

Sicilian Silliness

Our motorcycle club tries to take one international trip per year. Three years ago Croatia. Last year Greece. This year Sicily. It's a 12-day affair with upscale hotels and fine dining. The problem is, our group average age is approaching 70...and that's with us leaving our oldest members at home. That means these trips get sillier and sillier. Silly can be a good thing right until it gets too silly. Too silly is in the eye of the beholder and the older you get, the less good your eyesight, especially for the too silly line.

As with all endeavors in life, the key elements are the vision, the product and the people. Vision is pretty easy. In this case it's seeing the beauty of Sicily with all five senses. The product is the motorcycle and the riding thereof. Selection and execution are the key. Selection is easy, but execution can vary. And then it's all about the silly people, stupid. Or maybe I should say it's about the stupid people, silly. Either way, here is my version of our brand of Sicilian Silliness.

Bob's GPS

Bob is a gadget guy. I met Bob on a motorcycle trip twenty-three years ago. He had something he called a GPS, which looked like a Walkie-talkie with a small screen.

"Rich, it works from satellite triangulation. It's fantastic. You just put in the ordinal longitude and latitude coordinates where you're heading and it points you in the right direction and tracks you as you get closer." Bob was an ex-Navy man who thought any improvement on the sextant was a great idea.

"But Bob, we don't travel through the void to a pinpoint destination in life. Maybe if it had a map to give it some context it would be helpful. You know, mountains, rivers, maybe even a road or two. Then it might be useful. Now it's just another piece of paraphernalia to throw in your top box and have it rattle around when you make a turn." This retort was meant 30% for Bob and 70% for the rest of the motorcycle group gathered around Bob and his mysterious new GPS gadget. My response drew the chuckles I had hoped for. Mission accomplished. I was funny and Bob, despite his Harvard MBA, was decidedly less impressive.

My effort was entirely eclipsed by Bob putting his GPS in his top box as predicted and taking out his rain suit. On motorcycle trips in Vermont, rain suits are essential paraphernalia, unlike this GPS thing. Watching Bob rush to put on his rain suit while we all waited, helmets on and motors running was the perfect Bob moment. In all honesty, hopping on one foot while trying to get a rubberized overgarment over a pair of clunky boots is a sight-gag that would have Charlie Chaplin in stitches. We had all been there by the side of the road, but this was Bob's post-GPS moment in the sunshine, as temporary as it may have been.

Now flash forward to 2018. Bob and I are on a motorcycle trip to Sicily. Bob is now 83 years old, but still riding and still quite nimble, especially for his age. When Bob had sent an email to the riding group that he was worried about making the GPS equipment work on the rental bikes, I had quipped back that since we were circumnavigating the island in a counter-clockwise manner, "All you have to do, Bob, is remember to keep the water on your right-hand side." The group snickered (I could hear it through the email). Bob, harrumphed.

On the first day out of Palermo, heading counter-clockwise to Trapani, we stopped at the temple of Segesta. It was predicted to start raining cats and dogs. I hadn't bothered to pack a rain suit so I needed to boogie to the hotel or risk getting drenched. I had my trusty GPS, now modernized with full map and programmed destination points like the hotel. I waved at Bob as I left the parking lot, smiling at his familiar rain-suit hopping in progress.

After 20 minutes into what should have been a 15 minute ride, I realized that I had inadvertently toggled on a "handy" feature on my GPS, the choice to avoid highways. This meant I was enjoying the long way to the hotel as the sky opened and the pouring rain descended on me, trickling down my neck and into my boots.

As I squished my way into the hotel lobby, there sat Bob, as warm and dry as could be. He ignored my lateness and soggianness, and I avoided both the GPS and rain suit topics. What he wanted to discuss was the latest in Bluetooth helmet ear-phone technology. I decided to pay attention for a change.

