

Greetings, fellow HOG members.

Let me begin by saying that it has been a *great* summer! Why? Because it wasn't as bad as 2009! Seriously, even though the economy is still struggling, motorcycle enthusiasts around the globe rolled out their bikes, cleaned all that 2009 dust off, and got back in the saddle.

Here at Highway 101 Harley-Davidson we saw a sharp increase in our summer visitors over last year. Once again we hosted visitors from Europe, Australia, Asia and many of our Canadian neighbors, who were eager to take advantage of their dollar's strong purchasing power here in the States.

We celebrated our 10<sup>th</sup> annual Lighthouse Run by selling out for the first time in many years. Granted, moving the event from October to June undoubtedly helped as the rain finally stopped the third week of June (whew!) and we were blessed with the terrific weather. Of course, having comedian Herb Dixon was simply icing on the cake and several attendees told me they hadn't laughed that hard "in years." And what better remedy for a pesky recession than a good ol' belly laugh?



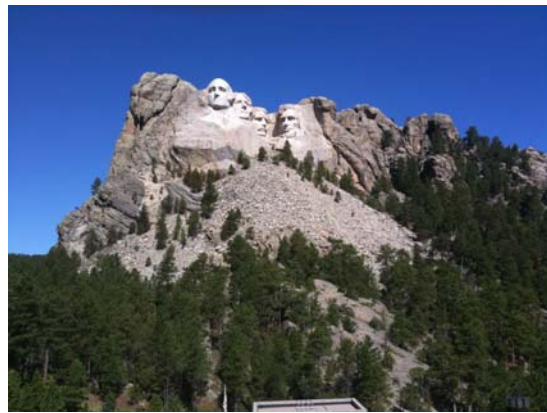
In 2009 I canceled my much-anticipated trip to Sturgis due to economic conditions, but this year I decided a road trip was the perfect remedy for what ailed me (a case of the down and dirty recession blues). And what gives faster relief from the frivolous things in life than putting some wind to your face? So on August 28<sup>th</sup> I headed east, and after an unnecessarily long and uneventful ride through the Oregon Badlands I finally crossed into Idaho and, gratefully, a 75mph speed limit. (I'd like to meet the bonehead who decided that we should all drive 55 mph on one of the most boring, hot, desolate and empty roads in all of Oregon.) I spent my first night on the road in Pocatello, Idaho and the second night in Jackson, Wyoming. I pushed hard and joined several other Coos Bay folks at the Buffalo Chip in Sturgis, South Dakota in the early evening of my third day on the road.

This year's Sturgis attendance was the largest since 2000. It is estimated that between 600,000 and 700,000 riders converged on this small town of normally 6,700 residents for a week of great music, hot temperatures, dust, warm beer, expensive food, Mt. Rushmore, Crazy Horse, Devil's Tower, Deadwood, Spearfish, the Badlands, Bob Dylan, Kid Rock, Ozzie, Motley Crue and - did I mention? - hot temperatures and dust. Lots and lots of dust.

We paid a visit to Rapid City Harley-Davidson and rode into the Express Lane for a quick oil change. “Four to five hour wait” the young man said. “What’s ‘Express’ about that?” I asked. “Hey, there are 55 bikes ahead of you,” he responded. He didn’t answer my question but it was obvious we weren’t going to get our oiled changed, so we joined a sea of bikes in the parking lot and made like Usain Bolt for the air-conditioned store where we secured some immediate relief from the oppressive heat.



I’ve now attended Sturgis in the two largest crowds of the decade - 2000 and 2010 - and as you inch along Highway 34 with several thousand over-heated motorcycles, making your way back towards a blistering hot dustbowl known as the Buffalo Chip, you inevitably ask yourself “what the heck am I doing here?” But then you head south on Highway 35, and an hour later the four faces of Mt. Rushmore suddenly appear to your right, and you’re glad you made the trip. And how can you not visit the Crazy Horse Monument each time you’re in Sturgis, if only to see what progress had been made since your last visit? The first time I saw the monument I was only nine years old, and it had taken Ziolkowski the previous 15 years to punch a tunnel through the mountain. I was unimpressed. Today, the face of Crazy Horse is complete and the family continues to methodically carve what will eventually be a three-dimensional monument. In fact, so much work remains that there is no completion date even projected, and I am resigned to the fact that it will not be finished in my lifetime.



