

CUSTOM TOUR 2015:

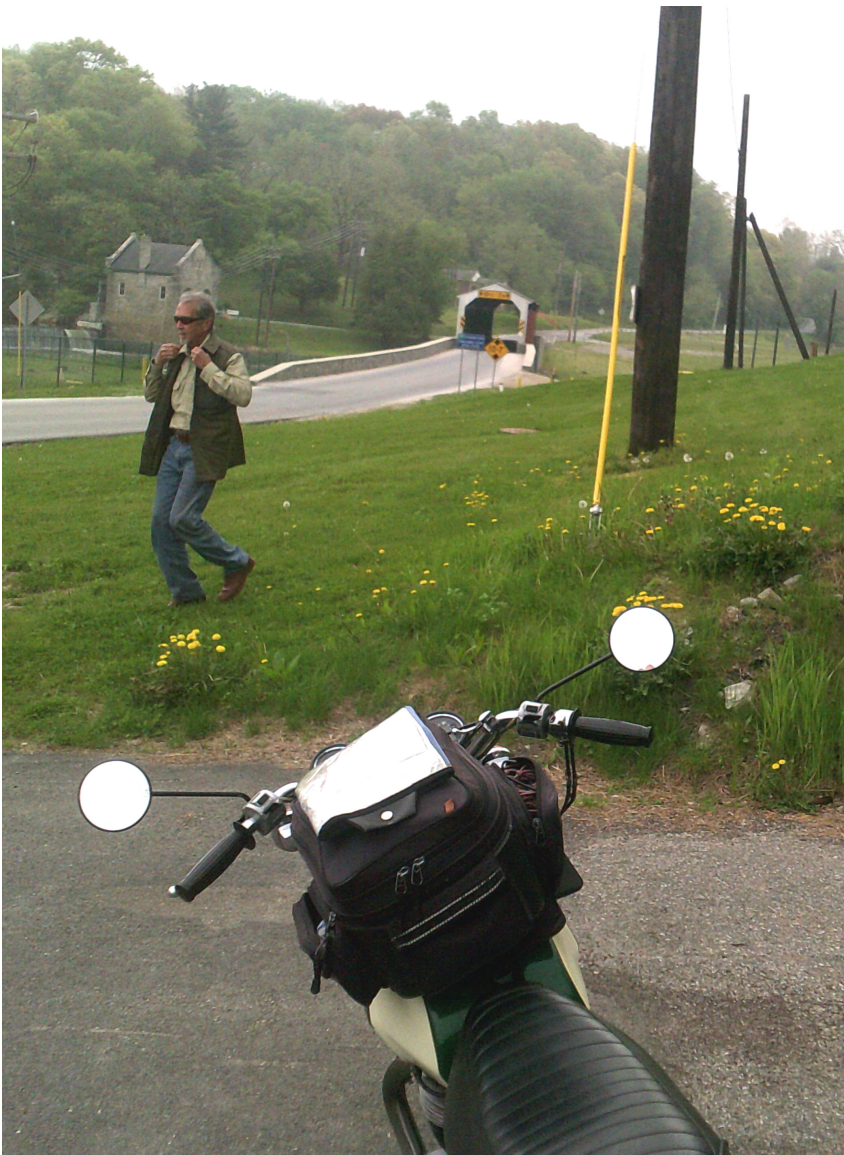
Two riders signed up for this one so we were a compact group of just three. The upside to small groups is that it's easy to stay together and to make good time. The downside is that the variety of bikes is reduced. This was a custom designed tour and after discussing the ride with the two riders I came up with an interesting route that would cover about 200 miles per day. The bikes were chosen as follows: Norton Commando was first choice for Rob, a died-in-the-wool Anglophile. His second choice was the BSA and Scott's only request was for something user friendly. The Moto Guzzi V50 fit the bill perfectly and I was anxious to see how it would do on its first tour since being rebuilt following last year's horrendous wreck. Incidentally, I recently checked in with the unlucky rider who was involved in that mishap and am pleased to report that he has recovered 100%.

Rob arrived Friday evening and stayed over after we ran into town for some light Mexican fare. Scott came early Saturday and we had a hearty breakfast served up by my wife Lynn. Thanks again Hon. We shuttled to the commercial garage where our bikes were waiting and clipped our loaded tank bags into place, rolling out at 9:01 on the dot. A few moments in an adjacent parking lot doing figure 8's allowed everyone to become familiar with their bike and we were off to the west.

The route was quite convoluted; intentionally so, so as to avoid highways and traffic. We zigzagged across the foggy Pennsylvania farmlands including one short stretch of dirt road and took our first break about 25 miles out at the longest covered bridge in Lancaster County. Built in 1884 with 2 trusses and nearly 200 feet long, spanning the Octoraro Creek is the

Pine Grove Bridge.



