

May 23, 2015

The Agony & The Ecstasy: The 20th Annual AFMC CanyonRun



Posit: The Flyers are aging. Average member age of this ride - 65 (82-49). The Flyers are still riding the "Big Canyons" like they always have at average speeds of 90+ mph. There ain't no River Running Through It, but I ask, "Why do those who most need our help, never take it?"

High Mileage, Low Expectations.

- Chairman Walt Lynd



ORANGE
is the
new **BLACK**

Kirby have retired with multiple Purple Hearts. Some go to Italy instead of riding and then graciously accept positions of leadership anyway.... Some want to go to Waco to free our brethren, some to join the militia to rid Waco of biker gangs and some can't remember why they want to go to Waco. An alarmingly growing number are reverting to three-wheelers.

The Ride

The 2015 May CanyonRun is over. This was the 20th CanyonRun since the Charter Ride in May, 1996 with Rich Marin, Frank O'Connell, Andy Forrester, Arthur Einstein, Larry Klane and Deb Wells. All but Andy (recovering from his minor stroke at the end of the Croatia Ride) and Larry Klane (recovering from his second family obligations) were along for this ride, though Deb was only able to join for a fun night at the Lodge at Red River Ranch since she is caring for her own aging mother.

The ecstasy of 20 excellent years of riding with AFMC was epitomized by this 20th year ride. We saw many of our longtime friends, we made a few new friends, we saw and marveled at the familiar and beloved natural wonders of Nevada, Utah, Colorado and Arizona and we rode a few new roads and saw some different sights if not different perspectives. Watching new members marvel at our monuments and enjoy the camaraderie of the group for the first time is half the fun. We had good mild weather and

that struck me the most was his fascination and embracing of our "High Mileage, Low Expectations" motto. We, who attended the famous organizational meeting at Robinson Farm in October, 1996, where the Chairman's beer-assisted ruminations were captured as the now-famous "Quotations from the Chairman", tend to take this pithy and meaningful description of our founding organizational tactic for granted. It is only more meaningful today as we and the group age and deserves further pondering.

As Donna Wellhausen, on her first ride with AFMC, listened to our vote to pardon and promote Kevin Ward, she was mortified that we would do such a thing for someone not even in attendance. Kim was equally appalled given all her efforts for this ride. Rookie mistake. They didn't understand that even with no mileage, our low expectations about Kevin is what keeps us going. We could think of nothing more upsetting to him than to be taken off permanent probation and promoted in an official capacity. We expect the worst of our membership and they never fail to disappoint. Kevin has embraced the new role as Sergeant-at-Arms, so before he tries to lift the embargo on Cuba or the sanctions on Iran, we plan to impeach him just to put him back in his rightful place where our expectations and his mileage intersect.

Mileage Matters

Mileage is naturally an appropriate measure of performance for an MC. However, AFMC has never really specialized in extreme iron-butt mileage. We tend towards a very comfortable 250-350 miles per day (we mathematically average 47mph unless on forced march, when we average 53 mph). This is consistent with our massage, hot tub and early cocktail hour philosophy of motorcycle travel. Naturally, several members have been famous for very high mileage in the past; Gator Bob is always going for 700-900 per day coming or going, Frank has had an occasional deal-induced long ride, Seattle Bob was always reaching back and forth to....Seattle, and Governor Bruce Rauner has been known to take stern fiscal matters in hand and ride from the Windy City rather than ship and fly.

But mileage is not about asphalt, mileage is about stamina. It's about going the distance. It's about riding as long as the good Lord let's you ride, then moving from two to three wheels if necessary, but keeping the wind in your hair and the bugs in your teeth....and an occasional bee in the helmet. This ride we had the Larsens in a three-wheel Polaris Slingshot (I could only get one butt cheek in the thing) and Seattle Bob II on his Tilting Harley. That's a three-wheel increase of 128% from last year, when the Morgan made its debut and untimely exit at the South Rim. And here's the most disturbing news, it wasn't as embarrassing as we thought to be seen riding with the trike crowd.

desk at the 2-bar (cellular reception) Navajo Tribal Center between Mesa Verde and Four Corners. They said it was not the biggest deal done on their reservation.