A Quick and Respectful Stop in Corleone

So, Ann Sardini hails from Sicilian roots. Ann is a financial wizardess, who has been the CFO of many important companies including Weight Watchers (a company whose inherent concept to which I am generally either opposed or ambivalent, despite desperately needing its services). Her husband is a likable but decidedly off-beat Okie who art-directs major blockbuster films like *John Wick 2*. His name is Chris, but in honor of our planned visit to Corleone, the mythical yet all too real seat of the Sicilian Mafia, I like to call him Fredo. This has nothing to do with his character, but everything to do with the fact that he would appreciate the movie reference from *The Godfather* and yet get rankled by the less than flattering likeness it paints. I like to rankle Fredo, he is rankler-in-chief of our motorcycle group. I suspect Senora Sardini of Sicily secretly likes my rankling, simply for the sport of it.

We launch forth from the Hotel in Trapani and wend our way through the small towns of middle Sicily. Middle Sicily is very Tolkienesque. I expect to see a Hobbit around every corner. "Oh, there's one!" I think inside my helmet, but no, it's just an old man with osteoporosis on his way to the buffalo mozzarella store. We go on one narrow road after another up hill and dale (*la collina e dale*, in Italian). Then, suddenly, we encounter a detour sign that sends us in the instinctively wrong direction, but assures us that it is the road to Corleone. More *collina e dale* and we come upon yet another detour sign that tells us to go in a totally different direction to get to Corleone. This goes on and on until it becomes obvious that in this part of Sicily, all roads do not lead to Rome, but indeed, to Corleone.

Did I mention that Fredo has chosen to ride a Ducati for this *giro tortuoso* of Sicily? The BMW motorcycles are more reliable and comfortable, but Fredo must have his Ducati. He probably would have preferred a more esoteric bike like an MV Augusta or a Moto Guzzi, but the Ducati will suffice to let the world at large know that Oklahoma is pretty darned snazzy when it wants to be. Anyway, Fredo has Senora Sardini on the back in what is called the pillion position. Look up the word pillion in your #MeToo dictionary and then scratch your head and ponder the intricacies of the Fredo/Sardini juxtapositioning. Add in the Ducati element and it is a truly mind-blowing equation.

Sooner or later we arrive at the foot of the otherwise nondescript Corleone. Ten motorcycles and a Turkish chase van pull over on the side of one of the busy roads leading to Corleone. It is not a place to stop, but must be a very popular place to stop nonetheless on account of the

obvious photo opp. The idea is to memorialize our presence in the heart of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra and make the Mafia our *cosa nostra* for the day. We all gather under the town sign, adorned as it was with touristic stickers of all sorts, except someone is missing. Senora Sardini does not appreciate the gesture. She is Siciliano. She and hers are more than the mob. The Mob is a bad thing. Sicily is a good thing, *un cosa buona*, not just La Cosa Nostra. Fredo implores her to join, to reconsider, to find the fun in the photo rather than the insult in the mockery. No dice.

We repent by going straight away to the DICMA Museum (Centro Internazionale di Documentazione sulla Mafia e del Movimento Antimafia). For those not familiar with the Italian language, the operative word is Antimafia, a museum in the heart of Sicilian Mafia control, dedicated to defeating the notion that the Mafia had any control of Sicily. I'm not certain, but I suspect I know who the biggest contributor to the museum may be, and the name starts with M and ends with afia. I am beginning to understand the Fredo/Sardini/Ducati thing better and better.

After a delightful lunch in a local Trattoria off the square, which Senora Sardini proudly points out is entirely staffed by men and not women, we "take the cannoli and leave the gun" and hightail it out of town, glancing in our mirrors for any untoward Carabinieri looking for trouble and unsuspecting Americanos. We are headed for Agrigento, where the dominant culture is a blend of conquering Carthaginians, Arabs, Turks and Greeks, which makes this a much more passive and pliable place than Corleone. Fredo, I suspect at the direction of La Senora, cuts off Marco Dilly for the lead in our conga-line of bikes. It seems only fair that a Ducati should lead the charge out of Corleone and all that it represents.

