

JIM THORPE TIME WARP

Saturday, October 28th 2017

Russ Mason, Newark, DE
Tom Rosenkilde, Morrisville, NJ
Domen Kalajzic, Bled, Slovenia
Barbara Kalajzic, Bled, Slovenia
Joel Samick/Tour Guide

Russ and Tom, local talent, came in that morning; quite early actually, as breakfast was scheduled for 6:45AM. Both had been on tours previously. Domen and Barbara flew in from Slovenia, where they operate an adventure touring company of their own: **3Glav**. They offer bicycle, rafting, hiking, and other adventurous activities in the incredibly beautiful Slovenian Alps. Google it!

Domen is a dedicated motorcycle enthusiast. Barbara would be riding in the sidecar, piloted by me. They stayed here the night before. Careful planning for the second day would allow them to split off early to attend a wedding party in Philly.

1976 Kawasaki KZ750 Twin
1975 Ducati 860GT
1970 Triumph T120R Bonneville 650
1977 BMW R100S/EML sidecar rig

These are the bikes that were chosen, except for the KZ750, which was drafted as a last-minute replacement for the obstinate Norton. It ran on one cylinder and stalled in the first mile. When I tried a bump start the footrest broke off. It became obvious that it would not be going on this run and the KZ was pressed into service as we got off to a very shaky start, hoping this would be our worst setback, which it was, fortunately.

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Saturday, November 10th 2018

Mason Apostol, Philadelphia, PA
Ed Richmond, Allentown, PA
Kelly Cash, Canton, MA
Joel Porter-DeVriese, Spencer, MA
Chuck Lovey, Plainfield, NJ
Joel Samick/Tour Guide

Mason and Kelly had each been on a tour or two in years past. Ed and Chuck were more recent repeat clients. Joel, Kelly's boyfriend, was a RetroTours 'newbie'. Mason and Ed elected to come early Saturday, for our 7:30 AM breakfast, while Kelly, Joel and Chuck all slept over.

1978 Honda CX500
1974 Kawasaki W3-650
1970 Triumph T120R Bonneville 650
1973 Norton Commando 750 Fastback
1979 Moto Guzzi V50
1972 Laverda 750SF

The two Brit bikes and the Guzzi were requested. I chose the others for riders who had no particular preference. This last ride of the season was remarkable for mechanical gremlins that plagued us throughout the day and some of the night. This challenged us to our very cores and dragged the day out to 12 hours. It was all taken in stride by these remarkable riders who hung tough and never once whimpered.

The weather was cool, but seasonable for the time of year. I passed out some of our loaner gear, so everyone was reasonably well dressed. The sidecar trunk was well stocked with snacks and drinks, and Barbara had a blanket to keep warm. Once we swapped the Norton for the KZ, things went smoothly as we made our way to the first stop, 40 miles to the north, at Hopewell Village, a small National Park/restored pre-revolutionary war village with an operational iron forge. This was the last weekend of Daylight Saving Time so we left in the morning twilight and had daylight past 6 PM.



Parked up at Hopewell Village. The sun is out, it is warming up rapidly. The bikes are bare because our baggage is in the sidecar trunk. As the day warms, we are able to shuck some gear. The Autumn colors are intense; a perfect day for a fall ride.

From Hopewell it was 60 miles to lunch in Snyder's, all paved, and smooth sailing as we crossed the Eastern Continental Divide. The café there was great, and we took our time over lunch. Riders had begun to switch bikes at will. On the way we passed through the historic Dreibelis Covered Bridge, where Barbara got a shot of her husband on the Ducati, which turned out to be his favorite bike. It is a great machine: a true Gran Turismo.



It was too cold to take pictures; my fingers weren't working well enough. Before the cold took effect, I got this one shot of the bikes, ready for departure.

