

CanyonRun 2022

HOLD ON... Let Me Overthink This

Everyday Risks

Today is the first morning of our Utah motorcycle ride. We picked up Chris and Ann at the airport on Saturday night and began our journey into the event by finding that one of their three bags got lost. San Diego airport, technically named Lindbergh Field in honor of Charles Lindbergh, who flew the Atlantic Ocean on a solo flight 95 years ago this month, was the venue. That was considered an amazing risk in those days, hence the decision by the city fathers of San Diego to name their city airport after him. It remains one of the most central urban airports in America with a single runway of 9,401 feet that brings you down with buildings seemingly on your left shoulder in an almost eyrie landing. Like all airports these days, they manage the traffic patterns of the cars coming to pick up arriving passengers almost as actively as the flight controllers manage the airspace. We are told to either go to the cell phone lot or keep circling until our passengers have emerged with their bags whereupon you are allowed to momentarily pull over to load them and are then shooed away to make room. When you start to load your passengers with the expectation that the last bag will be out in a moment you risk inciting the traffic manager's wrath with your open trunk and existing baggage, giving you only a moment's grace before they threaten you to either restart your circling or take a parking ticket. Once Chris determined that the bag with his underwear and such was lost, we loaded up and beelined it for the nearest Target to give him some replacement Jockeys and a toothbrush to get him through the lost luggage process of the next few days. Problem was that we were departing for the wilds of Utah on Sunday morning, so the bag would need to give chase across the desert. One wonders how airlines ever make money when they need to fix their mistakes for travelers in such personalized manner. Chris and I have a bet as to when the bag will reach him in Moab. No surprise, I took the under and Chris thought he would likely see his bag when the sun, the earth and moon were in perfect alignment at best.

It so happens that there is, indeed, a full lunar eclipse scheduled for tonight in the Western U.S., so I am fully expecting to win my bet. Chris is not so amused as he tugs at his bargain u-trow and does his *Rain Man* impersonation saying "Target Sucks". We loaded up the trailer and made our 8am departure on Sunday per plan, heading on the slab up to Vegas and into Polygamy-Central in Colorado City and Kanab, Utah. I had already gone through the rigors of getting the trailer loaded and attached, recognizing after the fact, that reversing that order and attaching before loading makes the trailer hitch manipulation much easier. Once

again I had problems getting the ball hitch properly seated, but with a quick FaceTime call with my trailer guru, Kevin, I got everything locked down enough so that the trailer would not go sailing past me at some future stopping point on the journey. 100% of my motorcycle inventory is lodged in that trailer with two big ratchet tie-downs securing them each in place. I think I did the ratchets correctly, but that is yet another risk that time will tell for sure. So far so good on the trailer risk.

In the late afternoon of our forced march to Page, Utah where we would be meeting Steve and Maggie for dinner on Lake Powell, I had my next travel risk decision. We were an hour or two out of Page with only one wide-spot in the Road Town left to get gas. I had 136 miles of gas range according to my electronics and 90 miles to the hotel. Does one stop for gas and risk less time to prepare for the dinner gathering or does one get gas and avoid the stranded-in-the-desert risk. I thought it was worth putting on the table for a group decision and was immediately hailed as an idiot for thinking we should do anything but stop for gas. I liken that risk as being like the risk of standing for democracy versus autocracy in 2022. We all understand that autocracy is an expedient, and that democracy is theoretically better, but that with democracy comes added effort and burden. I thought it was worth the risk to call for the referendum and was not so richly rewarded by my passengers ganging up on me and calling me a dope for imagining that there was any value at all in a democratic process when we were staring at a 100 degree desert. Here I was, thinking I was Volodymyr Zelenskyy, when I was made to feel like idiot Hunter Biden who obviously had self-interested ulterior motives. Sometimes you can't win, right Brandon?