Inspector Montalbano to the Rescue

Montalbano ever so slowly closed his book and with his towel around his neck, rose from the comfortable chair he had brought with him from Agrigento to here in Marinella. The house was mostly furnished with pleasant and ordinary furniture that Montalbano preferred to the garish and modern "genie bottle" furnishings that were all the rage these days in Ragusa. But his reading chair was special to him. It was comfortable while not being slouchy. It was important to maintain good posture at all times, especially when one was stationary for long periods. Montalbano

loved to read and usually read mystery stories, but that had changed recently. He was now compelled to read every book he could find about the controversy in the United States over the American Presidency. Montalbano was a solver of conundrums. Looking out to sea helped him think. Walking the pebbled beach was better than meditation. This Trump business was quite a mystery. But it was time for Montalbano you go to the police station to solve more local mysteries.

Montalbano's current case load was mundane enough to pass most of it to Detective Fazio, but one case troubled him. Rosalina was now a mature and successful woman in her fifties and yet she had recently decided to come forward to report an incident that occurred thirty-six years ago when she was sixteen and an innocent young girl attending the local *liceo*. Normally this would have passed its statute of limitations, but in Sicily there were no limitations on crimes of passion. This incident was clearly one of passion and it involved a renowned magistrate who had attended a prominent local *liceo* available only for young men and only to pursue judicial studies. The magistrate was considered a serious man, but there was evidence that in his youth he was perhaps a bit wild and certainly fond of the fruit of the vine. He is an important man now who is rumored to know President Putin of Russia.

Rosalina filed a declaration that the magistrate on one occasion those thirty-six years ago, had physically abused her, but she had narrowly escaped due to his inebriated state. Montalbano found Rosalina's sincerity noteworthy. His interview with the magistrate was less friendly and filled with recriminations against this *putana* that was accusing him. The magistrate was none too pleased with Montalbano either and suggested that a newly promoted Inspector should know better than to pursue frivolous claims like this. Montalbano felt the magistrate did protest too much.

That afternoon, after rereading the depositions from all witnesses, he heard on CNN International that a Judge Kavanaugh in the U.S. was suffering the same fate as the magistrate. The similarity struck him profoundly and his natural interest in the foibles of President Trump made him pay closer-than-normal attention to the details of the Kavanaugh case. He had long ago wondered about how such a crass and vulgar man like Trump could hold such an exalted position. The President's own history of sexual harassment accusations and his recorded and unbecoming words about the treatment of women were astonishing to a proper man of

the law like Montalbano. When he combined this profile with what he had read about Trump's interactions with Russia, he began to understand better.

Lately, every summer, Russian tourists were flocking to Marinella. And every summer there was a growing caseload of assault claims by Russian and local women against Russian men. The pattern was too familiar to ignore. He says yes and she says no and he says be quiet and lay down and she says no and he hits her or worse. The case goes to the magistrate who says that he can do nothing with he says she says and dismisses the case.

Now it is the magistrate who says and Kavanaugh who says and Trump who says. But CNN says Trump says only what Putin says and Putin looks a lot like those summertime Russians to Montalbano. It's all too confusing to Montalbano so he goes home to sit in his chair and stare at the waves.

But just then, a group of motorcyclists ride up to the piazza next to his house and the noise disrupts his contemplation. He looks over and sees a man in Harley Davidson clothes disrobing. He stands with his bare chest and his best Black Sea dacha-on-the-beach tan with his hands on hips. It is Vladimir Putin. Montalbano has seen the pictures of the Russian dictator and he is certain of this. Putin is approached by a lovely woman, who looks vaguely like Montalbano's own love Livia, but with matching Harley Davidson clothing. Montalbano is ready to spring to her rescue should Vladimir move to harm her. Instead, she smiles at him and tells him to stop being silly and to put on his shirt. He does and smiles back at her. He looks now less like Vladimir the Destroyer and more like just a man, taking his wife to lunch on the beach.