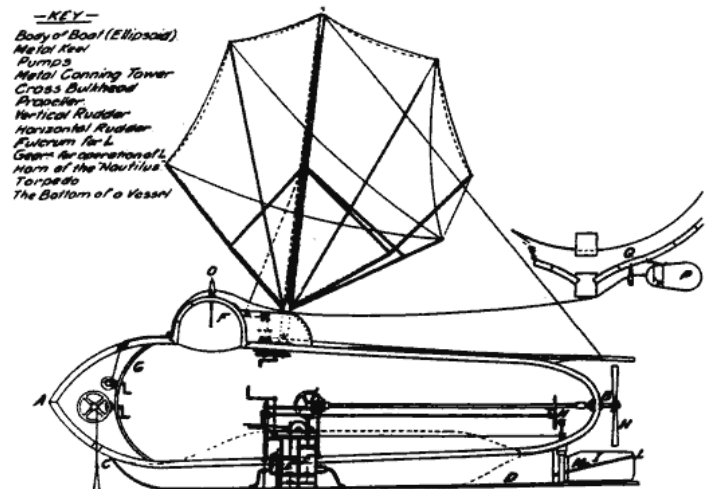


The bridge connects Lancaster and Chester Counties and here we said hello to a friendly group of Amish women and children walking by. We noticed that the women were all barefoot. It was a warm spring morning and just a bit misty as we rode through the foggy farmlands. Except for being on a motorcycle, being barefoot seemed like a decent idea. The children had pudding bowl haircuts and smiled broadly at us; so cute.

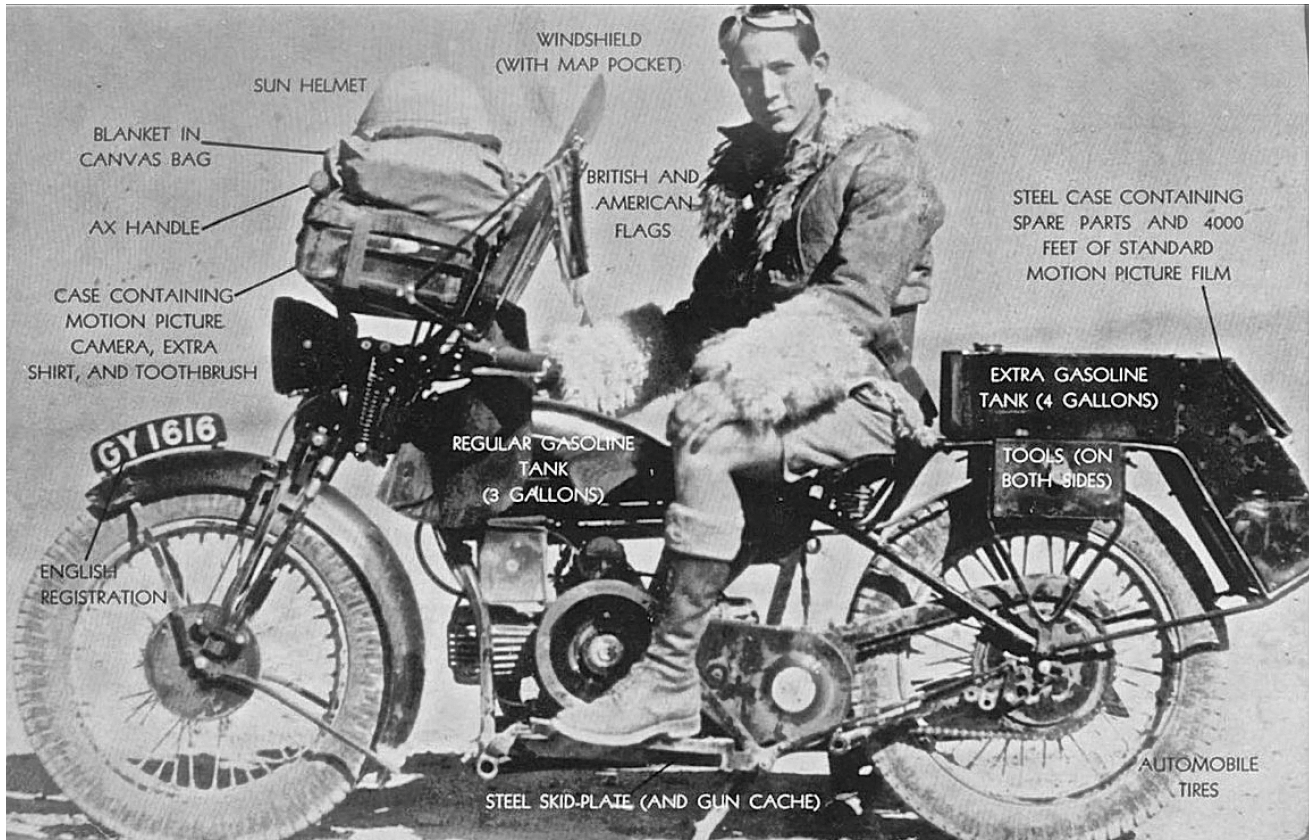
At left, Scott is chatting up the Amish folks who are not shown because they actually do not appreciate being photographed.