This morning I am up early, as is my habit, and I have decided to ride Monument Valley. This requires me to take the two motorcycles out of the trailer. I loaded them myself and I think I can unload them myself, but there is risk in the maneuver if you do not have a spotter to keep you from tipping over. The smart money play is to wait for Chris, but that entails getting someone less early riser in lifestyle to be there on a timely basis and once again risk being name-called for being a pedantic early-rising pansy who can't unload a motorcycle on his own. In other words, do I take the manly risk of unloading solo or wait patiently for my spotter? What would Lindy do? That SOB would just do it in the best of Nike manner, right? So, as soon as I finish this story, I am down at the trailer and I am getting the unloading process in gear. If Chris gets there, so be it. If I drop one of the bikes (likely to be my preferred big GSA rather than my cute little R-Nine-T that Chris is scheduled to ride), I just suck it up and live with the dented roll bar and the scraped leg. Some risks a man just has to take. I'm sure I will be called an idiot again if I gauge this badly, but so be it.

While killing time this morning, I happened upon an article about how some foundation (probably funded by the property and casualty insurance industry) has come up with an algorithm to determine the wildfire risk of every single property in America. I tested the system out by putting in my address since we all worry about wildfire risk out in my neck of the high chaparral. I was pleasantly surprised to see that my home is rated a 2 for Minor Risk on a 5-point scale. That was an unexpected bonus piece of news for someone who got kicked out of Chubb insurance this year for having excessive wildfire risk. This news allows me to privately thumb my nose at Chubb and applaud Farmers for taking on my policy. Now let's get down to that trailer and unload those bikes while the risk Ju-Ju is running in my favor.

On Sacred Ground

When I owned a home in Park City (I actually owned five different homes in Park City over fifteen years), one of my favorite pieces of artwork was a print I bought by a well-known western artist names Bev Doolittle. One of her favorite techniques is to paint images with a double entendre. I had several of her prints, but the print I especially loved was called On Sacred Ground and it was very chilling in what it depicted. It was a winter scene with a cowboy on horseback leading another pack horse through an aspen thicket covered in snow. That scene alone was beautiful all by itself, but hidden amidst the aspen trees with their mottled bark of dark spots against the predominantly white of the bark was another image only visible with great effort and by standing back about ten feet and concentrating on the print from afar. To begin with, the cowboy and his mount, as well as the pack horse have gotten spooked by something in the aspen thicket and they are rearing back while simultaneously trying to run as fast as they can to get the hell out of that thicket. It is a startling depiction of a seemingly peaceful and bucolic place that has much more going on beneath the surface. The blending of peacefulness and sheer panic is quite unique in the painting. What one sees in the aspen trees if one is both perceptive enough and patient enough, is the face of an angry Native American and the head of an angry eagle, that symbol of American freedom and dominance. The two are screaming at the intruders to their lands and in effect telling them ever so dramatically to get away from their sacred ground.

Yesterday was day 2 of our Utah ride and the day when we gathered in Moab, famous for its red rimrock trails and overhanging canyons. We started the day in Page, Arizona on the banks of the drying Lake Powell that has for years been the summer water playground of Utahans who have houseboated their way into peaceful pleasure and not a little bit of controversy with the likes of Tommy Lee and Pamela Anderson's sexual video tape taken aboard just such a houseboat. Three of us set out on our BMWs (Steve Larsen, Chris Shriver and I) with our

spouses in two red Mercedes SUV's respectively pulling two motorcycle trailers. I should note that Kim was pulling our American Flyers Motorcycle Club white Ironhorse trailer that is covered in AFMC logos and draws a lot of attention from fellow travelers in this part of the country due to its aerodynamic look and handsome white with blue and red pin-stripped paint job. We headed south and east on a less than direct ride to cross the northern Arizona desert in the early morning cool (only 80 degrees at the start) to get to the town of Kayenta. This entire area is spotted with Navajo Indian reservations, of which we see lots of signs. The sale of Navajo fry bread is ubiquitous and a clear contributor of the present day Navajo affliction of obesity. This doughy fried bread is a fried Pillsbury doughboy with equal parts of air and grease throughout and is to be avoided at all costs during a long ride across the desert with only limited bathrooms.

