

RIDE REPORT: SKYLINE DRIVE MAY 21 & 22 2022

The first ride of 2022! Spring is in full force, and we are raring to get out on the open road. The original group of 8 was pared down to 5 as health and family matters forced 3 riders to cancel.

This is who showed up:

Tri (Tim) Tran and

Stephen Bruckert from Philadelphia, PA

Adrian Barb from Downingtown, PA

Eric Johnson from Townsend, Delaware

Unusually, all are more or less local riders, and with me counted we are a group of 5: the perfect number for this trip. Tim is returning for at least his third tour. Eric is back after I don't know how many years. He was on some of the very early tours late in the 20th century. Adrian is a collector with some very unusual examples, including an older Vespa scooter and a Simson 425S. The latter was manufactured in East Germany, before the re-unification. It actually has a 250cc motor with an in-line crankshaft and shaft drive. It is sometimes called a clone of a BMW 250 single and is quite rare in this country. Stephen is a fan of older British bikes, explaining why he chose the Triumph 500.



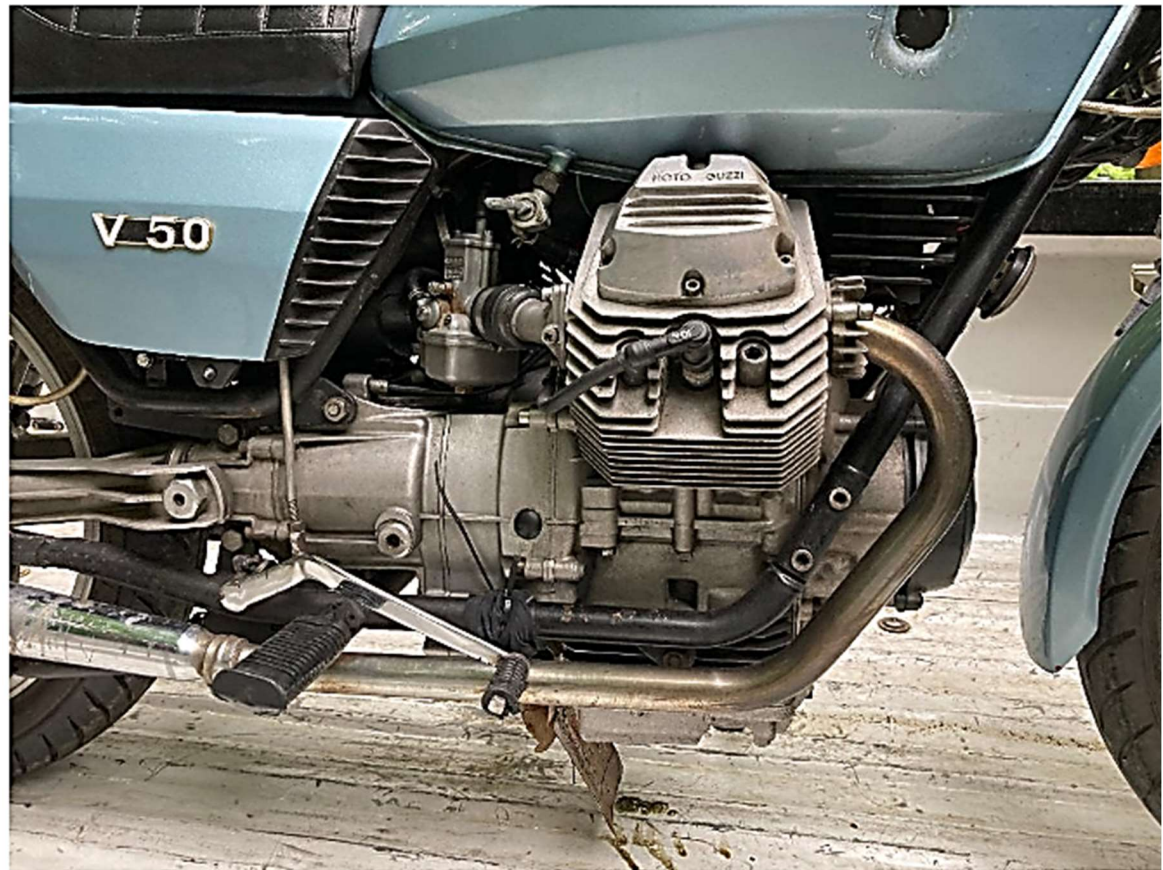
After breakfast we load up our chosen mounts. Eight bikes had been prepared to accommodate the original number of reservations, so everyone gets to choose which bike to start out on. The chosen ones:

1979 Moto Guzzi V50: 31,827 miles..... Tim
 1978 BMW R100/7: 27,735 miles.....my choice
 1974 Moto Morini 500 Strada: 26,551 miles..... Adrian
 1974 Benelli 650 Tornado: 32,882 miles..... Eric
 1970 Triumph T100C: 27,601 miles..... Stephen

The weather is so fine! With the sun shining on our backs, we make our way west and south, crossing quickly from PA into MD. We gas up somewhere near Jarrettsville, then continue on back roads through Mexico, MD and Libertytown, stopping in Poolesville for lunch at Bassetts Restaurant. The food is great, and the quaint Whites Ferry across the Potomac River is just a few miles down the road. Unfortunately, the ferry is still closed due to a land dispute that will hopefully resolve one day soon. Besides being a unique tourist attraction, the ferry cuts miles and minutes from the daily commute of folks who need to cross the border into Virginia for work.

After lunch we negotiate a detour around the defunct cable ferry to cross the river at Point of Rocks before regaining the back roads through Waterford to a gas stop in Paeonian Springs, VA, known centuries ago for its excellent supply of spring water and as a haven for visitors from Washington, DC. Today there are only a few hundred residents left and for us, a nearby gas stop. While refueling the V50 we notice an alarming puddle of oil beneath the engine. Close examination shows that the horrendous leak is from the seam that separates the engine from the transmission. This is the clutch housing and leakage there is likely from the rear main seal, but how bad is it?

We decide to continue on our route, stopping every 20 miles or so to check the oil leak and the oil level. The engine oil level is dropping noticeably, and the leakage has started to contaminate the rear wheel and alarmingly, the tire. We mop it up and I volunteer to ride the scary little beast. At the next stop, I offer to the group that this bike may not make it through the weekend; at least not safely. We had jury rigged an 'oil deflector' from a hamburger box and a piece of safety wire (no, really—see photo) and this helps only a little. We come upon some dirt roads, part of our route, and this is more helpful: the leak serving more to keep dust levels down than to reduce rear tire traction. Still, I ask for ideas: should we rent a truck? Should we try to stash the bike and send 2 riders back to Kennett Square overnight to fetch a back-up bike?



During this brain storming session it occurs to me that I have an old friend, Justin McKay-Smith who is an avid rider living not far from our destination, near Front Royal, VA. I call Justin, explaining our situation and ask if he can help in any way. What would be the absolute best possible response? Justin offers that if we can limp the V50 to his farm (which is basically on our route) that I could park it there, borrow his modern, fully equipped Yamaha, and return the following week with my wife for a social visit and to exchange bikes back.

