



**SUSQUEHANNA RIVER CRUISIN': 2013**

**Steve Gilkey, Knoxville, TN  
George Brown, Knoxville, TN  
Joe Aiello, Canton, OH  
Fred Barnoff, Canton, OH  
Doug Snyder, Chadds Ford, PA**

**Don Harris, Amherst, NY  
Ray Harris, W Seneca, NY  
Frank Boyko, Taylor, PA  
Mike Kenny, New York, NY  
Joel Samick, Kennett Sq, PA**

**1970 Triumph Bonneville 650  
1971 Rickman Royal Enfield Interceptor 750  
1971 BSA A5 Lightning 650  
1977 Silk Sabre MkII 700**

**1971 Moto Guzzi Ambassador 750  
1972 Laverda 750SF  
1974 Benelli Tornado 650S  
1975 Ducati 860GT  
1979 Moto Morini 500 Strada  
1979 Moto Guzzi V50**

This two day tour was popular. Would that be because it's early in the season so as not to interfere with people's summer plans? Or is it because it's just a two day weekend trip so minimal disruption of the work schedule is required? Maybe the easy daily mileages are a factor. Whatever the case there were 8 solid deposits for this one and my co-leader Doug was also 'in' so the group was 10 bikes large. The theme was England verses Italy so I prepped the Norton (unchosen, held as a spare), the Bonneville, the BSA, the Silk and, for the first time in 2 years, the Rickman Royal Enfield. These British twins of the 70's have no electric starters which makes them light and nimble, with the Silk and Rickman being particularly bereft of bulk.

Not so the solid if portly Italians. We used the Moto Morini 500 and the V50 "baby Guzzi", both of which are reasonably compact, light and maneuverable. Not so the Moto Guzzi Ambassador, the Laverda 750SF, the Benelli 650 and the Ducati 860, all of which are solid but heavy and long of wheelbase. Except for the Ducati (electric start was an option but this example is not so equipped) all of these bikes have hefty reliable electric starters. This is very convenient but there is a substantial weight penalty. The starter motor itself, the switches, solenoid and relays, and the oversize battery needed to spin the motor must weigh close to fifty pounds. Then there is also the extra large charging system needed to keep said battery happy and the battery tray and frame structure to support the additional weight. Fifty or seventy-five pounds added to a 400 pound machine is HUGE!

There is a definite 'national personality' to each of these European machines from the past which makes a ride like this, where riders get to switch back and forth amongst the various bikes, especially interesting. Almost as interesting as the riders themselves:

George B. and Steve G. drove up from Tennessee, George's second RetroTour, he brought Steve for his first. Each rider was asked to choose one machine to start out on from the 10 that were prepped. Even though we would be swapping bikes every 100 miles, riders were told to keep an eye on the maintenance needs of their 'chosen' mount. Also, an extensive safety check and check list needed to be completed before departure. George chose the BSA while Steve went straight to the Rickman Royal Enfield. (Recently I noticed that he posted about his experience on a Royal Enfield forum.) Joe A. and Fred B. rode their modern bikes in from Ohio. A long-ish street ride on modern bikes to get to and from a RetroTour seems to be the popular way to go this year. They chose to start on the Moto Morini and the Bonneville. Don H. and his son Ray drove down from Buffalo and rode out on the Ducati 860 and the Triumph Bonneville.

Mike K. from Harlem was back for his 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> trip and I picked him up at the Wilmington, DE bus station with the EML sidecar rig. He was planning to ride his KZ750 4 cylinder bike home after the RetroTour. It had been in my shop over the winter for a 'resurrection' and it was finally done, just in time for riding season.



These 7 arrived the night before departure and we got to know each other a bit over dinner and beers. Way too early on Saturday morning Frank B. from PA's far north arrived as did Doug, my co-leader. Frank sort of inherited the Benelli 650 as Doug had 'pre-chosen' the V50. We completed loading the tanks bags and luggage racks. We ate a hearty breakfast (thanks to Lynn for that). We departed on time: early.



As I was leaving the garage just prior to our departure I found a bee or wasp with my forehead. The sting felt like a lit cigarette and I knew I might get a reaction. At the first stop when I took off my helmet I think I may have scared the other riders. My left eye was closed and my forehead swelled up except where the helmet kept it compressed which made me look a bit uglier than usual. I found some pills in the first aid kit which helped a lot.

