

WHY WE RIDE (REALLY!)

Most of the columns that I write in May are done from a hotel where the latest National Coalition of Motorcyclists (NCOM) is being held. In 2006 the convention was in Louisville. There were over 1000 bikers in attendance representing hundreds of patchholder clubs, ABATEs and SMROs from all over the country.

Usually this column would be concerned about issues relating to motorcycle rights like those that were being discussed in Louisville: The Patriot Act, rights of privacy, motorcycle discrimination, mandatory helmet laws and other such issues. But I want to talk about my trip, because it relates to what motorcycling is all about.

When I found out that the convention would be in Louisville, I made arrangements to ride my '93 FLH Classic down here. As the time to ride grew close I started looking at the weather forecasts and they were less than encouraging. By this time I had committed to loaning my car to my paralegal so she could get there a couple of days before me and attend some meetings. So I was stuck riding or catching a fast plane ride. I finally decided to ride. The forecasts by this time were dire. But my friend Magoo from the Road Agents, who was riding down with two of his brothers, checked with AAA and decided that if we took I-94 from Detroit to I-69 in the middle of the state, then south all the way to Louisville, we might get behind the rain. It didn't work!

Within 10 miles after we hit the Indiana line and had gassed up, we caught up to the rain. For the next 160 miles it poured. It poured so bad that by the time we got just south of Indianapolis we finally had to stop for the night. I kept telling myself that I was getting a little old for this. But then my three traveling companions were even more bedraggled and tired than me and they were all younger than me!

But one hour into the rain I started to relax a little. My senses started to pick up things that they hadn't since the past autumn. I started to see slight nuances in the colors of the low hanging clouds, differentiating between the light grays, the darker grays, the near whites and the darker clouds. I could smell the rain that was coming and see the mist off the pavement. At that point, and the next morning while we were continuing to Louisville, I wished that I was a painter and could put all the different layers of the scene enveloping me on a canvas and preserve it forever. The point of the matter is that I would never have had this kind of any experience on anything other than a motorcycle in this day and age. It was profound in a literal sense. In spite of my discomfort as the water seeped into and around my old rainsuit and into my aging bones, I actually felt uplifted and I became part of everything around me.

And folks, that, to me, is what motorcycling is all about and what makes it so utterly different than riding in those shiny steel cages we call cars and trucks. It is why I was in Louisville rallying for biker rights. It is why I am in the courtroom for the same reason. With all the rain, snow, mist, and beautiful days that intermix an upper middle west riding experience, motorcycling here makes you know what living, not merely existing, really is.