How cold was it? The mercury hovered in the low 40's during the warmest part of the day and dropped into the mid-thirties at different times. As if that were not enough, a wicked north wind kicked up late in the day. I can still feel the chill in my bones. There were several cancellations due to the cold weather, but all of the riders who showed up were experienced in these conditions and came well equipped.

Although it took a long time to suit up, we got off on time and without incident; that would come later. It was one week since the clocks had 'fallen back', so the sun would be going down around 4:30 PM, which proved to be a factor. I was hoping to get back not long after sundown. The leaves came down a bit early this year, so the colors were a bit past prime. At Hopewell Village, Chuck reported that the clutch on the Bonnie was slipping. I switched bikes with him to evaluate the condition on the next leg. The first gremlin had struck.

We made the second leg of our journey without incident. Chuck was right: The Bonneville was ride-able but would not accept much more than ½ throttle without the clutch slipping. I decided that it would be OK if we just rode it conservatively to preserve the clutch. This surprised me a little since the clutch had not been slipping up to this point.



Domen on the Ducati at Dreibelis.



Domen, diggin' the Ducati.

The ride into Jim Thorpe was sweet. Brilliant sunshine lit up fall colors to die for as we passed through Andreas and past Mauch Chunk Lake. Then on the way into town we encountered grid-lock of the worst kind. The last mile and a half were bumper to bumper and barely moving forward as Jim Thorpe was overrun with weekenders out to look at the leaves, and who could blame them on a gorgeous day like this? There were also no parking spaces to be had. As we neared the train station, our engines were getting hot and our patience was wearing thin. Finally, I pulled into a Hotel parking lot and we crammed all the bikes into a space marked 'Unloading Only'. I told everyone to explore while I babysat the bikes. After 20 minutes I was told to move, whereupon I squeezed bikes between parked cars wherever I could. A carnival atmosphere pervaded the town.

After the covered bridge, I decided to run up past Leasor Lake and cross the Divide on a dirt road that forced us to slow down for 5 miles, allowing us to warm up a bit. As we crossed the Appalachian Trail, the fallen foliage afforded spectacular views of the valley below. Just one more mile to Snyders for gas and lunch, and plenty of hot liquids. We were cold, but a hot meal helped, and we didn't have that far to go to reach Jim Thorpe.

The ride into Jim Thorpe was cold and I was beginning to worry about time; we wanted to leave for home by 3:20 so we could arrive back before it got too dark. About 10 miles from town we encountered a detour; a power wire had come down across the road in the high winds. This pushed out arrival back another 20 minutes. After last year's traffic situation, I had plotted an alternate route that took us through the back side of town and into the train station parking lot. As it turned out, traffic was light; the blustery day kept the tourists away. We took a 15-minute tour of the town, found much needed bathrooms, and headed south for home.

Chuck was riding the Laverda. Like Chuck, it's big and sturdy. Riders were free to swap bikes at will, but he wasn't giving it up. Mason was enthralled with the Norton. Though he found the kickstarting drill to be a challenge, he stayed on it most of the day. Kelly had asked for the V50, but when the clutch began to act funny, she decided that the CX500 was her new fave. I was riding the Triumph, babying the clutch, and Ed did a tour on the Kawasaki 650. Around Slatington, the Gremlins attacked for real.

I stopped when I noticed a few bikes had fallen behind. Backtracking, I found Joel and Kelly pulled into a gas station. The V50 clutch has suddenly begun to slip so badly that it would not move forward. I quickly noticed



illegally parked in Jim Thorpe at the Inn



There was singing and dancing in the street.



Barbara and I enjoying a serenade

no free play in the cable, made a very major adjustment at the handlebar and clutch action was restored. Weird! We continued towards home as dusk approached rapidly.

The ride plan was to follow Route 100 for a long ways to get us home 'on time'. It was not to be. We came upon a construction zone; our lane was stopped while oncoming traffic was allowed to proceed. We waited our turn and it seemed like it would never come. We were all chilled to the bone by now and no one wanted to turn off their engine; it was too hard to get everything going again, what with our bulky riding gear and three kick start only bikes. The wait turned into 25 minutes. It was crazy. I couldn't believe how long they held us there.