(Byron Beebe’s picture used without permission. ☺)

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Every rider must be diligent about wildlife while on the road and my eyes were constantly darting to the right and left for signs of motion. South Dakota is flush with

antelope and tiny mule deer, but it was so hot they seemed to be content to just lie in the fields, unwilling to exert any energy until nightfall. I made a point of being off the road well before the sun went down, knowing full well that all critters large and small would be on the move for food and water once it cooled down.

In spite of my constant concerns about deer the only close encounter I had with the wildlife (outside of Sturgis) was in Northern Michigan where I rounded a blind curve and came eye-to-eye with a particularly large Golden Eagle trying to gain altitude immediately in front of me. Fortunately, we simultaneously realized that we were on a collision course. I braked and ducked as he dropped a very large woodchuck and immediately elevated. Disaster was narrowly averted as he barely cleared the bike and my head – thanks to his approximate seven feet of wingspan. I watched in my rear view mirror as he completed a quick 360, retrieved his prized woodchuck and made for home.

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In spite of living in Michigan the first twenty five years of my life I hadn't crossed the Mackinac Bridge since I was eight years old, and I was very excited to revisit this famous Michigan icon. As I began to cross the expansion portion of the bridge I suddenly heard a loud whine emanating from my tires and the Ultra began to jerk right and left. My anxiety was heightened when I looked down - and through - the open steel grating all the way to the Straits of Mackinac, which was falling away hundreds of feet below me (552

feet at the bridge's peak). I later learned that the grates were installed to keep the bridge from undulating in the frequent high winds. I instantly decided to defy the "No Lane Changes" sign and made a hasty retreat to the adjoining lane and the security of concrete. My return trip several days later was no less harrowing, as 45-55 mph winds dictated that I ride at an approximate 65-degree angle to keep from being blown into the sidewall. I later learned that in 1989 a lone driver



who was also unnerved by the high winds made the ill-fated decision to bring her tiny Yugo to a complete stop on the bridge grating. A rogue gust literally lifted her car off the bridge and tossed it into the Strait, killing its occupant.

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After three days of successful bass fishing near Gaylord, Michigan I headed for home. Aside from three or four hours of wet weather west of Fargo, North Dakota I enjoyed clear skies the entire trip. In the town of Livingston, Montana I stopped for fuel and stared at the north gate of Yellowstone National Park. The distant mountains were beautiful and inviting, and for a few moments I was tempted to change my route and return through the park – again. But “the road less traveled” prevailed. I continued west on I-90 and was soon rewarded with the beauty of the Great Divide, Lolo National Forest, Lolo Pass and the beautiful Clearwater River. For those of you



who haven't had the pleasure of traveling the same trail used by the Lewis and Clark Expedition on their westward journey in September of 1805, and again on their return in June of 1806, I highly recommend it. For approximately 160 miles the road never leaves the river. And it's beautiful. Abundantly and unbelievably beautiful.

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On a side note: I was very lucky to have spotted a Bald Eagle in Michigan, Minnesota, Montana and South Dakota. These majestic birds were on the brink of extinction just thirty years ago. It's gratifying to see their numbers returning to healthy levels.

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So, 5,940 miles and nine states later I pulled into Coos Bay and slid off the Ultra, looking forward to standing for a while and giving my backside some rest. It was a great trip and I did the entire ride solo. Several folks along the way asked me if it was lonely riding alone. No, it's not. Lonely is to be “destitute of sympathetic or friendly companionship”. There wasn't a single stretch of road where I didn't cross paths with scores of other riders who never failed to wave a friendly “hello”, or have a chat at the gas station, restaurant or hotel. Consequently, I never lacked “friendly companionship.”

I'm already looking forward to next year's ride. The only question is, to where? Yosemite? The Grand Canyon? Alaska? Zion National Park? Joshua Tree National Park? The choices are endless. Perhaps I'll see you on the road...