The Italophiles opened the enrichener circuits on their Del Ortos and pushed their starter buttons then looked down their Roman noses at the Anglophiles busily tickling their Amals and lunging up and down on their kick start levers. Eventually we had all 10 started and headed out, slowly at first, as riders acclimated to various unfamiliar control layouts. We followed rural routes through the lush Pennsylvania farm country and stitched routes 82, 926 and 10 together with tiny back roads that required lots of turns and helped develop our 'loose group' riding technique. We moved like a giant mechanical inchworm as each rider waited at each turn to show the next bike where to turn. Ten bikes is a pretty large group yet we managed to stay together, passing through Morgantown and skirting around Reading, taking our first stop at Robesonia.

Our progress was slow but steady and as we began to feel peckish we stopped for lunch just north of Danville. Danville is where 'T' rail was first developed, using the region's anthracite coal to stoke fires hot enough to change iron into steel. This development made the railways and perhaps the entire industrial revolution possible. We were entering coal country: where coal was once king. Our goal was Williamsport, on the mighty Susquehanna, where a tiny Honda shop houses a very interesting museum dedicated to old Honda motorcycles, cars, automobiles and even snowmobiles. As the morning was turning into afternoon we found a likely looking pizza shop and basically overran the tiny establishment.

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The Rickman was running reasonably well but developing a clatter from the primary drive case. I checked the motor oil level and primary chain tension. The primary chain was far too loose, accounting for the clatter. Adjustment requires removing the left exhaust and the primary cover which is more than I wanted to tackle at the pizza shop so we decided that a loose and noisy primary chain could be lived with in the short run.