Montalbano thinks that this is how women should be treated and that the Vlad that lurks in the hearts of men should never be let loose. He thinks of Judge Kavanaugh. He thinks of Donald Trump. He thinks of the magistrate and lovely Rosalina. Montalbano decides there and then to file charges against the magistrate, and Putin be damned.

Temple to Temple with Barb & Icarus

"Barbara...Barbara...?" Frank tried to whisper. It was dark in the room at the Villa Athena and Frank had no idea where he had put his running shoes.

Barbara rolled over in bed and opened one eye, sort of. “What is it Frank?” She said, remembering, yet again, to be patient with her absent-minded husband of almost forty years. She then realized what Frank likely needed, as her sleep turned into full wakefulness, “Remember, we said your shoes are by the door so you wouldn’t forget them?”

“ Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I remember. Go back to sleep, I’m just going out for a quick run. Love you.” And Frank picked up his shoes and stepped out of the room into the bright light of the hotel’s hallway, not thinking at that moment about where he would put them on, but just wanting to stop annoying the love of his life. The heavy door slammed shut behind him with a thud.

Barbara collapsed back into bed trying not to wonder why Frank would think she had no clue where he was headed after forty years of him getting up to run each and every morning and waking her up to tell her that ... each and every morning.

Frank, meanwhile, wandered out to the lobby and out the front door into the cool and damp Sicilian morning. He didn’t really know or care what town he was in or where he should run. He never did. He just took off to the right and followed his nose to a terra-cotta path through the olive trees. Doing so he ran past the motorcycles scattered through the parking area and smiled to himself when he saw the red Ducati, remembering that he had lived the motorcyclists’ dream. Twenty years ago, Frank had led the attempted rebirth of Indian Motorcycles and had actually negotiated to buy the Ducati brand to launch a globalization initiative. What a ride!

Frank ran up the hill towards the Temple of Concordia and around the ruins that surrounded it. The most notable thing on that scattered hillside was a massive green-oxidized statue lying prone. It was a naked man with wings and had been partially shattered as most old Greek statues usually are. It was missing some wing and its running feet, but was otherwise intact. Frank didn’t stop at the archeological sign explaining the statue. He was a runner, not a reader of signs. Had he bothered, he would have seen that this was Icarus, son of Daedalus, and owner of the epitaph of the dangers of flying too high and too close to the sun with wings of wax. Instead, Frank stumbled back down the hill towards the hotel and a fresh day of riding motorcycles around hairpin turns and next to seaside cliffs.

“Barbara...Barbara...?” It was the next morning and this time Frank had his shoes, but couldn’t find his socks.

“Yes, Frank?” Barbara groaned through clenched teeth. It’s hard to sound sweet through clenched teeth when one has a possibly cracked rib and serious back muscle spasms.

“I’m sorry to wake you, sweetie,... but I’m going out for a run ... and just wanted to know ... how you’re doing this morning?” Frank somehow sensed that socks were not a topic to bring up. Yesterday he had accidentally run into Barbara’s motorcycle on one of the roundabouts and had knocked her down. She had been momentarily stunned, but had seemed well enough to ride, so he had dusted her off and sent her on her way, this time keeping a slightly wider berth.

Barbara said, “It hurts, Frank, but I’ll be fine, just go and run and be careful, we’re in a Hill Town and the cobblestones are probably wet...”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, you just get some rest....” Frank stepped out of the grotto-like room into the grotto-like hallway. The door slammed shut behind him and he headed towards the lobby with his shoes in hand. The tile was cold on his bare feet.

As Barbara struggled to get out of bed, pausing to breathe deeply to make sure there were no sharp pains from her rib cage, Frank put his shoes on with no socks.

Frank ran through the town of Ragusa wondering where the bikes were. He ran to a wall that looked across a deep chasm to a lovely temple on the opposing hill. He wondered if there was a big green prone statue next to that temple, but it was too far to run to. He wished he had wings and could just fly over for a quick look, but he headed back towards the hotel instead. Frank loved these trips and loved life. He felt a blister developing on his right heel due to his lack of socks and reminded himself to ask Barbara to put a band-aid on it for him so he could put on his motorcycle boots and head off for another great day of riding to Siracusa by the sea. Maybe today he should ride ahead of her.

