

Couples Tour 2013

Saturday August 24th & Sunday August 25th



RetroTours has run “couples tours” several times in years past. This time we tried to plan a ride that would offer a bit more off bike activity to keep things interesting, especially for our passengers. Generally these are smaller more intimate groups and so it was that just two couples signed up: one from Maryland and one from Prince Edward Island. My wife Lynn not only agreed to come along but she took this tour as an opportunity to blow the cobwebs out of her 1975 CB400F. I know what you’re thinking: “That’s NOT a twin cylinder bike!” True enough, but the diminutive 4 banger is such an icon and so much fun to ride; and seriously, who could resist the seductive curves of those 4 header pipes as they wrap around the front down tube?

Glenna from PEI is a rider as well as a passenger and the cut seat and low weight of Lynn's bike meant that she could do some piloting, leaving her husband Brian free to romp a bit more enthusiastically perhaps on the sporty Laverda 750 from time to time. With its firmly sprung suspension and throbbing engine the Laverda may be more appropriate as a solo sport bike than a two up tourer but at least for this tour it was wearing a dual saddle in place of the sexier solo café seat.



John and Laimon rode in on their modern Harley and have lots of miles under their belts on Milwaukee big twins. For a bit of variety they chose to set out on the Moto Guzzi V50. It's so tiny compared to a Road King! The motor may be smallish for two up touring but it's willing, given a few extra rpm, and the typically competent Italian

suspension package and excellent full sized saddle insure comfort and practicality.

I rode the 1977 R100S/RS/EML sidecar rig which easily swallowed all the baggage and still left room for a passenger to ride comfortably in the chair. The plan was to start out with Lynn and I riding our own bikes with the other two couples two up on RetroTours 2 wheelers. As the weekend progressed we planned to capitalize on the options thus afforded: Lynn could ride in the sidecar while Glenna rode the CB400F and/or Laimon could take a break from the pillion and sit in the chair as needed meaning that we could alternate between riding two up, riding solo and/or sitting in the sidecar. Of course Brian and John would also switch bikes thereby sampling both machines and riding positions solo and 2 up. Variety is a good thing!

Brian and Glenna drove down all the way from Prince Edward Island and arrived the afternoon before our departure. This left us time to get to know one another, choose a bike (the Laverda 750SF), get oriented, loaded (the bike, not Brian) and to perform a safety check and complete paperwork. They confided that they were a bit shocked at the huge amount of traffic here in southeast PA compared to PEI and they also were amazed at how smooth our roads are. This latter impression surprised Lynn and I since PA is not famous for its smooth roads. Later we learned that the road system in Prince Edward Island is riddled with pot holes and lacks regular maintenance. In fact, the residents ironically claim that 'PEI' actually stands for "Potholes Every Inch".



John and Laimon live in Maryland, not far from Washington, DC and completed their short ride to Kennett Square early in the evening. We made introductions and were able to choose a mount (Moto Guzzi V50), and perform orientation, loading and paperwork in time for some relaxation with wine before retiring early, allowing for an early start in the morning. Not *too* early though...this ride was meant to be relaxed in pace and to feel like a vacation, not a marathon. The big

Harley was tucked away in the garage and in the morning, Lynn got up a few minutes before the rest of us to prepare a tasty and filling breakfast. This helped to get the 'vacation feeling' started. Eating well is a good thing!



As usual we tiptoed out of the development very quietly and turned onto fantastic Route 82. The gentle curves helped everyone acclimate to their bikes. We crossed the bucolic Brandywine River in Pocopson then followed it on Creek Road: one of my personal favorites. This took us through an interesting tunnel with a 90 degree bend in the

middle which can be scary since you can't see the proverbial 'light at the end of the tunnel' until after the bend; all the more so if you can't find the headlight switch on an unfamiliar machine! We survived this minor challenge and picked up Route 282, another fine example of paved colonial cow path then after a brief stop at "The Smallest Church in the World" continued on to the interesting restored village at Hopewell Furnace.

We explored the village, snacked on a granola bar and continued north. A minor detour was made in Virginville to ride across a very old covered bridge bringing us to Snyders for gas, lunch and a bike swap. The usual restaurant choice was closed for some reason so we went for 'Plan B': Chinese food. Not the best in the world perhaps but when you're hungry enough.....



