

The early morning mountain air freshens my nostrils as we cruise at speed down a rare straightaway in a remote corner of West Virginia. I am excited to be riding under the sun after 13 hours in the rain on Friday. The Ducati, battered as she is, continues to run smoothly, and this early in the day, the rock-hard seat is still bare-able. Barely. Lush, wide open, green fields fill the broad valley to my right, and the rolling landscape is punctuated by small ponds, spawned by the incessant rainfall, and peppered by lazy, black, grazing cows. It has been an arduous weekend, at times I didn't think we would make it this far. We are on the way home.

Challenges began early. Erik and Laurel were to have arrived in Philly from Minnesota at 10:30 AM on Thursday. Nathan from Brazil would meet us at baggage claim and I would bring everyone home to freshen up, enjoy lunch and take a short familiarization ride. Plenty of time would be left to attend bike night at a nearby dealership and pack the bikes for our early Friday morning departure. We would even be able to get a good night's sleep. But mechanical problems—aircraft, not motorcycle—delayed the departure of the flight by over 6 hours, stranding the couple in St. Paul while Nathan waited at the airport in Philly. Eventually, he found a train to Wilmington, DE, just 12 miles from here, where I picked him up, but by that time, we had to drive back to Philly, through rush hour, to meet the delayed flight which was finally airborne. We just had time to get a killer Philly cheese-steak sandwich for Nathan at 'Big Sam's' near the airport. Welcome to Philadelphia.

We all got to the house eventually, and Nathan was outfitted with riding gear while we test fired the bikes and tried the seating positions on for size. The Laverda was way too tall and the clutch way too stiff for several of the riders so I swapped it out for the Moto Guzzi V50, a far more user-friendly device. By the time we had our gear sorted and loaded, it was close to 11 o'clock. We would meet at the breakfast table at 7:30. The forecast for the weekend was rather grim: the depressing weather pattern of rain all weekend every weekend would continue, prompting one rider to quip: 'Maybe it should be called **WetroTours**.' We felt drops as we suited up but left the raingear in the bags. It wouldn't stay there for long. 13 hours later, we pulled up to our cabin in Lost City, WV. We were soggy, a little hungry, and profoundly fatigued. The cabin itself was a fresh, clean, carpeted, **DRY** structure with vaulted ceilings, enough room for 10, and no cell service or internet. Perfect! Even better, there was an electric cloths drier; sorely needed and put to immediate good use.

On the route to the cabin, we rode very cautiously in the abysmal conditions, but were not able to totally avoid trouble. At one tight right hander, Erik must have caught an oil slick. He lost the rear wheel and did a slow low side on the poor Ducati 860, which has seen more than its share of crashes lately. This was done in full view of his wife, Laurel, who was following close behind. The bike and Erik, I presume, slid across the oncoming lane. Luckily, there was no oncoming traffic at that moment; Erik was uninjured and the bike only slightly damaged. I would add to that shortly. After checking things over and kicking stuff straight, I ran the bike up and down the road a bit. It felt OK. We suited up and were about to leave, but when I kick started the Ducati it sounded decidedly off-song. I stood next to the bike, held the front brake, and revved the engine to 4500 rpm to try to clear it out, or at least to determine what the trouble might be. Though the neutral light was on, the transmission quite suddenly and without warning, dropped into first gear and the machine tried to shoot forwards. Because I had a death grip on the front brake lever it didn't get far, but it did fall over. **HARD**. We re-removed our riding gear and spent another 30 minutes straightening out controls, gaffing up broken blinker mounts and the shift pedal. My crash had done far more damage than Erik's, proving that experience counts for something. The mis-fire came down to a loose spark plug cap. All this while it was still raining.

The pace after this incident slowed even more, understandably. We were averaging something like 17 MPH including stops. At Charlestown I offered the option to stop and take a motel. That was at 6 PM. I best guessed our ETA at 10 or even midnight, given the pace. My thinking was: no way was this group going to make it to the cabin tonight, if at all. I totally expected the three sensible adults to vote to stay here for the night and lick our wounds, which would have fine with me, preferable maybe even. Instead, they voted unanimously to continue on, into the night if need be. I had underestimated my riders: this was a tough group. Maybe we could do it? Now the roads opened up a bit and we were able to safely increase our pace, though still on wet roads in light rain. We reached Wardensville at 7:58 and pulled into the Cacapon Restaurant: the only show in a small quiet town, they close at 8. The receptionist actually tried to turn us away, but we would have none of it, begging for them to at least make us sandwiches; we were cold, wet, and hungry. Relenting, they even let us sit at a table for a spell, then we were off into the fading daylight, about 30 miles to go, and yes, it was **STILL** raining. Over the course of the 275 miles 13-hour day we got exactly one minute of no rain/blue sky, at Harper's Ferry.