At Kayenta we have already suffered the ignominious rider insult of having been slow-played tens of miles on Rt. 160 behind a line of cars slowed by a huge Jeep-hauling Class A recreational vehicle of massive and lumbering proportions. As we turned north on Rt. 163 we started passing through not just a few signs of Navajo life but a veritable thicket of Navajo roadside souvenir stands that were either occupied by scattered resellers of Indian trinkets or eerily vacant with their sunshades and tables awaiting more Navajo women to bring their commerce to the vacationing passers-by. These stands reminded us that these Native Americans are not only still here after over five hundred years of dominance and persecution by the European white man, but that not all of them have a casino to run and become wealthy off the back of. I heard an admittedly liberal (and black) college professor suggest that anyone including Payton Gendron, the alleged Buffalo shooter, that wants to grouse about replacement theory had better figure out how to deal with the Native American replacement complaint first since they were here long before the European white man.

We head up Rt.163 through the amazing Monument Valley with its red sandstone spires on every side of us. The desolation of this valley and beauty of these natural structures makes for one of the great places in America's multifaceted landscape from sea to shining sea. When we are on the downslope of the monuments, heading north towards the Utah border, we pass what has become the most famous place in the valley of all the magnificent places. The best way to refer to it is as the Forrest Gump spot because it is the location where Tom Hanks playing Forrest, Forrest Gump stops his back and forth running across America where all kinds of shit happens, and suddenly, and without warning, stops at that spot with Monument Valley in the background. It is at this very vista that he decides to turn around and finally go home to his deceased mother's house in Greenbow, Alabama. Today, this spot is where thousands of people stop every day

and crowd right into the road, on the presumption that they can see oncoming traffic for miles, just so they can record for posterity that they stood where Forrest Gump once stood. America can be a funny place.

While all the Monument Valley visitors are pushing and shoving to get their Forrest Gump photo, the poor Native American women (mostly Navajo I am led to believe) are still out there trying to eek out a living selling wampum, trying to make enough to buy the ingredients for Navajo fry bread to feed their blossoming, likely to become obese children. Is it any wonder the Indian and the eagle are screaming for the cowboy to get the hell out of their sacred forrest and off their sacred ground?

But this is also sacred ground along Rt. 163 to us American Flyers. Our logo has a rondel with UT and VT in the white spaces. The UT stands for our 27 year heritage of coming to southern Utah, and no place carried more spiritual weight with our clan than that around Mexican Hat. It is where we stopped for gas on our first ride in 1996 and then chose to eat on the patio at the Swinging Steak across the road. In the last 26 years we have stopped at the Swinging Steak for lunch many times, but found it open for business only one other time. This time we were again fooled by the neon OPEN sign beckoning us across the road only to find it was, yet again, closed. The spirit of the Navajo, probably the same one that Bev Doolittle saw in the aspen thicket, is telling us that its fine to pass through and buy gas (\$4.79 in 2022 versus \$1.79 in 1996, a mere 168% increase while national inflation has been only 84% during that time), but no soup for you at the Swinging Steak. So we beat a path to the Twin Rocks Cafe in Bluff, which was apparently not in the Navajo sacred ground arena.

I'm not sure how many more times I will pass through Mexican Hat on my journey through life, but I suspect that just as it is unchanged in the past 27 years, it will remain unchanged then and as peaceful as a snow-covered field of young aspen trees. Just don't look too closely or think too much about how the white man has treated all men of color over the years, especially the red man who sanctified the ground around the monuments in this magnificent valley.

Gettin' Loopy

We gathered last night with our American Flyers Motorcycle Club members at the Sunset Grill here in Moab. The Sunset Grill is the old home of the Uranium King or Utah, Charlie Steen, who discovered the Mi Vida uranium ore load just south of Moab in 1952. At the time the United States was anxious to get domestic production of uranium ore and it was the Mi Vida strike that both put Moab on the map as the Uranium Capital of America and gave the United States all the uranium it needed to build out its nuclear programs for military and commercial purposes.

It seems that Steen's first thought on making a windfall worth millions, was to get his family out of its tar-paper shack and into a nice hilltop home overlooking the verdant valley of the upper Colorado River, where Moab now sits. He put in a big swimming pool and gardens and was able to look down on all his neighbors in what was a previously dirt-poor prospector town. The sunsets from that spot are quite spectacular as we learned last night, and later watched the full moon rise over the bluff to the east.

