations between 65 to 95 degrees, and taxing centripetal forces on ageing muscles and shoulders. Many kudos to Presnell and Wayne for (mostly) hanging with our "Sport-Touring" group. They were ever-present at each way-point with refreshments; not an easy task in a 4WD pickup!

With Cliff's "Touring-Group" nearly an hour behind, we head west towards our Fresno hotel 95 miles distant. The first 38 are now familiar and exhilarating fun, the last 57 miles 2 and 4 lane highway. It's "*only*" 100 in Fresno today thanks to a 10-15 degree cooling trend, and I suppose we should be thankful, but it did take its toll on several who didn't hydrate sufficiently. Almost 2 hours later we learn that Mickie Waid had crashed her 700 Honda about 10 miles after turning around at the end of Kings Canyon Park. Rounding a tight-radius left-hand curve, an eastbound motorhome crossed the double yellow into her lane forcing her wide onto the gravel shoulder where she tumbled to the ground. The stone and concrete retaining wall thankfully contained her and the bike, because it's a *loooooong* way down in that area! The bike wasn't pretty in the bed of the Murray's pickup, and quite frankly, neither was the usually bodacious Ms. Waid. Beaten, bruised and with abrasions about knees and face, the local E.R. Doctor would later proclaim her to be OK, save a sprained wrist and ankle. An advocate of "All The Gear All The Time", Mickie's now dirty Hi-Viz yellow, armored  $\frac{3}{4}$  length *Olympia* mesh jacket excelled with no visible distress. However, her new *HJC* modular flip-front, full-face helmet, was an unmitigated failure! The facial abrasions to her chin, nose and forehead happened how, you say? Gouges to the centrally and predominately located release button on the lower leading-edge of the chin-bar indicated an impact on something during her 25mph get-off allowed the chin-bar to spring open, leaving critical facial features exposed. Buyer beware! Being the

trooper she is and the sensitive nature of her “Bubba Brothers” (NOT), Joe and Lynn were later overheard complimenting her on the now rapidly emerging, perfectly formed, raccoon eyes!

Day one’s histrionics behind us, let’s regroup and ride again this beautiful 70 degree Wednesday morning. California 41 to Oakhurst is a relaxed and meandering two-lane studded with oak trees and barren grass lands in this summer of drought. Traffic is light, but a frustrating pattern is emerging in the middle of this 42 mile, 55mph leg: with few passing lanes, fewer pull-outs and almost non-existent broken double-yellow center lines we are relegated to a snail’s pace twice, each for 8+ miles; first behind the ponytailed Prius driver and then a diesel pickup pulling a horse trailer. Successively, they have served up massive gridlock! Adequately posted with regulatory signs advising “slower vehicles use turnouts”, the clueless imbeciles fail to cede several times and are ceremoniously greeted with a stereophonic cacophony of horns and middle digit salutes from 50+ four and 2 wheelers when the very rare passing opportunity does materialize.

At Ca. 49N we finally shed the remnants of idiotic congestion and begin the southernmost terminus of this fabled ribbon of tarmac. Very light traffic, numerous passing lanes and manicured ranchettes interspersed throughout rolling hills allow a relaxed country pace for 28 miles to bucolic Mariposa. Days earlier I had called *Happy Burger Diner* with a courtesy notification of a motorcycle invasion at 9:30 am. Not only were they ready with extremely courteous wait-staff, we had our own reserved room away from the general public. I suspect the likes of some of our “Poster Children”, read: Blumenthal, Callejas, the entire Williams clan, Dewey Presnell and most certainly the Bubba Brothers and their battered, raccoon-eyed baby sister, now sporting Audrey Hepburn-esc sunglasses (“Hmmm, which one o’ y’all done that to the filly”) may have had something to do with that! *Happy Burger* is known for their extensive menu, and whether breakfast or lunch was ordered, we were in and out in 45 minutes with excellent food!

As much as I’d like to stay on gloriously serpentine Ca. 49 several hundred more miles to its northern end at Ca. 70 in the mini berg of Chilcoot (Pop. 200, maybe!), we’re eastbound-and-down on Ca. 140 for 38 miles to Big Oak Flat Rd., the western edge of Yosemite National Park. Here, signs of the August 17, 2013 Rim Fire begin to emerge. We exit Yosemite on Ca. 120 and the enormity of the fire, which devastated 257,314 acres for more than 2 months until being contained on October 24, 2013, sinks in. We’ve ridden 40+ miles through fire scorched brush, oaks and pines, and on the eastern outskirts of Groveland come upon its point of origin. A few miles later: An “E” ticket adventure-ride down New Priest Grade on Ca. 120, offered up by a 910’ elevation drop over 6 miles of insane curvature with perfect asphalt.....what’s not to like? With little more than 30 miles to our Sonora digs, many of “The Faithful” feel the need to stop at Jamestown Harley Davidson to replace shed parts, broken parts, or procure de rigueur “Authentic Motor Clothing”. Those of us riding Motors that remain *whole*, or not needing fringed vests check in at the hotel long before the “Bring In The Clowns” brigade arrives. It’s

pizza night, and after hours of pool frolicking, *Mountain Mikes* gets the call all delivery drivers dream of. "You're ordering how many pizzas? We'll be right there!"

