



*Joel Samick's garage is packed with retro motorcycles used for his RetroTours vintage motorcycle tours operation. (Photos by Kel Edge)*

Have you ever discovered something that has you asking yourself, *Why hasn't anyone ever done this before? It seems so obvious, and yet...* (The "and yet" is usually the reason why not, but still...).

That was my reaction when I first came across Joel Samick and his Northeast U.S.-based RetroTours operation seven years ago – and I'm still asking that very same question after spending two days visiting Joel and his wife, Lynn, in their spacious home on the Pennsylvania/Delaware border and riding a selection of their motorcycles. For this lovely semi-rural house comes complete with a large garage and workshop space to house 23 twin-cylinder motorcycles, plus two Fours – a 1976 Honda GL1000 Gold Wing ([read my test ride review here](#)) and a 1983 Suzuki GS550 ES, the only one not built during the 1970s.



*The author enjoys his ride on the 1976 Honda GL1000 Gold Wing K0 rented from RetroTours.*

These motorcycles comprise both Samick's personal collection of 1970s Big Twins and the RetroTours rental fleet. They run from 1970 examples of Bonneville 650 and T100C Triumphs to a 1973 Norton Commando Fastback 750, a 1973 Yamaha TX750, a 1976 Kawasaki KZ750, a 1975 Suzuki T500 Titan 2-stroke, a 1976 Moto Guzzi 850T3, a 1977 Harley Davidson XLCR, etc. on up to that GS550.

It's a veritable time warp collection that Samick has available for customers to choose from in making their way to Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, the mushroom capital of the world (google it to see why!) and gateway to some wonderful riding country, in order to go touring the classic way, on an authentic period motorcycle.



*Joel Samick operates RetroTours from his garage in Pennsylvania.*

“It’s important to stress that these are not perfectly restored, low-mileage collector’s items,” says Samick, who is in his late 60s, a true child of the era when motorcycles got used as everyday transportation. “These are working motorcycles that are carefully maintained but are not concours show ponies. I don’t want to modernize them too much, and I don’t want to fix them up to be better than they really were.”

“Okay, I do put on better shocks,” Samick continued, “and better lights, and a better horn and stuff like that, and blinkers, too, if they didn’t have them as stock. But I want people to experience them warts and all, and most customers appreciate that coming on one of our tours is going to add to their motorcycle knowledge simply because, in a given day, they can end up riding up to half a dozen different motorcycles in succession. That’s because on a group tour, we make it a policy to stop every 50 to 75 miles or so to refuel, stretch our legs, and swap bikes.”





RetroTours has officially existed since 2000 and has grown since then, mostly by word of mouth. "I wouldn't advise anyone to try this business to make money!" said Samick. "But if you love meeting people of a like mind and doing adventurous rides on 40-year-old motorcycles, seeing America away from U.S. highways with cookie-cutter rest stops and McDonalds everywhere, and visiting the real America via country roads and byways, this is for you. While I may never grow rich, at least I'll now grow poor a little more slowly while continuing to enjoy and share the adventure, the thrill, and the camaraderie of retro-touring. Every ride is unique, and each presents challenges, but I still love every ride I take, however short."

At a cost of just \$90 per day to include the rental of any of the bikes in the RetroTours lineup, plus a guided tour with Samick as leader, basic insurance, and home-cooked, post-tour dinner, it's a bargain.



Samick has experimented with different group sizes and distances. “I try to tailor the tours to my specific clients, and I really enjoy designing trips to suit a client’s schedule, interests, and desires. From one-day local loops to extended journeys, I’m open to any suggestions, and I try to make it easy for customers to just show up and ride.”

Over the years, this routine has evolved into six or seven pre-planned tours per year, with Samick riding support, often on his 1977 BMW R 100 S with Dutch-built EML sidecar outfit. He’s experimented with group sizes of between three to 12 people and distances ranging from local jaunts to cross-country adventures and even international rides to Canada lasting up to two weeks.





RetroTours itineraries can be structured around any number of themes – gastronomic, cultural (Samick’s HQ is just 30 miles southeast of Pennsylvania’s horse-driven Amish country), scenic, or just plain fun riding. Samick likes twisting, lightly traveled backroads leading to places well off the beaten track.

“We’ll always look for the road less traveled, shunning highways completely, seeking the smallest and wiggliest lines on the map,” Samick said. “We try very hard to find routes that put us intimately in touch with the countryside we’re riding through. We sometimes use dirt roads, and stops may include local museums, scenic views, and even kitsch tourist attractions. If the weather’s fine, we sometimes stop at a small-town market for groceries, then picnic at a scenic spot in the country. When the ‘map distance’ is 100 miles, we allow 175!”



A hint of the ethos underpinning the RetroTours operation can be found in the 31-item waiver form customers must sign to confirm their acceptance. “I know that motorcycling is a dangerous activity, and I further realize that the trip I am about to leave on is at the lunatic fringe of motorcycling,” Clause 3 states. Or Item 23, which says, “Thirty-year-old gas tanks sometimes leak, and high-tension wires sometimes arc. There is a potential for on-board fire, while under way, and no extinguisher.” And underscoring the adaptability required to swap mounts all through the tour, Item 12 states that, “I will be switching bikes frequently, and there is no uniformity of control locations. Therefore, I will never really be familiar with the ‘feel’ of the bike I am riding, putting me in a very high-risk situation, even when nothing obvious is going wrong.” So there!

Driven by a belief that motorcycles should be ridden, not stored, Joel Samick has created a unique product, which I’m not aware of anyone else having matched anywhere in the world. Over the past quarter-century, he’s learned what it takes to plan and execute a successful tour while turning his hobby into a business.





*The author rode this 1976 Honda GL1000 Gold Wing K0 from RetroTours' fleet.*

“I’ve come to realize that the best part of RetroTours is meeting and getting to know other enthusiasts,” said Samick. “Making new friends out of those who come together to meet the challenges that are inherent in what we do on our RetroTours trips is a rewarding experience, which makes everything worthwhile. We have fun together!”

Find more information and plan your RetroTours experience at the [RetroTours website](#).