Funiculi, Funicula, Funicularum

Siracusa, Sicily is the seaside town with a 2,700 year history as an influential city-state in the center of the Mediterranean world. Its deepest impact may have been as the home of Archimedes, who gave us much of our 10th grade geometry, including the ever-popular derivation of pi and the early roots of the dreaded calculus. We stayed right at the center of the harbor in what was the old post office and is now the Grand Ortea

Palace Hotel. The shopping and the sights that have delighted Greeks, Romans, Corinthians and Carthaginians, made us hesitant to leave.

The day's mission was to climb Mount Etna, Europe's largest active volcano with as many modes of transport as possible. We drove north towards Catania, but veered to the West at Belpasso and drove up into the lava fields toward Rifugio Sapienza on the appropriately named Via Etna.

I should stop here to explain who we are and how we ride. We are a group of thirteen riders (six couples and one stag) with two wrangler tour guides front and back and a chase van for luggage and emergencies. If you need a visual image, imagine a kindergarten class trip with a rope around each kid and a teacher at either end. Now eliminate the rope. That's who we are. Average age 68.5 ranging from 60 to 82, average riding experience 38.4 years ranging from 25 to 52, average IQ well above the norm though south of Einstein (though we do have one of those in the crew usually, but he is back in Boca Siesta making gymp keychains or such), and average Net Worth in the top 0.1%. One might easily make the mistake of assuming that we are a mature and well-behaved group with extensive and uniform riding skills. Not so.

Perhaps motorcycles bring out the juvenile delinquent or the alpha male and female juices just run thick in this crowd. Or perhaps we were all just absent on comportment day in kindergarten. There is only one truly adult couple in this can of mixed nuts. One couple who would qualify to give Pre-Cana classes for six consecutive weeks to the hormonally-challenged youth of America. That is the St John's, and what a perfect name it is. It is not only indicative of their saintly status, but it speaks to the Everyman nature of their personae.

They are the salt of New England's earth and they pretty much do everything by the book. Robert (Rob or Robb, but decidedly NOT Bob) dutifully checks his tire pressure each morning and wears a riding jacket that has seen him through twenty five years, 2.42 children, and three dogs named Rusty, and still has plenty of useful life and then even more with a touch of duct tape. Mary is quite a different story altogether. She decided at an early age that she preferred the Martha's Vineyard appellation of...Wait for it...Wait for it...Urch. No Mopsy, Boopsy or Mary-Mary-Bo-Berry for her.

Where Robert was Rob, Mary chose to be Urch. Rob is easy to confuse with Bob, unless you are around Robert and you value your life. But once you go Urch you never go back to Mary.

Urch is so... urchful and serious. And Urch plays it as it lays. You order a cab, she asks if you've ordered a cab. You pay a tab, she would like to add it to her collection of invoices she has known. Urch likes to check on everything, just to be sure, and Rob is standing there dutifully holding the door for her, you and whomever else happens by. They are a force to reckoned with in our motorcycle group.

Why do I bring this up, you ask? I thought it obvious, but let me explain. Those kindergarteners in line, what do you suppose they enjoy doing over all else? Right. They af4ll want to cut line. Since being close to either teacher on either end obviates any ordinal or ranking conviction. But cutting off or jumping in front of someone is pure joy. This is a fine game which some play with glee, some play with feigned and earnest composure, and some snicker about with evil intent. But not Rob and Urch. Have you ever tried to play a game when two people at the table won't even look at their cards? They stifle the entire Bprogram by driving up to Rifugio in the middle of the pack and park in no offensive or bike-blocking manner.

That means the game must go into overtime on the gondola/funicular that seats 6. Surely we can leave one guy hanging with no musical chair seat. But Rob politely spreads us out over three gondolas with no issue.

