

## Local Loops I; June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Joel Oswald	1971 Moto Guzzi Ambassador 750
Bradd Hermann	1973 Norton Commando 750 Fastback
Russ Mason	1970 Triumph T100C
Steve Wittick	1977 Yamaha XS650
Eugene Sanderson	1977 Harley Davidson XLCR 1000
Tyler & Kristi Hissong	1974 Kawasaki W3 650
John Larcher	1976 Honda CB500T
Lew Jacobson	1974 Benelli 650 Tornado
Mac Morgan	1971 BSA 650 Lightning
Wayne Hartpence	1975 Ducati 860GT
Gerd Opderbeck	1975 Suzuki T500 Titan
Joel Samick	1977 R100S/RS/EML

### “Eastern Resurrection”

“Eastern” can refer to this pagoda, with its Chinese design, and in a different way, to its location—not in the Orient, but in the Eastern United States. It stands atop Mount Penn, overlooking Reading, Pennsylvania, where Michael and I stayed a night in late April. We were on a long backroad ride between the Adirondacks in upstate New York—where a few deep snowbanks lay in the woods, and flying snow filled the air—and Baltimore, Maryland, where flowers carpeted the woods, and spring filled the air.

The pagoda was built in 1908 by William Abbot Witman, a local quarrier who wanted to beautify the city whose hillsides he had been stripping bare. He planned the edifice to be a landmark hotel and restaurant, but it was never opened—the need for a suitable access road up almost 900 feet of steep mountainside being the biggest apparent obstacle.

In the background of this photo, the streets and hillsides of Southern Pennsylvania are beginning to show sprays of green among the trees—an effect I came to think of as “The Airbrush of April.” Those first signs of post-winter rebirth, the radiant bursts and washes of spring color, are so expressive of returning *life*, and are one reason why the word “resurrection” occurred to me for this story. Even as the band was reviving the *Time Machine* tour, bringing it to a new series of North American cities and countries outside North and South America (heading to Europe in May), and I was resurrecting my drumming and motorcycling skills and endurance, all around me the world was being reborn.

The following photo was taken on the road down from that pagoda atop Mount Penn (the road’s complicated engineering a testament to Mr. Witman’s problems over 100 years ago). Among the green washes at the roadside, a spray of forsythia glows yellow, while to the upper right, among the mostly bare, gray branches, a magnolia tree flowers in pink and white.”





Above: An early rest stop in a school parking lot. We're all there.

Below: The first wave has arrived at the Pagoda but where is the second group?



We all met at the house for breakfast at 7:45 on Saturday morning....early but easy. We ate our fill in a leisurely manner, getting to know one another and endured a thankfully brief 'rider's meeting'. The plan for the day was discussed and moderation suggested: crashing is bad, we all agreed. We then migrated to the garage where our bikes spent the night and proceeded to roll them out, load them up and get the engines running. Riders who were starting the day on bikes equipped with electric starters watching in amusement as those riding kick starter only bikes experimented with choke settings, carb tickling, throttle position and kicking technique. As engines fired riders were waved on to a big parking lot 2 blocks down the road to circulate, familiarize and warm up their engines while I helped those in need. The fact is that every one of the kick start bikes starts readily BUT only once "the drill" is learned which just takes a certain amount of time. The learning is a bonding process that melds rider to machine in a way that just pushing a button simply cannot duplicate.

From the parking lot we headed out in a loose group and promptly picked up the Brandywine River. River Road took us across 322 to our first rest stop at a school parking lot: SMOKE 'EM IF YOU GOT 'EM. Some riders were ready to try a different bike, others chose to stay on board a while longer..... .....The devil you know is better than the devil you don't know? We wobbled away from the school and found 282, one of the bestest curviest roads around. This took us in 25 miles to Hopewell Village: the second stopping point. Ah, clean rest rooms and the welcomed opportunity to jettison some coffee. We took a quick walk around and checked out the old water wheel used to run an air pump to stoke the fires to melt the iron used to produce wood stoves in Colonial days.

During breaks riders compared notes on the different machines. This particular group of bikes was all over the map with Japanese, British, American and Italian classics of many differing designs. Come to think of it the riders themselves were a rather motley crew with a group of buddies from New Jersey, another from PA, a couple riding two up and several independents. Ages ranging from the late twenties to the late 70's yet everyone rode well and shared a common passion. This meant was that there was plenty to talk about at the frequent rest stops where people got to know one another while discussing and comparing these cool old bikes. Having picture perfect weather only enhanced the experience. It just doesn't get much better than this.

Continuing north we angled east of Reading, staying on the back roads past Manatawny Creek and the waterfalls at Stoney Creek to approach the Pagoda from the east on fabulous Skyline Drive. The aptly named road affords fantastic views of the countryside around Reading and of the city itself from a high ridge. During our approach the group became fractured, as often happens when people are enjoying the ride and the scenery, so that when we reached the Pagoda the group seemed suspiciously smaller than I remembered , and a head count revealed that 4 or 5 bikes were missing. No worry, everyone had route sheets and cell phones with GPS so before we had finished our first cup of tea the rest pulled in and we all explored and refreshed. At every stop the sidecar trunk went up and cases of water and granola bars were diminished.