This morning, the group headed out in three directions. We are a very libertarian-oriented group where anyone can do whatever they want on any given day. Today it was all about some people going on a Colorado River rafting trip (Kim's choice) while Kevin and Eric Schmid went off to run the 120-mile, off-road, White Rim Trail down in the canyons along the Colorado. The rest of us chose to ride up along the Colorado River canyon to the Sorrel Valley, where we turned up into the La Sal mountain range for some alpine riding through the high desert. The road that goes up into those mountains is called the La Sal Loop and it has spectacular views of alpine valleys, snow-covered peaks and the little red rock canyon where Moab hides in between the mountains and the desert.

The Colorado is a river that is a shadow of its former glory as the most significant Rocky Mountain snowpack runoff vehicle in the western half of the country. It runs from the aspen-covered, highland, marshy meadows of central Colorado through the Grand Junction gap and tumbles down through the Castle Valley which is where the landscape stops looking like the Rocky Mountains and starts to take on the red sandstone monument look of southern Utah. That section of the Colorado River makes for wonderful and accessible recreational opportunities in a place where many of the great old western movies were filmed, since the area captures all the elements of the western landscape saga with alpine areas adjacent to red rock canyons and, as Norman McLean might say, a river runs through it. All three of the AFMC members spent some time enjoying that very stretch of river on our first day riding the area. The rafting crew went all the way up almost to the Colorado border and put in their rafts for a leisurely float down past the Sorrel Valley, almost to the Red Cliffs Lodge in the Castle Valley. This is not a terribly steep section of river so the few rapids that exist are probably no more than a 2-rating in terms of the whitewater content. Nonetheless, a lazy ride floating down a beautiful river is a pretty good way to spend a day.

Meanwhile, the main riding group rode from Moab up the river on Rt. 128, which tracks that same stretch of the Colorado, nestled between the red stone walls and that lazy river, which gives us riders a nice view of the passing float trips and wends its way around the Big Bend, one of the many switchbacks that the Colorado makes as it follows the path of gravity over the millennia and carves itself into the landscape based on where the rock is softest and the most pliable to

its erosive strength. The La Sal Loop is a short 60-mile ride up above the buttes surrounding Moab and above the Steen Sunset Grill home. The AFMC has ridden that loop several times over the years and we have seen it go from an up-country gravel road into a proper macadam surface, but where the river is the strength down in the valley bottom, up on the mountain, the natural power is owned by the wintery frost and snow. Up on that alpine hillside of Mount Waas and Mount Peele, the mountain doesn't care about motorcycles and macadam. It goes about its business of freezing and thawing as it pleases and the results are worn clearly on the face of the road surface. This macadam, probably laid not so long ago is covered by tar repair marks that the Utah DOT must get after quite regularly, since these roads are a big part of the tourist attraction that supports Moab now that the government needs no more uranium from the likes of Charlie Steen. The high country recreational business is the economic engine of the area and keeping the roads passable is a priority, but the operative word is passable. A big local business is about renting jeeps and off-road buggies, which we see zooming here and there on and off the road surface on the hillside. Four-wheelers are far less troubled by the tar road-snakes than are our nemesis on a sunny day when those snakes give our tires a 2-3 inch slip and slide element.

Navigating multiple length-wise tar snakes is made that much more challenging for motorcyclists on the La Sal Loop by residual sand and gravel on the road surface that come from some combination of intentional road grit (spread for winter traction) and residual from the roadside that those buggies that traverse the road throw up on the surface. Oh, and let's not forget the occasional winter-dug potholes that come up not so regularly, but at just the wrong place when one is dodging the tar snakes and the gravel. This may make the ride seem overly hazardous, but the truth is that all that road challenge is more than overwhelmed by the beauty of the ride on a sunshiny day like we had at our disposal.

After the Loop, we headed up after a Moab lunch to Dead Horse Point for the traditional and perfect view of the wide expanse of Canyonlands and the blue-green Colorado River that weaves its way down through these remote and relatively wild parts of the canyons. From the overlook with its convenient sun shades, we can see below the various mountain bike and off-road motorcycle trails like the White Rim Trail that Kevin and Eric S. Are off riding. We admire these brave and robust guys that want the added adventure and bodily testing that a trail like that provides, but we are happy to be on the smooth road surface on the high plateau where the combination of curves and scenery make for one of the oldest and most popular AFMC side-trips that the crew takes.