Expectations are for Wimps

When we began 20 years ago, a Best Western in Capital Reefs and a plastic chair by the pool and garbage dump was considered high living. We then graduated to the Chuck Wagon in Torrey, where the travelers on Rt. 24 were treated to the Einstein Full Moon post-massage. Now we only stay at the Lodge at Red River Ranch, where Charlene and Dave feed us Buffalo Steaks and we complain if they run out of Cabernet Sauvignon. At the Red Cliffs Lodge in Moab the cabins have two bedrooms, but only one bath.....how uncivilized is that? I guess we have to go back to Sorrel Valley and pay \$800 a night. As for food, Hank's at GVR and the Strater in Durango (only Dave Beilman is banned there apparently), but no more Cafe Diablo (under new management....and we await the critics' reviews).

But those are the earthly form of expectations. What we really seem to have succeeded in maintaining in terms of low expectations has to do with our tolerance for each other as we age. Take for instance my optimistic expectation for good warm weather. Mr. Fancy-Pants Airdat Big Data Weather Forecaster Jay Ladd tells me I'm an amateur and should lose my meteorological credentials. So I predicted Tuesday as 60-64 degrees and mostly sunny with a 10% chance of rain? The hail was no bigger than a marble for Pete's sake. And it's not like anyone slid off the Alpine Loop down the numerous and treacherous 1000 foot chasms during that micro-climate blizzard that hit us. I think there was sleet too, but my visor was so iced up I couldn't tell.

Also, did I get mad at the 12 members that kept going up the mountain pass into the blizzard as I was coming down in first gear waving and warning them to go down? I understand that these aged folks can't always see oncoming traffic, much less articulated warnings. It was suggested by Mark Dilly that he didn't even know it was me. In fact, I suspect they didn't even know it was me since there are lots of 6'5" 360 pound motorcyclists that ride the Alpine Loop every May on baby blue BMW's. And how about that indomitable spirit of the O'Connell's, stopping on the first summit to take nice pictures of off-piste skiers while still 40 miles and two mountain passes from Durango with massive black storm clouds filling the horizon to the SW. You have to admire and salute that kind of bravery, not, as was suggested by a panel of high mountain rescue experts, commit them to an asylum and permanently ban them from altitudes over 1500 feet.

Marx, who I believe once said in Duck Soup when he was Emperor of Fedonia, that you had to take up the taxes if you wanted to take up the carpet. There I go again, quoting ancient movies that no Millennial would recognize, much less understand what carpet tacks are all about..

But we must face facts and basic math.....in 1996 we were 42 - 63 (average age 51) Now we are 49 - 82 (average age 65). The good news is that over 20 years our average age has only risen 14 years. The bad news is that it's less because of younger members and more due to death, injury, child rearing and clarity of mind. Our organization is aging. 60 may be the new 40, but having 50% of our ridership over 65 and eligible for a National Parks Golden Pass does not help us actually remember to stop at the toll booth or pass trucks with alacrity and safety. You know how group riding is called the bungee effect? Have you ever had an old bungee and seen how it sags on your luggage rack? Get the point!?

Getting the Point

I spent a lot of time on this trip worrying about the aging of our group. Some of it I am sure had to do with seeing my dear old 99 year old Mom. She could not understand how I found my way to her house. When I reminded her that she had lived there 20 years (my first visit was solo on a Gold Wing I owned in 1995), she said, "That's right, you came on that red motorcycle". And then it struck me. It's not about the destination, it's about the ride. It's not about aging, it's about riding. It's not about expectations, it's about mileage.

Conclusion: The AFMC may be operating less off cerebellum and more off cerebral cortex, but we are still wracking up mileage. For some of us, life is entirely about keeping or getting the Wheel or wheels turning. Everyone knows when their ride is over. Kim and I often joke that we are going out Thelma & Louise style.....on a bike, together, with total and wanton abandon. I know a good Colorado pass just south of Ouray where we will head for that blessed event. But it won't be this year and probably not next. So rock on AFMC. In the words of the immortal Chairman, "Meeting adjourned, the Chairman's gotta piss."

Tourmaster Rich Marin (written on the JetBlue red-eye back to NYC)