A short roll down the 7 hairpins of Duryea Drive brought us through the city and our lunch stop at Queen City Restaurant, a little greasy spoon right on our route. Here we relaxed for a while, had soup, sandwich, salad or whatever, and socialized. The place was not crowded so we got a big long table all to ourselves and no one minded that we made a lot of noise, as folks having this much fun are want to do. During lunch we learned that Lew Jacobson had some properties in Reading that he visited regularly. As a result he knew the roads into and out of town intimately. It was decided that once we reached Morgantown Lew would take the lead and bring us to an interesting Amish ice cream parlor for dessert.

Things began to go off plan when the ice cream parlor turned out to be closed: out of business. No worries, Lew knew the back roads like the palm of his hand and volunteered to lead us to an alternate spot. We all set out after Lew who took off like a banshee, closely followed by my supposedly sweep rider Mac. The two are old buds and Mac couldn't resist the temptation to wick it up a bit. I suppose that's understandable and I just plodded along on the sidecar rig while those two old racing cronies did

their thing. The roads were actually sweet and Lew and Mac waited at appropriate points so the rest of us were able to follow along. It took quite a bit longer than I had imagined but Lew did eventually bring us out to a great little ice cream shop via amazing back roads. While we enjoyed dessert I got to look at and sit on a very cool Harley servi-car and spoke with the owner extensively. I always wanted to try one of those things; at least I got to sit on one.



Tryin' the trike at Just Mom's

'Just Mom's Ice Cream' was on Route 282 which I knew pretty well but Lew wanted to show us more back roads and I relinquished the lead to him again, though not without a certain amount of trepidation. I knew things were going somewhat further south when I suddenly saw Lew riding back towards us at breakneck speed. I learned later that he had left his glasses at Mom's but I now found myself back in the front and I definitely did not want to make everyone do two U-turns; I was in the lead again and there I would stay.

When I lead a group I like to follow a detailed route sheet which I display on top of my fuel tank for easy reference. Even if I know where I'm going and on familiar roads, I find it easier to use the route sheet so I don't have to think about directions and can concentrate on riding and maintaining the integrity of the group and a certain pace. We had used 283 to head north and I did want to use it to return so I decided to rely on my sense of direction and ad lib a zigzag route towards home: no route sheet available. Sometimes bush wacking like this produces the most interesting events and the best roads. At one point I chose a turn which led the entire group of 11 motorcycles and 1 sidecar into a private wedding procession. We rode on, did a U-turn and rode out while the bride, the groom and their guests watched, slack jawed. Surely a ceremony to remember! To be honest, it was not the first time that a RetroTour had inadvertently raided a wedding party.

Further on, while sailing along an unknown back road and having a ball I flew over a small hump back bridge which obscured the view of the very sharp off camber right hand turn just beyond. I hit the brakes hard enough to slide the front wheel a bit then the sidecar lofted some as I squeaked through the curve, not quite in control. Kristy Hissong who had been riding pillion behind her husband all day had decided to take a spell in the comfortable sidecar. Being her first time in a sidecar I doubt if she realized how close I was to losing the whole plot; if not for her weight anchoring the chair to the road I doubt I would have made that turn. I looked in my rear view mirror, dreading the possibility that the

next rider might have witnessed all that, only to see Lew on the Benelli going straight, leaving the road for the grassy verge, then laying the bike down unceremoniously. Fortunately neither he nor the bike was hurt which was somewhat miraculous. It was time for a break! I later learned from his friend Mac that Lew is rather famous for that sort of thing. Now you tell me!

Another risk with going off route like this becomes apparent when someone misses a turn; with no route sheet, they have no idea how to hook back up with the group. That did happen somewhere near Honeybrook. A group of 2 or 3 riders came to a turn and there was no one there to show them which way to go. They had little choice but to wait. Eventually I realized that there were 8 not 11 headlights behind me and pulled into a parking lot, found a bit of shade and asked everyone to chill while I chased back to find the missing bikes. Images of gory crashes or blown up engines went through my mind as I back tracked about 10 miles. We found them and got everyone grouped back up. It took a bit of time but no harm was done.

The day was getting long...our 125 mile ride was looking more like 175 and we had survived a very close brush with disaster. It was time to head directly home and we did, arriving at around 6:30. Lynn had a fantastic meal waiting and a gorgeous table set for us. Her contributions to RetroTours are always greatly appreciated. She doesn't just put out a pot of chili, she makes us a gourmet meal fit for a king. We ate and made merry, reliving the day over a delicious dinner which included wine or beer for those so inclined. We had a great ride, a lot of laughs and some real adventure. The old bikes ran well in spite of our relentless abuse. The food was great and the people were interesting and entertaining. All in all it was a delightful day and I doubt that much more could be packed into a single afternoon.