By the time we head back to the ranch in Moab we are all gettin' loopy about our good fortune to have the time and resources to get to ride these beautiful canyons of the greatest part of the western U.S. We take our respite to steel our

resolve for another greasy pub meal, which is the predominant fare available to the hearty outdoorsmen that frequent this red off-road ex-mining town along the great river.

The Scale of Life

Today is our last day in Moab with our AFMC buddies and we will likely take one last ride through the red rock bluffs and plateaus that surround this other-worldly place that we enjoy so much. As is often the case, the landscape around us barely changes from year to year, but the people of the group most certainly do. I think we are all supposed to change somewhat with time, but we seem always to be surprised by the change nonetheless. I have spoken about the aging-out process that we are confronted with in motorcycling. Some people seem to have some combination of the self-awareness and presence of mind to conclude that they are simply too old to keep themselves up on the back of a motorcycle at speed, and they opt out of further riding. For long-timers of our motorcycle club, that often results in a year or two of dwindling attendance, combined with less riding and more trinket shopping, but with some attempt to stay connected to the group. Staying a part of the organism or community seems important to most. Rarely do members just decide to stop and then dramatically fail to reappear. But then again, that too does happen and when it does it feels too abrupt. There is an old joke I love that I title as the “Your mother’s on the roof” joke. It is about how to prepare someone for bad news, in the joke it’s about the loss of a loved one (at first a cat and then one’s mother). The idea is that we all need time to adjust to the finality of life. The human species has always had that problem and it has invented every manner of belief to help deal with it. From the reincarnation of Buddhism to the life ever-after of Christianity, heaven, however you choose to define it, seems to be an important part of our shared culture.

Coping with finality is not an easy topic. People don’t like talking about life insurance for a reason, it is sad to contemplate a time when we are no longer part of the whole. That has led to the wonderful and soothing idea that we are all a part of some larger consciousness that is the cosmic universe. Now that is a comforting thought because it involves staying connected in some way and never having to say goodbye because we are always there in one form or another. Most of us who are clear-minded and rational thinkers understand that this is perhaps less provable truth than more some form of belief and palliative for the soul, but it is comforting nonetheless because it helps us avoid the topic we all try to avoid.

As I sat here last night in my Best Western motel room in Moab (quite a spiritual way station of a place by all standards), I was reminded of all this end of life thinking because a long-time friend and fellow AFMC member interpreted by last missive about the burdens of group leadership to mean that I was using that

story to cushion my voluntary fall from the top of the hill of leadership so that everyone in the group would know that my mother was heading up to the roof. That happened not to be the case because I am not yet necessarily at that point. Two years ago when we came upon our silver anniversary as a riding group, I did wonder if it was time to pack it all in, but that was less about my own fatigue and more about my worry about the collective fatigue that might be causing this group to linger on for old times sake rather than because we still enjoy the gathering.

That does not seem to be the case even though there continues to be compositional erosion to the group brought about by the natural aging-out process and the replacement theory (no, not the Replacement Theory that Tucker Carlson espouses and yet pretends not to know exists when someone tries to tag him with it). Life is about replacement. Death and birth are one on the Möbius strip of life, aren't they. The same is true of quitting and joining when it comes to group dynamics. This should be the characteristic of life eternal that we should all celebrate and not avoid addressing at all costs, shouldn't it?

As I pondered these imponderable thoughts (something my overtaxed and waning capacity brain wants to do to itself every day for some reason), I was sweeping out the garage of my digital inbox and happened upon a National Geographic article. As I have mentioned before, NatGeo is one of the few publishing mainstays of my life that I read even more today than I ever did during the mainstream of my adult life. I suppose that is because NatGeo discussed the world around us without political bias and without much sentimentality. It is the Dragnet of life, just the fact, ma'am. And the older I get, the more I appreciate and really want to know more about the world around me that I may have heretofore ignored for want of busying myself with work. That article is about the largest living thing on the planet.

