

BRITISH BIKE BONANZA

05/25 & 26, 2019

RIDE REPORT





Out of Brooklyn...

...rode Chuck, Steve, and Scott, leaving The City early on their modern bikes to beat traffic the day before our RetroTour. They escaped New York and took the scenic route to southeastern PA, arriving a little late after a minor mishap about 3 miles from the house. Weary after a long day in the saddle, one rider couldn't find the ground at a cambered stop and just tipped over. No harm done, except that an overly helpful local immediately dialed 911, compelling the group to wait for the police to arrive. The riders got here finally, safe, and perhaps slightly embarrassed, but unbloodied, and toured the garage before taking dinner and settling in for a good night's sleep. As it turned out, they would need it.





In the morning, Chuck stands guard over the five Brit bikes: gassed, loaded, and ready to rock and roll. Left to right: 1970 Triumph T100C, 1973 Norton Commando Fastback, 1970 Triumph Bonneville 650, 1971 BSA 650 Lightning, 1970 Rickman Royal Enfield Interceptor 750.

Ed arrived from Allentown to join us at breakfast at 7:30 and we tried for kickstands up at 8:30. There was possible rain in the forecast, so rain suits were packed. The sunny coolness of the morning would become heat and humidity as the day progressed. Our departure may have been a few minutes later than planned, as riders needed to acclimate to kick start only, shifters on the right and in some cases, upside down shift patterns.



Above: this is us....acclimating??

Rolling along a bit more smoothly now, I hate to stop, but my bladder says we must. There is a massive Harley dealership 50 miles out: Chesapeake Harley Davidson, and they usually have



something going on every weekend, as well as clean restrooms, free coffee, apparel, and accessories if needed, and scores of amazing Harleys to gawk at. Our bikes are hardly noticed; maybe here, not being American-made is un-American.

Parked among the dressers. L-R: The back of Chuck's head, Steve, his brother Scott, and Ed.

We're travelling at a very relaxed pace, enjoying the bikes and the scenery. We arrive in Poolesville, the last town before our ferry crossing and it's getting pretty hot. Time for lunch! We eat well and drink plenty of cold water. As we are starting our bikes to head for the ferry line, the Triumph sounds off-song. Scott mentions that it seems to lack poop, running more like a 325 than a 650. One of the throttle cable is broken: it is indeed running like a 325 since the left cylinder only runs at idle. All the bikes have spare cables hidden on board. It takes a while for me to find where I hid the spare cables years ago, plus we notice that the air cleaner has fractured and is close to falling off, plus, I am far from flat rate time working under the hot sun. Everyone pitches in though and in about an hour, everything is patched up and we are more than ready to get back into the wind.



Thanks for the help guys; I couldn't have done it without you.



It's just a 10-mile ride to the ferry from Poolesville but minding the speed cameras on the way out of town and lining up behind a slow-moving piece of farm equipment makes it seem longer. On line for the short ferry ride, we discuss what to do if the engine won't start when it's time to disembark; in a word—PUSH. This proves unnecessary and when we reach route 15 we turn right to avoid the horrible traffic that typically plagues Leesburg, but something is terribly wrong. The traffic is all stopped and backed up as far as the eye can see. It's quite hot out; our antique air-cooled engines don't like

this one bit and won't tolerate it for long. I can feel the engine heat building up and I know that the fuel in our carburetor float bowls will soon begin to boil, stalling the engines. I begin to drive up the opposing lane, past dozens of cars, many with the engines off. Three of the four other bikes follow my lead. Drivers are standing out on the road, trying to see what the holdup is. I know this is illegal, but we are like sharks that must swim in order to breath, except for Ed, who is understandably, not willing to bend (OK *break*) the law. He may be right, because an

angry state trooper scolds me severely for the 'minor' infraction of driving on the wrong side of the road. Luckily, the accident that has caused this jam up is his center of attention at the moment, and I avoid a citation, or worse. We four pull into a driveway and shut down, but Ed, who stayed behind in line, is nowhere to be seen. As predicted, his engine has overheated and died. I ride back to find him stubbornly kicking away, give him my bike so he can join the others, and push the Rickman back to join them.



Where's Ed???

Motorcycles are great for beating the traffic (usually)!



I know the bikes will be fine after a short cool down period, but what to do about this jam-up? It's getting late in the day, its sweltering hot, and we are beginning to feel fatigued. We drink some water, consult GPS on someone's smart phone, and devise a detour that will take us around the issue, over some dirt roads. We are back on track at last!