Leaving the bridge behind we continued to meander through the countryside, happy to be warm but hoping for some sun. Here the name "Fulton" kept coming up on historic markers and street signs. Robert Fulton who developed the commercial steam boat lived right here in Little Britain, PA in the late 1700's. Most people don't know that he also designed a submarine (see drawing below)

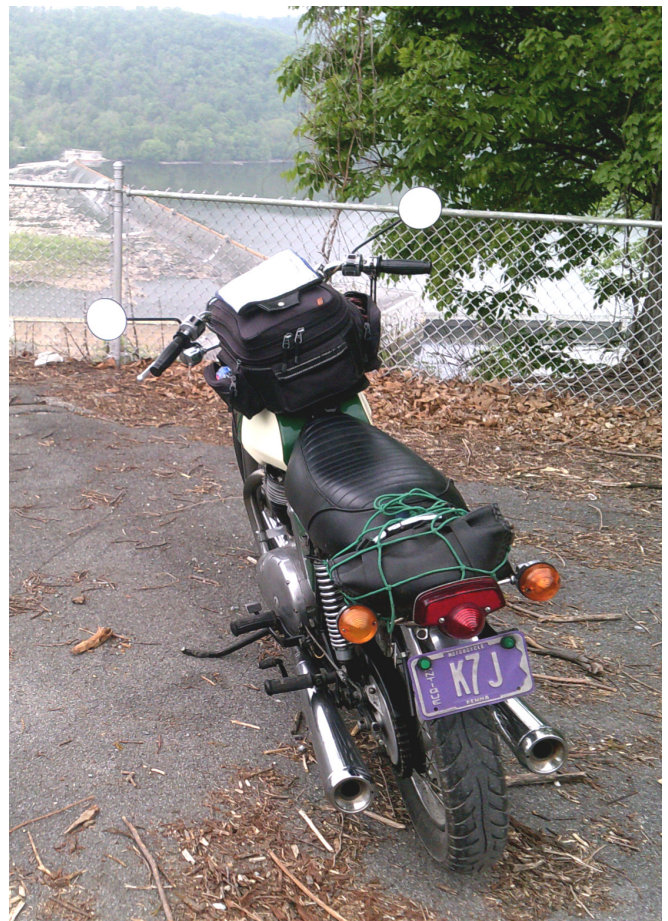
and here's the motorcycling connection I know you were waiting for: his descendant, Robert Fulton, Jr. traveled around the world on a motorcycle starting in 1932. The journey took 18 months and the bike was a Douglas twin cylinder machine. The engine is similar to a BMW flat twin but the cylinders are arranged for and aft rather than transverse across the frame. Considering the road conditions at the time that would truly have been a RetroTour and a half: he was a MANLY MAN!



RetroTouring: 1932



Without even realizing it we pretty much passed right by his house where a small museum exists but is opened only by special appointment. After Fulton View Road in Little Britain we crossed through an exceptionally isolated stretch of Amish farmland then crossed Route 372 and climbed “The Pinnacle” overlooking the Holtwood Dam. We took a second break and admired the view, searching for eagles which nest along the Susquehanna River. Next to the dam is a “fish elevator” which cost 20 million dollars and helps the fish migrate across the dam. Of course hydroelectric power production is a major part of the plan here.



Hydroelectricity at “The Pinnacle”



High tension towers frame the Moto Guzzi V50 above,
while transformers form the backdrop to the Norton Fastback below.





Rob on the left, Scott on the right, food behind.

The lack of sun becomes a bit more of a factor as we leave “The Pinnacle” and head north along River Road which starts out by twisting and turning around the base of several huge high tension towers then continues to delight with tight technical curves. Under the trees the road surface is a bit wet and while we never even considered putting on our rain gear we had to respect the low traction conditions; not really a big deal since we are riding at a relaxed pace this weekend, enjoying the warmth and the extreme mechanical presence of these fine old machines and taking in the sights and smells around us.