Sometimes people turn phrases to get our attention and that is certainly more true of journalists who need to grab us and keep us reading, but in this case referring to the largest living thing on the planet is not a euphemism for something like the earth or its Ecosystem. This is about a single living being that is far larger than any whale hanging in the Museum of Natural History. It is called Pando and it is one tree here in the center of Utah. To be more precise, it is a thicket of aspen trees (apparently and unknowingly to me, the most ubiquitous tree on the planet) that are connected from one root structure and extend out some 146 acres worth of trees that spring from that same root. For those of us who have recently read books like *The Hidden Life of Trees*, we are not unaware that trees are known to communicate with one another, both laterally among peers, but intergenerationally among years and years of progeny. But I had never heard of Pando or for that matter, a living being of some 45,000 tree trunks that form one single entity. I have often said that I come to Utah because the canyons are my cathedral and because I

find something very special about the landscape and the vortex of life I sense in this place. Now I learn that only a few miles from all of our riding lives the very life form that we would hail as an answer to our never-ending search for some form of immortality. And it comes the form of a tree, the very same tree I wrote about a few days ago in *On Sacred Ground* and about the only real Native Americans that commune so well with the world around them.

This is all starting to feel very spooky to me and I do not know exactly what to make of it all. Pando is now specifically on my list of places to go to. In fact, I have already booked a week for my extended family next July at our AFMC retreat *par excellence*, The Lodge at Red River Ranch. In the mean time I will ponder the confluence that appears to be flowing all around me. My family, my friends, my motorcycle group, my favorite place in the world, Utah. It all seems to be making sense in some weird way. For now, I must return to the present and suit up for my last day of riding the red rock hills, wherever the group says they want to go. That is the only guidance I need at this moment.

The Five A's of Ride Leadership

Today was day three of our AFMC Moab ride. The most important element of a good ride is always the weather and it has been superb, so that has been a blessing. We are all appreciating this good fortune. It is hard not to when you are sitting out in this magnificent landscape in near perfect weather that is warm and sunny and yet not too hot and with a pleasing breeze. So with that in place, we are down to roads and attitudes all of which have some good and bad qualities. I will keep that analogy going and say that all the tar snakes, bumps, potholes and gravel we may find on the Utah roads of all qualities don't add up to an ounce of concern, especially given how wonderful most of the Utah roads are. The same can be said of our membership of the AFMC. We are not a perfect group by any standard, but we are, by definition, a normal and representative group of Everyman people within the broad context of the American middle class. We may have an above average level of income and/or wealth, but not by so very much. The reason for that is quite simple in that we pretty much let anyone who wants to be in the group into the group. Now, for someone to be introduced to the group they generally have to be a motorcyclist or be partnered with a motorcyclist, and since none of us are ever friends across all socioeconomic spectra, there may be some bias, but the fact that we are a wide sampling of America is best evidenced by the fact that our collective politics come close to mimicking the political leanings of the general population with somewhat balanced numbers of blue and red advocates and liberal and conservative advocates. So, if the roads are fine and the membership is fine, the big issue boils down to ride leadership.

Ride leadership has the same sensitivity as leadership and control in every aspect of life. Everyone wants it and hates it simultaneously. No one wants to be told what to do, especially when they are on vacation, and yet everyone seems to appreciate sound leadership to make the vacation go as well as possible. It is, by nature, a delicate balance. I have spent an inordinate amount of time thinking about this issue lately since I have effectively been the ride leader of the AFMC for 27 years now, a long organizational life by any standard. There have been some false moves to transition to new leadership and there have been some individual contributors to specific rides, but ride leadership is only partly about the ride of the moment and much more so about the long-term dynamics of the group and its interest in gathering for the next rides. So far, that has defaulted to me over time and as Socrates once said, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Now Socrates said this at his trial for corrupting youth and he was eventually put to death for these acts, so one must be careful when using this dictum for any justification. Nonetheless, I have chosen to examine my life as a ride leader for the education of the “youth” of AFMC.

I have identified five A’s of ride leadership to make this explanation. Writers use mnemonics like five A’s so that people can remember what is being said and perhaps to keep them engaged in the lessons so that they stick with the story to the end, so please understand that I understand this control dynamic and use it for both those reasons and for the humor I hope to find in it.