By now the heat and humidity of the day has built up to the tipping point: an afternoon shower is inevitable. I pull over somewhere near Paeonian Springs as soon as it starts to sprinkle and ask if anyone wants to don rain gear. The truth is, it's just so hot that rain gear probably wouldn't keep us dry: we would just soak from the inside out. After navigating some tiny back roads, we pop up onto a short stretch of divided highway, where the rain gets much more serious and suddenly it's like riding in a blender.

Soaked through, less hot at least, our route takes us from the short highway run onto Blue Ridge Mountain Road a back road that climbs high onto a mountain ridge. The temperature drops about 10 degrees and now we are shivering and loving it; the humidity and high temperatures of the day are forgotten. I pull over to allow for a quick break and regrouping. We are near the top of Mt. Weather. The rain has let, up but I feel uncomfortable somehow...like we are being watched.



Continuing on just a few hundred yards, we pass an ominous looking fenced in, well-guarded area. Here, a 564-acre, high-security federal government facility along the Loudoun-Clarke County border in Virginia serves as the backup site for the national emergency operations center run by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. If you enjoy conspiracy theories, Google this one, preferably from someone else's computer *You have been warned!*

After descending from the mountain ridge we hit US Route 50 for 7 miles and work through a final backroads maze towards Front Royal. The heat and humidity have returned at this lower altitude and there is a light mist. We are nearing total exhaustion. Now bikes begin to hit reserve and stall, and the riders are having problems re-starting their engines. I am shuttling back and forth, starting someone's bike, riding a mile, noticing that two bikes are missing, backtracking, and starting the whole process over again. My frustration boils over at one point and I get in Scott's face. Fortunately, he does not 'take the bait', and forgives me later when I apologize. I would like to apologize again here Scott. My bad.

Finally we reach our destination: The Quality Inn Skyline Drive, where I have reservations. After waiting in line, I am told by the clerk that my reservations were given away when I did not answer my phone to confirm at 4 o'clock. It's closer to 8, we are hot, wet, hungry, and very tired and we need to check in **NOW**. Luckily there are still rooms available, but because today is the first day of the tourist season, the rates have nearly doubled since I made my reservations. I suggest a compromise, offering to pay tourist rate for one of the two rooms, and this is acceptable to all. We stop briefly at our rooms then rush to get to the hotel restaurant before it closes, only to be told that the kitchen is closed 15 minutes before the doors. We are close to tears and it must be obvious because the receptionist takes pity upon us and serves us a fantastic meal. *THANK-YOU SO MUCH!* Sleep comes easy and we meet for coffee in the lobby very early in the morning to ride Skyline Drive: this is a bucket list ride that should not be missed. Our early departure means that we didn't even have to pay the entrance fee--the fee takers were still asleep—and there was virtually no traffic—the motor home travelers were likewise still in bed. The grandeur of Skyline Drive at dawn made the trials of the first day fade from memory.

This is what RetroTouring is all about....



We are treated to magical vistas.

The air is crisp and clean.

The road is ours.

The moment is ours.





Early morning, up on Skyline Drive

We ride 35 miles south, following the Skyline, then exit to sample some of the equally spectacular parallel roads as we reverse course, heading north towards home now. At one hairpin curve, I am astonished by the view and we have to pull over for a closer look. Two hikers stop to chat, and we admire the scenery together.





I have not been here before, and I'm not certain I could find this spot again, which only makes it more special; everyone simply *has* to take a picture.



We continue to descend, and continue to head north, cutting through some very upper-class looking horse country in northern Virginia, including a short stretch of dirt road. Just past the Arch de Triumph in Purcellville we pause for lunch Italian style. Pasta is good! Air conditioning is good! Next we pass through the very twisty Catoctin Mountain Pass and finally re-cross the Susquehanna, entering Amish country around Quarryville, PA. It's a short hop to home from here. Our British steeds have been demanding, but they have given something back: a feeling for motorcycling as it once was, warts and all, and we are the better for it.

At home, we are treated to a splendid home cooked meal. My wife Lynn is out of town, but our good friend Lucille has agreed to prepare the feast. Thank-you Lucille, it was quite special.



Ed heads home after our celebratory dinner, while the 'Boyz from Brooklyn' spend the night. The next morning, they leave after breakfast. Outside, watching their departure, I am pleased beyond words when one of them suits up, starts his engine, mounts his modern bike, and tries to shift his brake pedal into first gear. ***HAIL BRITANNICA!***



Steve, Scott, Chuck, Ed, and Joel: Life is Good.