River Road leads us to Columbia, PA where there is a watch museum. We opt to skip the museum, ironically due to time concerns: we want to arrive at our destination by 6 o'clock or so and we firm up our ride plan over lunch at Prudhommes Lost Cajun Kitchen, a well know eatery among local bikers. The dining room is in the lobby of an old hotel in an architecturally interesting building.

After lunch it becomes obvious that the sun is going to come out and we are anxious to get back on the road. We bypass the congestion of Lancaster and Lebanon via Milton Grove and Anneville, arriving finally in Pine Grove for our 50 mile break. Time for ice cream and a good stretch; we need our heads right for the next stretch of road which is Route 125, called “The Switzerland of PA”.



This is one of those motorcycle roads that defines riding pleasure as it makes its way through anthracite coal country, with lots of hairpins and big elevation changes. After 36 miles of riding bliss we reach Shamokin which was big when coal was king but has come upon harder times just now. Still, the Dunkin Donuts coffee at the very end of route 125 is as good as any and provides a much needed pick-me-up before the final leg of our first day's journey. Just a little “caffeined up” we ride out on route 61 which brings us north and west and back to the Susquehanna at Sunbury where we turn north. It's just a short ride up river to Steel Steeds Campground where we are greeted by the proprietor and guided to our camper where beer, cheese and crackers are waiting. We waste no time wetting our whistles and meeting our ‘neighbors’.

It seems we are the only non Harleys here at the moment and our bikes attract quite a bit of attention. Two hardcore biker type couples are especially interested and they appear to have gotten an early start to partying. There is a “biker bar” right next door so you can really tie one on if you wish then stagger back to your tent, camper or cabin. Actually, we would be treated to a bit more ‘biker culture’ than we may have wished, but not before enjoying a relaxing meal by the riverside on a tidy deck built by John the chef who prepares steak, chicken, grilled vegetables and sweet corn for us. All you can eat and I must confess to testing the limits by also having cookies and strawberries for dessert. No whipped cream though....I'm on a strict diet.



A more serene spot would be difficult to imagine as the sun finally defeats the clouds, putting on a show for us as it sets over the river.

A Facebook fan would have posted a picture of this meal but I'm not one so I just ate it.





The serenity depicted above would not last too long. We were pretty tired after riding all day and turned in around 9. Real party animals we are not, unlike the ‘neighbors’. At around 10 o’clock one of them decided to fire up his un-muffled Harley, maybe 30 feet from my head. I must admit he was quite careful to warm the engine thoroughly before leaving, running the rpm’s up and down for several minutes. As he pulled away his totally drunk wife starting sobbing and yelling: “Come back, come back....my husband left me”. The whole melodrama fortunately only lasted about 10 minutes since she evidently passed out and was left lying on the lawn ‘til morning. Ah the ‘biker life style’.

Despite the interruption we were able to get a good night’s sleep. We left after waking at no particular time and rode a few miles to fill the gas tanks and our bellies before



riding through Lewisburg and due west for 25 miles to pick up another one of central PA’s gems: route 235. This is more open than 125 but it too passes over three mountain ridges as it makes its ways south over 35 miles through state game lands to hit the western shore of the Susquehanna just across the river from Millersburg. Traffic is virtually non-existent and so are yesterday’s clouds. I love it!



At the river we lucked out by timing the Millersburg Ferry perfectly: a paddle wheel ferry boat that is the longest continuously operating ferry boat in the US. We are the only vehicles and passengers on board for this crossing and enjoy examining the machinery of the paddle wheel drive as well as the wide shallow river and the approach to the historic town of Millersburg.

We catch the boat and make a timely departure.

Rob is enjoying the scenery, don't you think?



We disembark on the eastern shore and ride about 10 miles to lunch in Halifax. The sun has warmed things up quite a bit, especially since we have come down out of the mountains and we are glad to rest and recharge in the air conditioned restaurant. Thoroughly re-hydrated, we continue east and south through the bucolic Powell Valley. This leads us to Gold Mine Road which tests our engines with its incredibly steep and long grades. We cross our route from Saturday in Pine Grove where we turn south, heading into Amish country. Its late afternoon on Sunday and many Amish folk are returning home in their horse drawn wagons. The temperature continues to climb and will touch 90 degrees by the time we reach home; some of the passengers in the wagons are hanging off the sides to catch a cool breeze. Finally we reach Kennett Square where we gas up and park. Back at the house a terrific meal is waiting: Latin Chicken preceded by tasty appetizers and accompanied by cool wine. We eat reminisce and relax a bit before saying our goodbyes. It has been a beautiful weekend: great weather, great roads, great bikes and great company. Life is good.