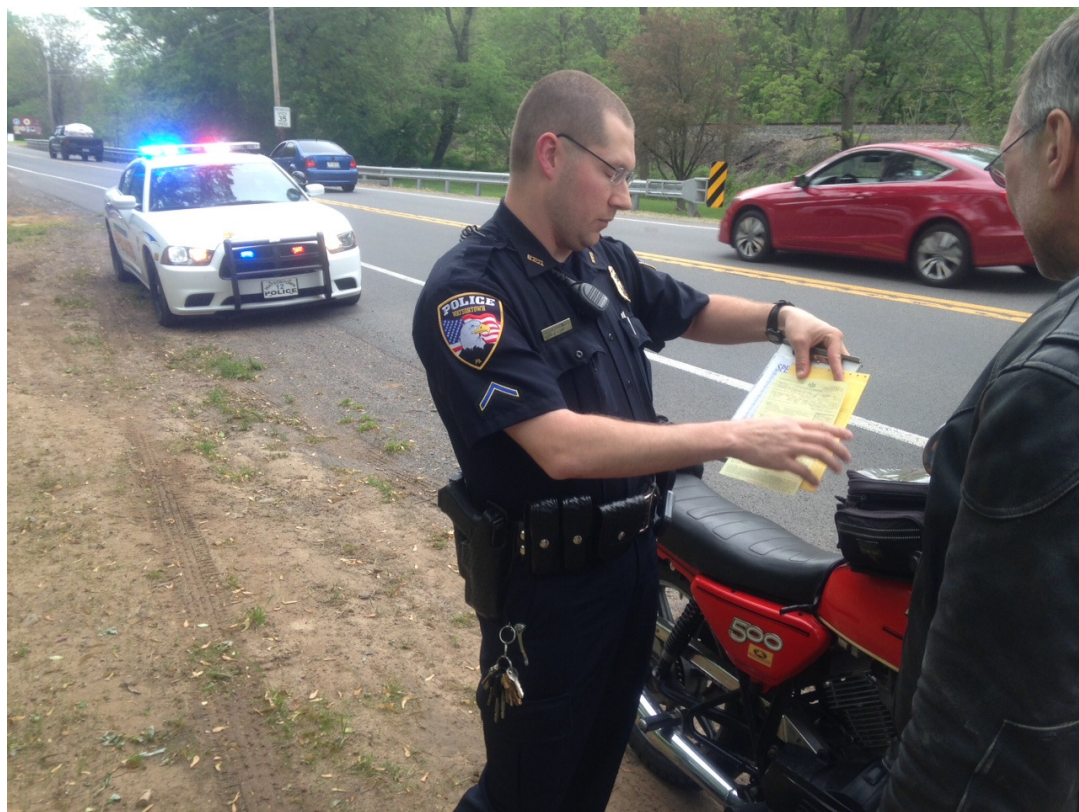


After a satisfying chow down we continued north. As we approached Williamsport it became apparent that we would not make it to the Honda Museum as early as anticipated: lunch had originally been planned for after the museum but we just couldn't make it from 8 until 2. Also, the weather was looking slightly iffy. If we rode into town for the museum we would wind up with a 10 minute visit at best and the route back included about 10 miles of dirt road up a very steep grade. If rain came the resulting mud might make things pretty ugly.

It was therefore decided to use the shorter alternate route, turning south just before Williamsport. It's always a good idea to have flexibility and to adjust to changing conditions. Unfortunately, when we made the turn around we managed to fragment into two groups; not totally unexpected when the group is this large. The lead rider simply cannot constantly count 9 headlights in the rear view mirror and must rely on each rider to wait for the person behind. It usually works but there can be glitches. This particular glitch was not major since we were nearly out of gas. The first group stopped at a gas station and put out a cell phone call to the second group. The second group stopped for gas shortly thereafter and we were reunited within about 20 minutes. Doug riding sweep helped to minimize any delay.

The ride to our campsite, Steel Steeds, was scenic and included one little ‘incident’. I was leading with Doug riding sweep as we putted through a small town at the posted 35 mph limit. At the end of town I saw a 55 mph sign ahead and accelerated past a police cruiser concealed between the last two buildings. I even gave the officer a nod as we passed and was taken by surprise when I saw his blue lights behind us. I pulled over with Ray as several bikes went by and several more stopped a short ways back. The policeman was clearly annoyed by the ‘extra’ bikes that stopped and told them to move on in no uncertain terms. This put 4 bikes in front of us, they pulled over a short ways ahead, and 4 behind us, they pulled into a rest area, out of sight. Licenses and registrations were asked for and I produced mine but since we were switching bikes Ray had to confess that his papers were actually on one of the bikes that the cop had only just ordered to move ahead. Awkward!

I was informed that I had been clocked on radar at 58 mph in a 35 zone. I admitted that I might have accelerated a bit soon but begged that only one citation be issued since Ray was simply following me. The officer was OK with this, especially since Ray did not have any papers, but unwilling to write the ticket for anything less than 58mph. This is a 4 point infraction and I was feeling a bit depressed. With 25 bikes insured, the possible surcharges for a citation like this



are staggering. Even so I could barely control my giggling when one of the riders ‘hiding’ in the rest area popped out into the street to see what was happening then stealthily popped back to stay out of sight. It reminded me of Whac-a-Mole. We reached the campground very soon after this unplanned stop and we all felt that the ticket was extremely harsh since we had essentially been very careful to obey the in town speed limits.

In the end I entered a not guilty plea, waited a week and then called the officer to beg for mercy, explaining the entire situation. He was very helpful, agreeing to accept a guilty plea to 5 mph over which is a zero points violation. He even agreed to show up in court so I would not have to. A letter to the judge sealed things and I felt very good about the outcome: I did have to pay a reasonable fine and promised to be more careful in the future. The town is a little bit richer and justice has been served. I do love this country!

We rode into a big party at the campsite. It was Steel Steeds' annual pig roast and they were booked solid. Luckily I had reserved three of their clean camper trailers and we soon had hot showers, cold beers and all the roasted pig we could handle; except for Steve and I. Steve had left his fancy cell phone at the lunch stop. Luckily the folks there were honest and helpful as well as skilled in the culinary arts. The pizza joint was only 15 miles away and we scooted over and back to pick up the phone, carefully observing the posted speed limits of course. In addition to a great location right on the edge of the Susquehanna River *and* great food, the campsite had live music going on and we enjoyed some Blues tunes under a brilliant starlit sky until fatigue overtook us and we retired to our comfortable accommodations for the night; except for Mike and Ray who were rumored to have partied until the wee hours. Such is youth I suppose. If only I could remember mine!



