

## **Custom Tour: August 30-31, 2016**

Blaine got in touch via email in the middle of the summer and expressed a desire for a custom tour that would fit his and his friends' schedule. We went back and forth discussing possible dates and destinations while he tried to 'herd the cats'. It's not easy to get several people to coordinate time off and in the end, Blaine threw in the towel and decided to come by himself to scout things out.

Blaine is not your average motorcyclist. He has been riding for decades and in fact makes a point of logging at least 10 miles every day, year 'round, regardless of weather. No, he does not live in southern California or Florida where the weather is conducive to riding for 12 months a year. He lives about 100 miles west of here and yes, it snows in the winter. In addition to his daily jaunt on two wheels Blaine likes to ride as many different bikes as possible, and to record each experience. He's quite serious about this and showed me the excel spread sheet which spans several decades, detailing his test rides on an amazing assortment of motorcycles over the years. The VIN, make, model, year and mileage at the beginning and end of each ride is noted, along with a running tally of total miles ridden. Each model must be ridden a minimum of 20 miles to qualify for this list. The total documented mileage covered by Blaine is more than 1 million miles.

Who am I, with 25 classic bikes in the garage, to comment on another's obsession? There were a couple of bikes in the RetroTours fleet, the Yankee and the Silk for example, that Blaine had never ridden and he wanted to add them to his bucket list: "bikes I have ridden". We arranged for him to visit on a Tuesday/Wednesday and I set about preparing 6 bikes for us to sample. Blaine decided to stay overnight here and ride two loops per day to maximize the number of different rare machines he could log in. I tried to pair the machines so that we could pace together comfortably, and we did a 125-mile loop and a 50-mile loop each day.

As I recall we started out on the Silk and the Yankee: a couple of obscure two strokes. The Yankee is quite unrefined, brutal even, belching smoke and noise from its 360 degree twin cylinder 500 cc two stroke engine as it propels the rider forward via its unique 6 speed gear box with 2 neutrals: one between first and second and the other between second and third gears. For normal street work, first gear, a real stump puller which is useful off road, is not needed. The rear hydraulic disc is smooth and powerful as is, surprisingly, the diminutive single leading shoe front drum; surely an unlikely combination of brake hardware as one will ever find. The steering is very precise and the Metzler Enduro 3 tires contribute to good handling on the road. The suspension--not so much, as the rear shocks are primitive, but all in all, the Yankee was the GS of the 70's: a bike you could ride to the trails for a day of happy plonking, then home again on the streets.

We rode some of my favorite local back roads, enjoying fine weather and the lovely Brandywine Rover Valley. Midway through the jaunt we swapped bikes and by the time we returned home to trade for the next pair, Blaine was visibly pleased to log these two rare birds



into his little book. On our loop we stopped at Smith's Bridge which provided a suitable backdrop for Blaine who posed for this picture.

I must admit to being unsure about the exact order of loops but I believe that we swapped bike at the garage after lunch on that first day and headed back out on the Norton and the Laverda. On this longer legged pair we were able to cover ground at a faster pace and the loop consisted of more open roads suitable



to our mounts. We headed north to Hopewell Furnace, with a stop for coffee and a visit to "The World's Smallest Church". These two touristic spots are reached by some



alluring twisty roads, and the Laverda and the Norton both acquitted themselves well in this



environment. After swapping bikes we concluded this longer loop in time to enjoy a great meal that my wife, Lynn, prepared for us. Fortunately for me, Lynn finds cooking to be therapeutic, much as I find wrenching on motorcycles to have a calming effect on the soul.



On day two we rode the Benelli and the BSA. Blaine had ridden a Benelli years ago but without logging the ride. Apparently, he had experienced a poorly prepared example because his experience on day two left him with an impression of the Italian twin that far exceeded his recollection. We headed west this time, with a stop at another fetching covered bridge: The Pine Grove Double.

Next we toured through Robert Fuller's old stomping grounds and ascended to The Pinnacles State Park which afforded this fantastic view of the Susquehanna River far below.

On this, our longest loop, we added an interesting disparate element: we made our way to Powersports East, a motorcycle dealership in Bear, Delaware. Here we talked our way into a short test ride on a pair of Zero electric motorcycles. These things are a delight, with superb, modern ABS brakes, suspension and handling. The act of twisting the throttle to the stop produces an



instant, massive torque wave of acceleration and unavoidable huge grins. The contrast with thumping big twins from the 1970's is profound to say the least.

It was fun riding with Blaine—he's quite a character and a hard-core motorcyclist. During this custom tour we were compelled to stop at every nearby Harley dealership so Blaine could pick up a 'poker chip'. I didn't know that every Harley dealer has promotional poker chips for sale. Blaine collects them. My feeling is that they should be freebies; that's just how old fashioned I am I guess. On a subsequent RetroTour we happened to stop at a diner not far from his house and a quick phone call was all it took to get him there for a brief visit over apple pie. With any luck, Blaine will be able to convince a few of his riding buddies to join us next year for an even greater adventure.

