

Ride Report: The Pagoda. Sunday, 10/08/2023

A solitary ride at whatever pace suggests itself, with no one else to accommodate or worry about, can be heavenly, but sometimes we would like someone to ride along with. A small group of enthusiasts provides a social aspect missing from solo excursions. This, it seems to me, is especially pertinent in the post-Covid era: many of us seem to have lost the capacity to get out and socialize.

RIGHT: Fred, his back to the camera, rode this nice VF500F. He has at least two.

That's me in the background scratching my head, wondering perhaps: "Roll your own? What have I done?"



I think many motorcyclists are just looking for someone to ride with. I base this statement on the many requests I receive from riders to come on a RetroTour, but riding their own, possibly modern motorcycle. Despite concerns about how modern machines might pace next to our fleet of Golden Oldies, I will sometimes decide to open a ride to anyone wishing to 'roll their own' bike, and discount the fees accordingly.

LEFT: File footage of a Hinkley Triumph



And so it came to pass that three local riders signed up to ride on their own bikes: Fred on his VF500F, Mac on his Hinkley Triumph, and Torin (Mac's son) on his Aprilla. While the VF500F might qualify as a vintage bike, the other two, not so much, but that's OK, for this 150-mile round-trip one-day excursion all comers were welcomed.

RIGHT: Torin's Italian Stallion





ABOVE: *The XLCR may be brutal, but if you survive, it will excite your senses.*

RIGHT: *Ducati's are sexy, and so, by extension, is the rider. Looking good, Nico.*



The Bonneville is a favorite; so well balanced as a result of decades of incremental improvement, oil leaks be damned.



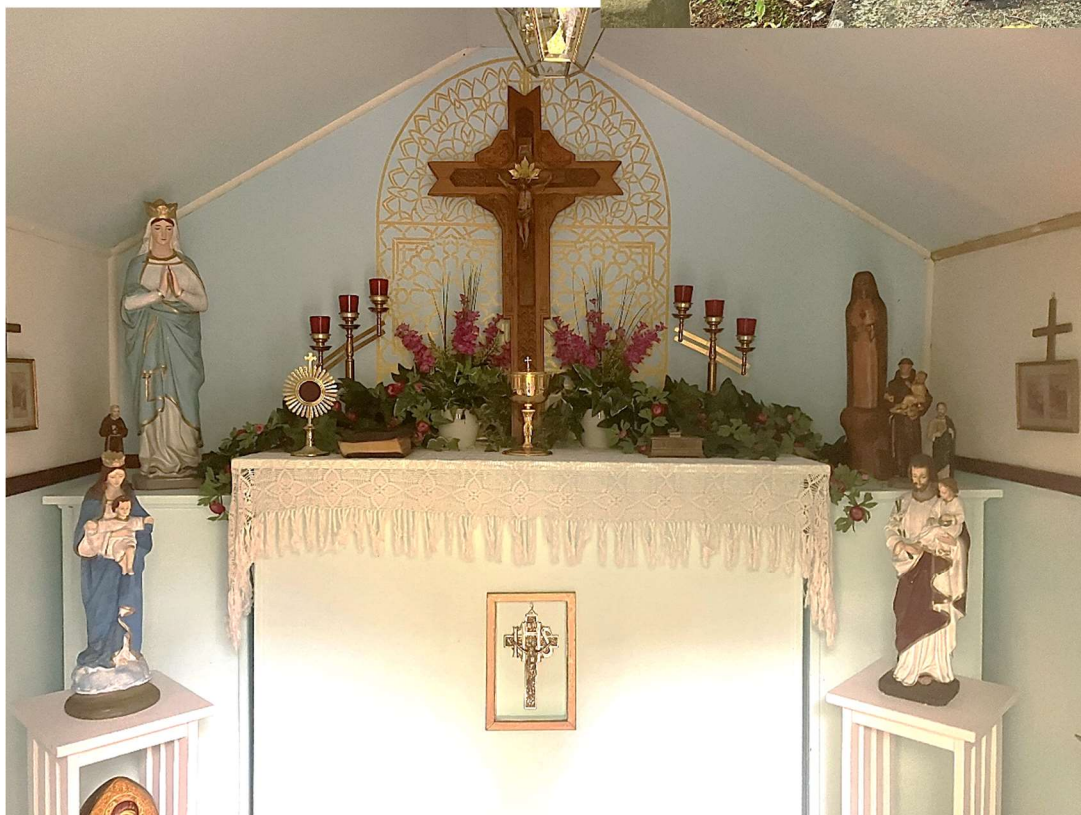
At an easy relaxed pace we followed back roads north, paralleling the Brandywine River for 35 miles, then taking a short break to visit The Smallest Church in the World. "How small?" you ask. Well, when a couple gets married in this church, the bride, the groom, and the priest stand inside by the altar. Everyone else is compelled by the laws of physics to stand outside and look in. We were afforded an opportunity to do just that when Gail, a third generation descendant of the builder, was kind enough to take a few moments and open the church for us.