The Norton stalled just before we got the green flag and I felt bad for Mason who had been kick starting the Norton all day, so I swapped with him. I got it going and we finally were rolling again. But not for long. It was getting hard to pretend that it wasn't dark when we were stuck at a red light at the end of yet another detour. I had the Norton at idle and my electric vest plugged in. Suddenly it stalled and there were no lights, no horn, nothing, as if the battery were completely dead. I pushed into a parking lot and got under a light for a look see. I was cold enough that my brain wasn't working that well and I decided that the battery must be completely dead from running with the headlights on and the vest plugged in.

The Norton has a capacitor that allows running with a dead battery, but only after a push start, and not with the headlight on. I was able to push it down a grade and get it running. Finally, we could get back on the road. We shouldn't be too late getting home. The perfect time for the Moto Guzzi clutch to go completely bonkers. The bike refused to move.

Getting out of town was looking like a nightmare as we would need to re-enter the nasty traffic jam leading to Route 209. I was in the sidecar rig, so lane splitting was not an option. I told everyone to filter through the traffic and to wait for me on the shoulder. Then I waited for a chance to take to the oncoming lane, dashed up to the intersection, and cut back across traffic to make the right-hand turn. No flashing blue lights appeared, and we were on our way south.

The hill sides were ablaze with color. The sun was out, the temperature was cool but moderate. Autumn motorcycling doesn't get much better. We stopped in Bechtelsville for coffee at Dunkin Donuts, then rode on to Eagle, PA and pulled into the parking lot of the closed Harley Davidson dealership. Lynn was waiting with Domen and Barbara's rental car; we were right on schedule. The couple from Slovenia transferred their stuff to the rental car and said farewell, heading into Philly for a wedding reception. I took over on the Ducati from Domen and Lynn drove the sidecar rig back home.

We were home well before sundown and enjoyed a delightful meal. It had been a near perfect day.



Leaving Dunkin Donuts

Adjustment didn't help at this point and I was thinking we might have to double up to get home, then retrieve dead bikes the next day in a truck. In desperation, I unhooked the cable from the transmission lever and found that I could make headway if I used no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ throttle. Ed volunteered to ride the Norton if I push started it for him, I would ride the Guzzi, trying to nurse the clutch home, and Joel would ride the Triumph the rest of the way, leaving Kelly on the CX500, Chuck on the Laverda, and Mason on the W3. Oh, one more thing: Ed had to ride the Norton with the headlight off, though it was well and truly dark by now. We kept him corralled with bikes with working lights. Did I forget to mention that with the clutch cable disconnected on the Guzzi, I could not stop without stalling and had to shift with no clutch?

This was turning into a nightmare!

At a very reduced pace, we made our way south, relentlessly closing in on home. One final challenge came when the Triumph stalled and would not restart. Joel and Mason fell behind, and we wasted another half hour getting regrouped. The Triumph decided to cooperate eventually, and we continued to limp along. In West Chester a big buck jumped out right in front of me. I didn't have time to react or even to become scared. It was only by the grace of God that we didn't collide.

We made it home at 9 pm, 12 hours after leaving home. Lynn had the fire blazing, and hot food and drink ready. We were all wind burned and exposed from the long day at low temperature, but we had survived. Over dinner, I even got the impression that everyone felt good about getting in a late season ride, full of adventure and yes, adversity, but we had met the challenge.

2017

(left to right)

Barbara

Domen

Russ

Tom

Joel



2018

(left to right)

Kelly

Mason

Joel S.

Joel P.-D.

Ed

Chuck

FOOTNOTES: The Triumph got a clutch overhaul with heavy duty plates. The Moto Guzzi will need the engine out for a complete clutch overhaul over the winter. The Norton had a bad fuse. The Honda, the Kawasaki, and the Laverda performed flawlessly, as did the riders.