A bit to the north we intended to pick our way past the windmills on Route 339 beginning in Mahanoy City but encountered a road block before reaching that point. I tried a few different ways into town but each one was barricaded and our mileage was accumulating. Finally I asked a local how to get to our desired route and we were then back on track. It turns out that the town was closed off for a union convention of some sort although it is beyond me why anyone would want to convene in Mahanoy City, PA. No offense, I'm just sayin'.

We still enjoyed 25 miles of 339 and were not disappointed. There were by now a few sore bums so we stopped for a break and to play 'musical chairs'. Using all the available seating options enabled everyone to stay as comfortable as possible as we made our way past Bloomsburg and on, 15 miles north to Benton, a sleepy little town on fast flowing Fishing Creek. On really hot days the locals swim just upstream from the little waterfall. Our stop for the night was the Mattress and Muffin Inn, a cute B&B on Main Street right next to two large antique malls. We checked in and unpacked, rested and/or walked around a bit. Laimon hit the antique shops, her favorite past time. We met just a few doors down for dinner at The Filling Station where good food and local wine made the meal a memorable one. After dinner a short walk along the creek helped get the kinks out and we retired early in preparation for more relaxed riding in the morning.



Old Barn: Benton, PA

The weather was picture perfect all day Saturday and Sunday promised more of the same as we saddled up and tuned back to the south on Route 487. We made our first stop within 10 miles at The Twin Bridges: East and West Paden. The only twin covered bridges in the United States span Huntington Creek just east of Forks,

PA. They were constructed in 1884 and the park was formed in the 1960's when a new road bypassed the structures in favor of a modern open bridge. We enjoyed the peace and quiet of a warm summer Sunday morning and posed for pictures while exploring this lovely spot.



Heading south again, we meandered on some tiny back roads and popped out on Route 11 about ½ mile from our next destination: Bill's Old Bike Barn. We visit Bill and Judy a lot on RetroTours, and why not? Besides being a very interesting and hospitable couple, their collection of motorcycles is one of the best anywhere. And in case that isn't enough, there are so many other collectibles to gawk at that sensory overload is inevitable. I always feel like a kid in a candy store; besides amazing motorcycles, there are cameras, Coke a Cola memorabilia, an old manual typeset print shop, a dentist's office, a fire department, a Harley repair shop and a barber shop. All this and more under one roof is called 'Billville'. It is an amazing and eclectic place.

Glenna and Brian strolling down "Main Street".





Brian admiring an old Brit bike, seen through robots and cameras.



John and Laimon check out the predecessor of their own Road King

There was still 125 miles of great asphalt between Bill's and home so after about 90 minutes in 'the candy store' we hit the road again. Everyone had acclimated to our routine by now so things were rolling along quite smoothly. We slalomed down Route 125 from Shamokin to Pine Grove then jogged over to equally entertaining Route 645 to Myerstown. A short burst on 501 South got us to 897 which zig zags through Amish farm country, forcing us to dodge horse pat and veer around slow moving buggies. There was even time to stop for ice cream and a group photo.



It just doesn't get much better: summertime, classic bikes, ice cream *and* friendly women.

Finally returning home near sundown, we enjoyed a celebratory dinner and said goodbye to John and Laimon who hightailed it back to Maryland. Brian and Glenna would spend one more night before their long journey back to the northlands of Prince Edwards Island. We hope to see them all again soon.

I think that Glenna, Lynn and Laimon all enjoyed their brief rides in the sidecar. Laimon was apprehensive at first but when she got sore enough she took a turn in the chair and found it to be comfortable and not so scary. If Glenna was scared at all it didn't show—I'm certain I saw her napping a few times! She also took right to Lynn's CB400F and that gave Lynn a chance to get a break in the chair. John seemed to really take to the V50 Guzzi; lightness is beautiful! Brian is looking for a Laverda of his own; I guess that a super hard clutch pull and copious engine vibration did not put him off.

All in all we had a very good time and BONUS! we made some new friends. It's fun to tour as couples; I have to admit that having some women along changes the atmosphere but it's all for the better and I honestly wish that more women would join our tours as riders. Next season I hope to run a really cool couples tour with short days in the saddle, a very nice farmhouse B&B and a special treat: a ride in an Amish buggy from the B&B to an Amish family's home for dinner. Check the 2014 schedule.