RIGHT: Gail schools Neal on the history of the wee church.



LEFT: That's pretty much all of it, looking in from the door.

We continue on our way, crossing the Schuylkill River at Douglassville before riding down quiet farm roads through Stoney Creek and past a 60' high waterfall to our next stop at a little park on the shores of Antietam Lake, surrounded by over 600 acres of recreational parklands. The town of Reading purchased the original grist mill and dam in the 1860's.



L TO R: Jack, Nico, Neal, Mac, Torin, Fred.

From Antietam Lake it is a short hop up a steep grade to aptly named Skyline Drive which affords us great views on the way to our destination: The Reading Pagoda. Here, we are slightly disappointed, as the Pagoda is closed for renovations. Still, the views are inspiring, as is the structure itself. We can here distant music wafting up Mount Penn from the city of Reading below; it sounds like a parade. I am taken by surprise when Jack, a RetroTours participant from last year, shows up to say hello. Any excuse for a ride...he is heading south to Maryland on his Kawasaki 400 but decided to detour about 40 miles north to see if he could catch us at The Pagoda. Good timing! An even greater surprise comes next, when 20 reverse trikes pull into the parking lot, many with extreme custom paint work, exhaust and sound systems blaring.

It turns out that today is Puerto Rico Day in Reading and after the parade, this group made the climb up to The Pagoda. This is the source of the parade sounds heard earlier. It is really quite a sight! I can't remember ever seeing this many reverse trikes in one spot.



LEFT: Earlier this year, Jack rode his Kawa 400 to Sturgis and back! A serious hike on a small-ish bike.



LEFT: Mac & Torin: father & son. View from Mt. Penn.



*VIVA LA PUERTO RICO! VIVA LOS MOTOS DE TRES RUEDAS! (OK, I know my Spanish sucks; I just don't care.)
Fred, on the right, toasty warm in his space suit, surveys the scene in apparent disbelief.*



Neal at the Reading Pagoda, built in 1908. (The Pagoda, not Neal)



The way down from Mount Penn takes us through the 7 hairpins of Duryea Drive. Folks have raced up the mountain on this road since the mid 1800's, beginning with high wheel bicycles. At one event over 7,000 riders participated. Runners have also raced up Mt Penn and to this day, once a year, cars race the clock, drifting through the turns to ascend. At the bottom we are cutting across Reading's sizeable Hispanic neighborhood and remnants of the day's festivities are all around. Crossing the Schuylkill River puts us onto Route 10 south. We pull into Reading Cycles for a quick look at this independent shop's store front. Our stomachs are growling by now, so it is fortunate that our lunch stop is nearby. Trooper Thorn's Irish Beef House is hopping! We are fortunate to get seated outside where we enjoy some really good Irish pub lunch fare.

Suitably refreshed, we continue south on Route 1 to our next point of interest: Johanna Furnace, a restored 18th century iron works and blast furnace. I have never seen anyone here in the past, but today is different: it's the Fall Foliage Festival and we are not alone. There's a good sized crowd here as folks are out enjoying the weather. Scores of vendors are plying

their wares: mostly arts and crafts. An old, restored saw mill, tractor rides, and the Bosch blast furnace, which features a sort of supercharger and produced, among other things, cannon balls in the late 1800's. A restored bit of Pennsylvania's industrial past, the iron master was a 'conductor' on the Underground Railroad.



LEFT: Mac is thinking: "Do people really buy rocks? WHY?"



It's not too far from here to home. Another nice meal awaits: 'Ride to eat. Eat to ride.' We have enjoyed the bikes and the ride, the sights, the good food, and especially the camaraderie. For sure, there are worse ways to spend a Sunday afternoon.



NEAL, TORIN, MAC, JOEL, FRED, NICO