Thursday morning, we awake to crystal blue skies and refreshing mid 60's. Seventy miles of Ca. 108 up, over, and down 9,624' Sonora Pass is a conundrum of freeway, 2 lane, single lane and goat path, with scenery and vegetation as varied as the quality and curvature of road surface we ply. Dense majestic forests give way to massive granite-rock outcroppings thousands of feet below the summit. Grasp that this is the oldest trans-Sierra trail into California and the "road" very closely follows the original 1865 wagon-train alignment with insane 8 to 26% (!) grades and pavement so contorted and spastic there are no straights for 20+ road miles either side of the summit. This ain't my first rodeo on 108, nor will it be my last, but each trip still generates user-selectable Tourette's Syndrome. Gravel strewn corners on otherwise good pavement, and the occasional pickup pulling a 26+' travel trailer that you encounter around a blind curve as he encroaches into your already narrow 8' lane might add to the anxiety, too!

At the intersection with U.S. 395, we of the "Sport Touring Group" hydrate and exchange expletive tirades before heading north another 18 miles to Coleville for breakfast. We inundate the *Meadowcliff Lodge Restaurant*, but the appreciative owner had the foresight to add an extra waitress based on my "clue" phone call days earlier. After a relaxing break and very good food, some elect to take the more relaxing route to Reno, read: Sonora Pass was enough for one day! The more adventurous of us? Six miles to Ca. 89, also known as Monitor Pass, 30 miles to the junction with Ca. 88 then an 19 mile sprint to Nv. 207, the beginning of fabled 20 mile long Kingsbury Grade into Lake Tahoe. The aforementioned splits were wonderfully scenic, offering commanding vistas of valleys below, interspersed with the occasional 10,000 acre ranch. The only caveat: Nevada continues to excessively seam-seal expansion cracks with strips of tar on their otherwise excellent asphalt, which engenders "oh shit" slip-angles far too frequently while negotiating hundreds of curves.

The eastshore of Lake Tahoe finds us on U.S. 50 in light traffic comingled with oblivious sophomoric-tweets that insist on driving 25-30 in a 35 mph zone *side-by-side* on this scenic 12 mile stretch of 2 lane, rendering forward thrust non-existent! Ah Ha, Lake Tahoe Eastshore Drive (Nv. 28) promises an escape from gridlock with another 12 miles of 45 mph zone. Beautiful, lake hugging, smooth and rhythmic flowing curves wind past estates, boat harbors and the occasional sandy beach. Valhalla? NOT! Within 2 miles we're mired in back of a trick looking C6 Corvette, the driver-of-which is more enamored with his high maintenance trophy queen than the road ahead.....which is vacant for miles! At Incline Village we can finally escape the jewelry encrusted, Dior sunglass bespectacled touchy-feely poseurs onto Country Club Drive which shortly merges onto majestic Mount Rose Highway. Finally, 24 miles multi-lane, well paved and meandering roadway, with panoramic vistas of the Reno valley thousands of feet below. For about 10 miles, bliss, then we're stuck, mired in multiple summertime construction zones. It makes a grown man want to cry! Eventually, we merge onto the new U.S. 395/Nv.I-580 and are promptly at our hotel.

The swimming pool beckons with arid high 90's and we luxuriate with margaritas and Coronas generously provided by Sunnyvale's DPS retiree Bill Weber, he of the gun-toting and hose-fondling brigade. The coup-de-gras bowshot: Tex-Mex enchiladas, rice and salad with soft drinks. Thanks Billy, ya' done good!

Gastronomical morning fluctuations notwithstanding, US 395 delivers us to I-80 West Friday, July 11<sup>th</sup> and we curve up and over crisp and crystal clear 7240' Donner Summit to Ca. 20W. Dense stands of pines grow down to the single lane roadway, and for 30 miles we're shrouded under the canopies of timber 100 feet above our procession. Cool, damp, and with a wonderful musky smell in its own micro-climate, it's best to savor the olfactory delights, as surely Bambi lurks in the thick underbrush. A reunion with Ca. 49S delivers us in a half hour to the omelet capitol of California, Sweet Peas Restaurant in Auburn. The food and service, as always, is home-style and exquisite. With a 55 mile freeway sprint, we wrap up this epoch 1000 mile 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Ride at Woodland's Best Western Shadow Inn. This is MMOC's second sojourn here, and it remains one of the chain's best kept secrets. Spacious rooms with modern amenities, excellent room soundproofing and super-efficient whisper-quiet air conditioning all contribute to the ambience. Then there's the central courtyard theme with expansive pool and hot tubs lending credence to my style of ride's-end frivolity. Time to let down my thinning thicket of hair, for it's party and commiserating time!

Twenty one years, 100's of participants, and countless returnees; it has been EXTREMELY rewarding rekindling old and making new friendships alike, within the MMOC fold. Discovering meandering tarmac off the beaten path throughout 6 states in pursuit of motorcycling nirvana with great compatriots has indeed left an indelible mark in this vacant cranium. Freeways expedite, yet backroads speak to our history of yesterday, and it's here we reunite with the slower pace of decades gone by and the history of storied America.

This year's ride was dedicated to friend, co-founder, and first 10 year Ride Leader Bob Hossfeld, and throughout our journey, I could feel him gazing down from the Heavens above laughing his ass off at the histrionics, evolution and tribulations of our merry riders.

Thanks, one and all: it has truly been a memorable and rewarding reign of terror. WHAT A RIDE!

His Own Self, Dennis M. Brown