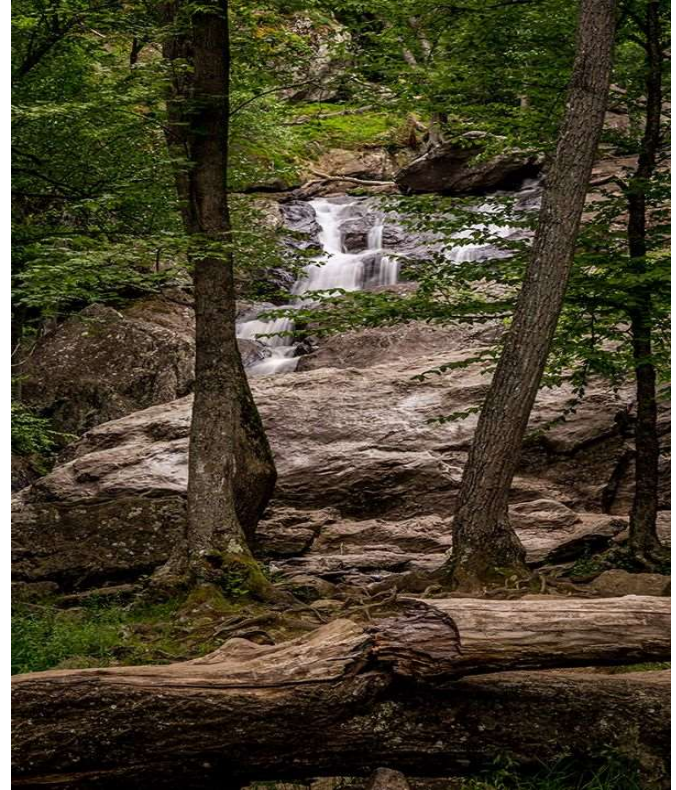
And that is exactly what we decide to do. I make the 'ultimate sacrifice' and agree to ride the plush Yamaha for the duration of our trip while my four paying customers swap through the 4 remaining antiques. The bottom line is that it all works out perfectly. We make it to Front Royal, the 'Gateway to Skyline Drive' and check into our motel, just a little later than planned. After unpacking the bikes and resting for a bit we meet at the Indian restaurant just off the lobby and enjoy a fine meal followed by a relaxing walk through the historic old town. The weather forecast for tomorrow looks promising.

Early Sunday morning we ride about a mile to the entrance road to Skyline Drive. Angling sharply upwards, through many perfect, constant radius curves, we idle through the entrance gate before the toll collectors are even awake. The tourists in slow moving campers are also still between the sheets so we have the glorious weather, intense sunshine, entertaining curvy road, and amazing views all to ourselves. We all ride at our own pace, having agreed beforehand to regroup 35 miles south at the first available exit. We leap frogged one another, pulling off at the scenic overlooks at random and exit as a group, as planned. **This is as good as it gets: there is nothing like endless smooth curves through the cool air at 3500 feet early on a Sunday morning in May. The bikes feel great, and the views are to die for. LIFE IS GOOD!**



Once off the Skyway, we discover that the roads all around are every bit as entertaining. This is the first time in several years that the 'high road' has been perfectly clear. Recent tours to this area were hampered by rain or fog but we totally lucked out this time. The curse of the Skyway has been broken! We head north now, towards home, completing a 70 mile loop that brings us back through the outskirts of Front Royal then through a part of northern Virginia that is remarkable for its stately homes, amazing stone walls, and thoroughbred horses. Onward, through Purcellville, where an Italian lunch in an air conditioned restaurant gives us a break from the heat, then to Brunswick and Wolfville, and on through a pass over the Catoctin Mountains.

Finally, we pass Thurmont then the Bachman Valley, crossing into PA for the final run East down 851, crossing the Susquehanna via the mile long Holtwood Bridge. Quarryville is a nexus of Amish culture, and we dodge horse drawn carts with cute little kids hanging out the back windows down Routes 896 and 10, finally arriving back home after along day's ride, where Lynn has a delicious dinner waiting.



Cunningham Falls, Catoctin State Park



After dinner, we enjoy the company of like-minded individuals for a while before everyone heads back home. Later that week, Lynn and I commandeer a company pick-up truck and load up Justin's Yamaha for its return to Front Royal. We 'pay' Justin with 2 bottle of his favorite home-made Pennsylvania whiskey and spend the night with him and his wife Meredith. I cannot thank Justin enough for his trust and incredible generosity, and I should add that this is not the first time he has baled me out of a tough situation. The Moto Guzzi V50 is carted back home and parked in the back of the garage, awaiting repairs to be made over the winter. Considering its age, I must forgive it for this bout of incontinence.