The cabin was heavenly. Plenty of room, fresh, clean and **WAY** in the woods. Lost City is no metropolis. it was chosen as a RetroTours destination precisely because it is an undeveloped area in the least developed part of a relatively undeveloped state. From the 2-lane main road we turned onto a tiny, unlined, one-lane mountain road, following it 8 miles up the mountain. We turned off onto a rutted dirt road that took us a short distance into the forest before delivering us to the steep gravel driveway leading to the cabin, well hidden in the wooded darkness. I was only able to find it because I had previously paid a virtual visit, courtesy of Google Earth. Laurel would comment later: "When you turned onto that driveway, I was sure you were taking us into the woods to murder us". Her attitude improved considerably when we found the key and switched on the cabin lights.

On Saturday we slept in a little bit, then looked over our environs for the first time in daylight. Twin ponds, a large fire pit, and the dilapidated original cabin could all be seen from the front porch, along with the sky, which was at least partly blue. We chowed down on fresh eggs and toast, purchased at our last gas stop, then packed our rain suits and rode south, seeking aliens. Our search for extras-terrestrial intelligence aimed us towards Green Bank, where we intended to tour the immense radio telescope. Somehow, we avoided any major rainfall, just skirting a few showers. The ride was 100 miles of West Virginia's finest swervery, our enjoyment augmented by the experience of sampling different classic bikes as we swapped mounts on the way. After an informative tour of the facility, capped by ICE CREAM, we made our way back to the cabin under ever improving skies, arriving just after sunset. The final 20 miles took us up and over a high mountain on a desolate, hair-pinned, one lane road; just us and the deer. Our dinner plans were scuttled when we reached the restaurant in Lost City at 8:15. You guessed it: they closed at 8. We picked up a box of spaghetti, a jar of sauce, and cans of meat and veggies to prepare our own feast back at the cabin, made plans and preparations for an early departure Sunday morning, then retired to get some much needed, restful sleep.

With the cabin cleaned and our bikes loaded, we had kickstands up just before 8, slightly ahead of schedule. Amazingly, incredibly, the sky was perfectly clear: a deep shade of blue that one can only see in the mountains. The temperature was comfortably warm, traffic non-existent, and traction was abundant on the rain washed, sun dried roads. We deserved nothing less! Our route took us through the Shanghai Pass and over the Tuscarora Pike, a narrow mountain road that climbs forever, then follows a high ridge for over a mile, affording miraculous views of the expansive valley below. I feel like I am piloting a small aircraft here, rather than a motorcycle. Finally, the Pike plunges downward, bringing us

back to civilization, where we fuel up the bikes first, then our stomachs, at a brunch smorgasbord. Nathan's eyes light up when he realizes it's all-you-can-eat. That man can eat! From here, we make our way through Civil War battlefields before crossing the Potomac from West Virginia back into Maryland at Shepherdstown. The final leg home has us feeling weary. At a detour, just a few miles short of our destination, we encounter two entertaining riders on modern dressers, one an Indian. They seem to have become lost in a maze while trying to navigate the poorly marked detour. They are riding frenetically, at high speed, basically in circles. They pass us going one way, we pass them going the other way; they seem so frenzied that it's comical. In the end we see them pass by when we are at our last top-up fuel stop, 2 miles from the house. At home, the beers come out and hors d'oeuvres are served, followed by a fancy multi-course dinner prepared by my wife Lynn. Love you babe.

We are saddle sore and tired, but saturated with satisfaction and joy. We have been severely challenged, and we have passed the test. This was a weekend to remember: not always comfortable, but adventure defined. We have experienced unadulterated motorcycle touring as it once was. No GPS, no throttle-by-wire, no ABS, no cell phone service, internet, or TV. Three days later and my body is still in recovery mode, my mind still negotiating hairpin turns somewhere in the West Virginia mountains.

I feel like I could ride like that forever.



Parked outside the cabin (L to R):

Moto Guzzi V50: most user friendly, even with linked brakes

BMW R90/6: weirdest engine noises (but only at idle)

Ducati 860GT: most crash-able

GL1000: most comfortable



Twin Ponds: our cabin in the woods. Nathan from Brazil and Laurel from Minnesota.



At a rest stop somewhere in Virginia



Newlyweds Erik and Laurel. The smiles say it all.



Wake up Erik, we're almost home



So long Nathan. Tenha uma viagem segura para Brasil. Eu vou lembrar meu amigo.