It's now left to the all-terrain vehicle taking us up through the lava fields. They seat.....20. Damn. Maybe we can see who can run up to the crater first, but did I mention our average age is 68.5? We are at 2,900 meters or 9,514 feet. Not gonna happen. We'll sit this one out.

On the way down the funicular (once again organized into three sociologically correct cohorts by Rob and Urch), we realize that we have been urched up the Volcano and robbed of our playfulness, so instead we just look out at the pumiced landscape, barren of all life, and think that at very least we can look down on all those poor, sad Bobs.

The Art of Blindly Seeking Taormina with Rich & Kim

Once Mt. Etna had been conquered, and the fun of jockeying for riding position had been dashed, I instructed Kim to mount up so we could

ride on ahead to the Hotel Ashbee in Taormina on our own. I did not tell Kim we were leaving everyone behind because she would have protested, being altogether more civil and gregarious than me. But once on the back of the motorcycle with knees up, feet on the pegs, torso jammed in between the Kevlar of my jacket back pad and the plastic of the after-market piece-of-shit top box on the rental bike, and helmet face-guard firmly over her mouth, there was little she could say.

The real reason for leaving early was that the switchback turns on the way down looked to be grand riding pleasure that was easier to enjoy solo and without a conga-line of bikes tentatively contemplating every bus and truck to be passed. Only once did I momentarily regret my speed on an unexpectedly muddied and sandy turn where I had to widen my turn radius and luckily did so when no oncoming traffic was present.

When we got into Taormina, the sun, the water stretching out below and the hillside town surrounding the wagging road leading up into town was a sheer delight for the closet Italiano in me. The Hotel Ashbee entrance was another matter. It was on a steep cobbled street that was well-trafficked, and worst of all, had a big iron gate, that while lovely and exclusive looking, did little to help a pillioned motorcyclist with a slippery clutch have the confidence to stop and attempt to push a buzzer to gain access. So I went past and went in the second entrance only to find that it was, indeed, the walkway. At least it gave Kim the opportunity to dismount and the staff of the hotel to open the gates of the castle for us.

We would be staying in Taormina for two nights and thus had a free, non-riding day to enjoy this picturesque and wonderful Sicilian “Portofino” or perhaps “Positano”. Our room was a tranquil oasis with everything we needed except a meaningful shower soap dish (but, hey, you gotta love Italy nonetheless).

That evening was planned as our Pizza-making extravaganza, approached with appropriate trepidation by our tour leaders Skip and Kaz. They had checked with me before booking this “extra”, I suspect in part because I’m sort of the *de facto* group organizer and in part I probably seem the least likely to want to do such a thing. We kneaded and blended, formed little cute pennies on sticks and hammered out some pizza dough and then went in for the kill with the sauce, cheese and accoutrements. The group voted mine the best as I recall, but then my recall may be a tad self-serving.

The biggest decision of the trip was now upon us, what to do on our day off. After breakfast on the delightful roof terrace overlooking the coastline in one direction and the quaint Hill town and fortifications in the other, Kim and I reverted to form.

Kim spent the entire day shopping with the girls. She had barely had any time to shop prior to that, only perhaps three hours on Monday, four hours on Tuesday, a half hour in Corleone, three hours in Ragusa, perhaps six hours in Sircusa and a half hour at the Mt. Etna gift shop (sort of stop-gap fix until we could get to Taormina). So you see, spending from breakfast until dinner shopping was totally justified. Her posse consisted of Senora Sardini, Jeanne/Livia, and Urch. Apparently Barbara and Edwina are non-shoppers, which is to say, since they both manage the books for their husbands, they get their fun from double-entry accounting.