A good ride leader must begin with Accountability. Someone has to be responsible for everything on a ride and even that is not really enough. Let’s be honest with one another and say that someone must be to blame for everything except maybe the weather, and even that gets discussed and assigned to the leader often for having chosen those particular days to have the ride. For our iconic annual Utah ride, we have always focused on the third week of May because it seems to fall right between the too cold and barren and the too hot and crowded. We want things to be open for business but not yet overcrowded. Weather too has generally proven good in mid-May though we are not without exceptions to that rule. Nevertheless, a good ride leader must be prepared to be accountable for the entire ride and the pleasure of that ride for each and every attendee. That is no mean feat with the diversity of membership we endorse. Happiness is relative and keeping people happy is hard. What is that old expression? You can’t please all of the people all of the time, but that is exactly what the good ride leader has to try to achieve.

A good ride leader must also be Attentive to detail. The rides are nothing but a accumulation of details, like any type of travel. They are specific and quite motorcycle-centric details to be sure, but there are general lifestyle details as well. Advice on where to get a rental ride is an obvious one. Since Utah

is a relatively remote state (at least the parts we like the best) there is also the choice of venue from which to launch. Should you come in from Salt Lake City, Denver, Phoenix or Las Vegas? Should you even use those hubs or do your particulars cause you to bootstrap in from somewhere else or just ride in or travel in by car and trailer on your own? Where do we stay? Do we go point-to-point or stay put and do day rides? Do you book for others or let them book for themselves? Do you offer meals and if so, which do you plan versus recommend versus leave to everyone's own devices? Do you have alternative activities for non-riders or riders-lite? Rafting? Ballooning? Museum tours? Shopping expeditions? And what about spa services? Do you have a massage program and if so, how do you orchestrate that? Even details like dinner times and wheels-up times are contentious issues that have to be attended to with a degree of care. Quality of service and food also matter a lot and are a big part of attentiveness. And of course, there is the economic accounting, which is always fun with a bunch of Alpha males and females. Suffice it to say that without attentiveness to everyone's needs and wants, the ride is in for some serious trouble...or more of it than normal at least.

A good ride leader must have a high degree of Awareness. This is somewhat different from Attentiveness because Attentiveness is mostly in the planning, where Awareness is all about keeping your wits about you on the field of play and seeing, hearing and feeling the mood of the crowd. It is the motorcycling equivalent of calling an audible in football. You have to adjust to keep everyone happy and adjust to fit the circumstances being thrown at you. Needless to say, a libertarian group like ours sometimes tells you when they plan to come and go and sometimes not so much. Some are vocal and some simmer quietly. A good ride leader is supposed to be aware of all of these nuances and incorporate a constantly evolving plan to get the maximum happiness out of the ride for everyone. The most important element of Awareness is Self-Awareness, and that gets us back to Socrates and the ability to reflect on what one is doing right and wrong in the leadership role at any given moment.

A good ride leader must know how to Apologize. Because everything that goes wrong is your fault as the leader, one must keep a spare apology in one's pocket at all times and it must be delivered easily, rapidly and without any reservation or contingency. "I'm sorry you feel that way," doesn't cut it. It needs to be something more like, "I'm sorry I fucked up and will try not to do it again." I should note that some members are hesitant to accept the quick apology sensing that it may be too easy of a palliative. Nonetheless, it usually gives the leader the guileless upper hand in future conversations if he has given out the unconditional apology rather than letting his ego or hurt feelings govern (no "thankless task" talk is allowed by leaders in public...only with their spouses in the dead of night).

And now the fifth and final A that you have all been waiting for anxiously, and that is Asshole. Yes it's true and yes it is a necessary truth. As Jack Nicholson famously said, maybe "you can't handle the truth", but a ride leader cannot exist without some quotient of Asshole in him. The extent and the nature of his asshole behavior is a factor for sure and everyone will disagree on the metric thereof, but if you grasp the concept that the leader is by definition part Asshole, you will be a happier camper for sure.

So, from a 27-year veteran ride leader who is totally accountable, tries to be attentive to everyone's needs, is as aware as possible of the changing gridiron, plays the apologist extraordinaire (I learned long ago that apologies are one of the best values in the interpersonal arsenal), and is prepared to admit to being a healthy quotient of asshole in the mix, ride on AFMC.