Sunday morning had us all craning our necks to peer up at the sky: overcast and drizzly. Some opted for rain suits. I prefer to wait until I am quite wet. Then I put on my rain gear to insure that I do not dry off prematurely. Hey, a cool shower on a hot humid day can be very refreshing. The way the weather has been this year we were lucky not to be riding in a torrential downpour, just a few drizzles and slightly wet roads. First we bopped over to a very fine local breakfast spot, just a few miles from our campsite. Suitably satiated, we then made a bee line west on route 45, crossing the Susquehanna and through historic Lewisburg before passing through some brief showers, several small towns and some lovely farm country finally reaching our turn south point.

Route 235 is one of my favorites: it twists and turns up and down across three mountains as it angles south and east towards the main branch of the river, ending finally close to the Millersburg Historic Ferry. Although we rarely seem to ride the entire length on dry roads I was psyched to revisit this road riding jewel. We had divided into two groups of five. I was riding in the second group and exactly at our turn, I came upon the Rickman and several other bikes stopped on the shoulder; the Rickman had simply stopped running and no amount of kicking or pushing could produce even a pop. I sent a rider ahead to retrieve the others and we pushed the machine up a very short ways to a graveled pull out next to a quiet barn. Soon we were all gathered around. Let the probing begin!



We had to first remove the fuel tank to get at the spark plugs and confirmed that spark was non-existent. Being a 'special' the Rickman Royal Enfield does not give up its bodywork easily. Nonetheless we had to remove the seat/ rear fender assembly next to access the coils and Boyer electronic ignition components. Steve who has swung a few wrenches on Brit bikes in his day became the number two tech and Joe, who one might call a 'computer geek' (in the most positive sense, of course) became our electronics consultant. He even brought a Radio Shack mini multi meter along with him although I plainly told him we would not need it. Good thing he did too because without it we would never have found the short to ground within the wire harness that was robbing the black box of its trigger signal. I had a length of wire and a few connectors in my 'bag of tricks' AKA mobile junk pile and we soon had rigged an external shunt wire for the trigger coils. This restored ignition, which I proved by turning the key on and off rapidly while holding the spark plug wire in one hand and the handlebar in the other in the drizzling rain no less. DUH!



**OUCH!** Yup, definitely have ignition now.

The thing started right up and ran fine and still does, but without everyone's help, I would probably never have solved that one. Days later, back at home, I visited the local Radio Shack and added a mini multi meter to my travel bag. Thanks Joe! Thanks Steve! One other rider, who shall remain unnamed (DH) provided us with entertainment by demonstrating the ineffectiveness of a double leading shoe front brake when rolling backwards. On the tall heavy Laverda with its bulging tank bag the hapless rider never had a chance as he rolled backwards down a grassy knoll nearly to the next county before tipping over unceremoniously. This provided a much needed distraction while the Rickman was being repaired as several riders had to help upright the undamaged machine and drag it back up the hill. In all we had the Rickman running and back together in about 45 minutes which would be respectable in the best of conditions, let alone in the dirt during a rain shower. I love how these 'vintage bike moments' create a sense of camaraderie: every person has *something* to contribute and in the end the group is more cohesive for having dealt with the situation.

The Silk also became a bit cantankerous towards the end, misfiring at any rpm above midrange. Also, an ominous knocking may have started. These two bikes are quite rare and service information and parts are both hard to find. Some might fault me for actually running them on the street but I believe that is what their builders envisioned when they built them. While they may not have run perfectly on this trip, they did complete the distance and enabled 9 or 10 enthusiastic riders to experience something very special. Besides, winters can be long here and I need something to do when the snow is on the ground. The other 8 bikes were close to faultless. The variety from one of the richest decades in motorcycle development is astounding and this eclectic riding experience is RetroTours' raison d'etre, warts and all.





Soon we reached the ferry boat dock. The boat was empty on the other side of the river so I opened the 'door to nowhere' which serves as a call signal and the paddle wheel began to churn, bringing the boat to us. After a very relaxed and enjoyable ride across we found a really good pizza/ salad restaurant and had a massive lunch break. We continued to skirt showers and dodge horse drawn buggies as we crossed the "Amish Zone", finally returning to home base for a fabulous meal prepared by my very wonderful wife Lynn. The bikes were great, the roads were beautiful and the riders sublime, but as often as not the celebratory meal at the end is one of the most fondly remembered parts of the trip.