I do not shop. I buy once in a while, but I do so with minimal effort. In fact, minimal effort is sort of my overall personal theme. If there is a ruin up a hill and a few rocks at my level, I am fine contemplating the minimal effort rocks. I'll usually make up a good story about why the rocks are more interesting than the ruin. If there is a restaurant up another hill or around the bend, I make up a convincing rationalization about why we should eat at the closer place. Some might call this being lazy, but trust me, it takes a great deal of effort to rationalize some of my choices. For this day in Taormina, I had stories to write, big ideas to develop, future low-effort trips to plan, so I chose to stay at the hotel except for a quick trip to "the arch" to meet Kim and the shoppers for lunch. I arrived early enough to buy a watch. When told I only needed to fill out the guarantee forms I said no, I didn't want a guarantee. Make no mistake, I had the time to do it but I truly did not want the guarantee. I have not returned anything since 1973 and don't intend to start now.

So Kim and I each enjoyed our respective perfect days in Taormina. She walked 15,000 steps and successfully shopped herself silly. I successfully lounged and fiddled with my iPad all day and walked perhaps 150 steps. She was happy, I was happy, and the world is a safer place for our both being that much happier on our vacation. Funny thing, she fell asleep at 10pm and I was up all night wondering how many hills I might have to climb the next day.

The Hansen's Stuff Themselves in Cefalu

Roger and Edwina Hansen look like a J.P. Morgan Wealth Management advertisement. I'm not talking about when they dress up, I'm talking every day and every minute of every day. When they arrived in Sicily several weeks ago, Roger's big bag had been lost by the airline. If that had happened to me, I might have come to breakfast the next morning looking like an unmade bed. But Roger came down in neatly creased khaki shorts, stylish sandals, crisp polo shirt and not a hair out of place. He looked ready to be in the VIP Gallery at the Masters Golf Tournament. Edwina sports a stylishly short and appropriately spiky hairdo that I think I've seen in the Vidal Sassoon catalogue. Since I don't really understand women's sizes, I will guess that she wears a -2 size. Both Edwina and Roger always have a uniform tan and a bright white smile that makes me wonder how often they use those infrared sonic teeth whitening gadgets. No phony Trump-like orange tans on them, the Hansen's seem to come by their color through Ralph Lauren rugged outdoorsy activities.

Now that we have a mental image of Roger and Edwina, let's discuss their broader lives. They live in Florida (at least 181 days, Roger swears) and southern New Jersey. They own many businesses including a top-100 golf course of considerable renown and a toll bridge. I think I've known people who own golf courses, but I can honestly say I've never known anyone else who owns a bridge. Roger tells me it's a great business, mostly, I suspect, because he doesn't have to do much except cash the checks. They have an active life that includes Roger riding motorcycles to all the places the rest of us only read about like The Silk Road, Bhutan, The Sahara Desert and Deepest Darkest Africa. Edwina fills the void by throwing elaborate charity galas that come off flawlessly no doubt.

When we arrive in Cefalu on the northern coast of Sicily we have had a wonderful day of curved mountain roads and snaking seaside roads. Roger had to stop to pee over the guard rails a few times, but that's OK. I can't get away with it, but Roger can. We dined at a seaside trattoria where Roger and Edwina chowed down like horses. Then it was off to the hotel and dinner in Cefalu. Again, Roger and Edwina ate every bite on their plates....real clean-plate club members.

Here's the thing. Roger and Edwina have 0% body fat. They are trim and lean as could be. I notice that Roger always wears nice colorful belts that you can actually see. No one has seen my belt in a long time.

He actually eats more than I do at breakfast and is always saying, “Most important meal of the day!” When Edwina mounts the back of Roger’s motorcycle, she looks like Annie Oakley jumping on a horse. She eats like all the rest of us do, no more, but certainly no less. How does this happen? How is this fair? I want an explanation. I demand answers!

Finally, Senora Sardini, one of us regular folks that has to think carefully before allowing anyone to photograph her at any moment and from any particular angle, had the answer. She explained her friend’s theory of matter. Wikipedia reminds us that “the First Law of Thermodynamics states that neither **matter** nor energy can be **created or destroyed**. The amount of energy in the universe is constant – energy can be changed, moved, controlled, stored, or dissipated. However, this energy **cannot be created** from nothing or reduced to nothing.” Voila!

Apparently the Hansen’s are staying so slim because the rest of us have moved, controlled, stored and dissipated all that matter that should be hanging over Roger’s belt. We have Roger and Edwina’s rightful allocation of excess weight. I somehow feel better understanding this. As much as I would love to shed some weight, if it keeps Roger and Edwina slim and trim, I’m OK staying where I am. I just hope they appreciate it.

Two Turks and a Texan Walk into a Bar in Palermo

The Texan says, “We have another AFMC tour planned for Turkey for next year.”

Turk #1, the one in the Ducati jacket says, “Well, let’s discuss this for a moment. We have the Iran trip and those guys are a lot younger, more fit, less fussy about their accommodations, never complain, and they know how to ride. Maybe we can work something out, but let’s see.”

Turk #2, the quiet respectful one who pretends not to speak English for self-preservation says, “What the fuck! Are you guys kidding? Heavy bags, bitch, bitch, bitch, and the big one just can’t stop yakking about anything and everything. You gotta be nuts to think I want to subject myself to that bullshit all over again for twelve more days. Maybe you can price the tour up to the point of negative elasticity and force them out of play. 50% profit margin is just not worth it. We only made \$60,000 on this year’s ride and that measly tip they gave us was tighter than a frog’s ass. I vote no, and since I own 80% of this operation, what I say goes. Tell them to call Burt Richmond.”

Problem solved, the three rehash their notes about the past two weeks among themselves.

- Two days in Palermo trying to prepare the bikes for the punishment to be inflicted by the AFMC riders. Buy extra duct tape and first aid kit. Stay as far from the Villa Igea as we can and try not to let the manager catch us once the Flyers start with the complaints.
- Drive to Trapani with stops in Monreal to see the Duomo and then to Sagesta to see the temple. That should wear them out. If we're lucky it will piss rain and dampen their enthusiasm for extra riding. Remind the hotel that they owe us money for delivering 13 fish that might buy their shitty wine.
- Do the bullshit Corleone stop and see if that pseudo Mafia museum racket is still going. Be sure to get half the gate while Ayhan sets up the trattoria play with the local boys.
- Head to Villa Athena and tell them to make the ticket gate to the temple look more convincing this time since we're up to €10 per ticket now. Don't let them see that it's open access from anywhere else but the hotel. Set up the gym to look like a restaurant and get the caterer to put on lots of balsamic paste since it will disguise anything.
- The New Yorker in Black is yakking about Montalbano again, so take them down to that house in Punta Secca that looks like the TV set and make them think they are seeing the real deal. Her husband is a set production guy so make it convincing.
- Get to Ragusa and pile the bikes in that garbage bin area. That should occupy them long enough and tire them out so the grotto hotel looks better to them.
- Go to Modica chocolate factory. Same split on sales as with the winery.
- Take them to the post office in Siracusa and explain that it doesn't show as a hotel on the maps because it's so new. Keep the mail bins hidden and get the women out shopping. Remember to double-back on all stores for our cut. We've got three serious shoppers so work it hard, boys.
- Fucking Mt. Etna again. Just bear with it. Last time this month. Gut it out.

- Get to Hotel Ashbee early enough to get the minimum wage issue settled with the pizzeria. Thirteen times two hours of kitchen help at \$15/hour starts to add up. Second night hang around cleaning the bikes and look hungry. Work the free dinner invite scam.
- Tuesday is rest day. Try to repair broken bikes as well as possible.
- Head to Cefalu and stop at cousin Melih's cantina on the beach. Skip to go ahead to hotel to be sure our crowd gets the rooms with the really small toilets. Do the restaurant switcheroo with the closed place so that they'll appreciate the pizzeria for dinner.
- Drive it home to the Igiea but remember no Autostrada. Tolls cost money. Wear your old jeans....it's tip day.

And so ends another AFMC/Motodiscovery/Kazoom adventure.