

## Big Sky Run / Montanathon - July 18-27, 1997

The “and beyond” stems from some of our regular riders making a week out of the BSR and taking a vacation to enjoy the roads of Montana, Alberta, and British Columbia through July 27th. I know the BSR will be covered in the STARreview for the national HSTA population, but because it is a local event, I will provide details from my point of view as well as a journal of our experiences that we encountered.

Mat McDanold, Bob Kramer, Peter Broda, and myself took 10 days of vacation and planned on touring Yellowstone, and then up north to Banff and Jasper after the BSR was over. Chris Harnish started with us on Friday and separated on Wednesday, while Jim Holzberger met up with us on Tuesday, in Missoula and rode with us the rest of the week. Brian Gershon rode over to Spokane with us, but met up with his friend and Kirby started off with us on his way to Chicago.

**Day 1: Seattle to Spokane - 514 miles** - we followed the North Cascades Highway (SR-20) to Kettle Falls, and proceeded south on SR-25, meandering towards Spokane. Highlights to this route are crossing Loup Loup summit between Twisp and Okanogan. The roads were clear of gravel, and smooth enough to get the pegs down on my 900RR.

Once in Spokane, we hurried over to Rod Eastwood's place for the BSR. We arrived after the food was pretty much gone, but we got to chat with fellow riders from across the country and couldn't help but notice the number of ST's and VFR's in the club. Chris showed off his VFR and I was surprised to see I had the only RR, and Peter and Kirby had the only two Ducks.

**Day 2: Spokane to Missoula - 381 miles** - by way of Lolo Pass (US-12). We started south along the east side of Coeur d'Alene Lake along SR-97. This road was nothing short of excellent with one pitfall - No guardrails. If you blow a corner, you get to swim! We worked our way down SR's -3, -6, -9, -3, and -7 to Orofino. After crossing about 2 miles of construction to get to Orofino, we ate, and the next sight we saw was a sign that read, “Winding Highway Next 77 Miles”! That statement just about says it all...

Once in Missoula, off to Jim Iverson's place for dinner. More gabbing went on, and prizes were drawn. Elbert asked for nominations for a goof award, and I, being the smart-ass that I am, quickly nominated Chris for his ability to wad up a bike. Elbert replied that the nominee would have to represent someone/thing that happened that weekend - so I restrained from nominating Chris once again, even though he still qualified.

**Day 3: Missoula to West Yellowstone - 375 miles** - Heading southeast toward W. Yellowstone, we crossed the Continental Divide, Montana/Idaho border, and Lost Trail Pass all in the same left hand sweeper - and what a sweeper it was! This would've been a great opportunity to take pictures of each other, but there would be many photo opportunities later on the trip. West Yellowstone - Elevation 6,666. (just thought I'd mention that...)

**Day 4: West Yellowstone to Billings - 230 miles** - If you asked us which road was the best road of our trip, you would get one answer from all of us - Bear Tooth Pass! If you have internet access - check out our website for a photo of the east side of the pass. WARNING - Not for the faint of heart! Peter was nursing a rear tire by this point, but still had enough rubber (sort of) to make it back to Missoula to get it replaced. The temperature when we got to Billings was a scorching 94 degrees!

**Day 5: Billings to Missoula - 399 miles** - Peter, concerned with his tire, left Billings at 6 am to make sure that the traffic on I-90 was minimal, and that the roads were as cool as could be so that he could maintain a slow speed for 350 I-90 miles to Missoula. After stopping at various dealerships along the way, and being advised to not proceed on the rear tire, he pressed on to Missoula in hopes of finding a dealer that had the rubber and had the tools to mount it on his Ducati. He pulls into Missoula, and the service guy took one look at his tire and instantly calls everyone in the dealership to come take a look for themselves. The comment of the day was, “That tire is so thin, you can see the air on the inside!”

The rest of us chose to take SR-3, north from Billings to US-12 and then west to Avon at which time we caught SR-141 to SR-200 to Missoula. If you've done these roads before, you know why I didn't mention them earlier - l o n g b o r i n g s t r a i g h t s. I'd swear I fell asleep and woke up 50 miles down the road still upright. Temperatures this day ran from 85-95, another hot day in the sun.

Jim Holzberger and Sam Nelson joined us, as we had previously arranged to meet in Missoula. Sam, riding a ZX-11, was eager to take Peter up on a quest to discover what the top speed of the two bikes were. I was looking forward to trying to keep up. The next day would tell...

**Day 6: Missoula to Fernie, BC - 445 miles** - can't say much for this day either - again it was pretty boring with straight roads and few kinks. Sam Nelson drew first blood by passing all of us from the back of the pack and setting the pace. Soon after, Peter shot to the front, and I was left in third position. What the heck, let's see what the 900RR can do...

Without telling - Sam went VERY fast, Peter only slightly slower, and I was right behind them. Fast enough for me! It's hard to get a true speed with saddlebags hanging off the rear seat. (I bet you thought I would give it up, didn't you?)

Glacier National Park was a let down for me. The scenery wasn't that impressive, and the roads were not anything special. I would not recommend going out of your way to make it through the park.

**Day 7: Fernie, BC to Banff, AB - 249 miles** - Banff National Park is beautiful, and given the chance, I would visit it again, spending more time there. Hwy 93 into the park was truly spectacular and the world famous, Banff Springs Hotel, has to be visited for its historical value.

**Day 8: Banff, AB to Jasper, AB - 228 miles** - As we pulled out of Banff, we decided that we would make the side trip to Lake Louise to eat breakfast. Chateau Lake Louise had the best food we ate on the entire trip, and this was just a breakfast buffet! The service was impeccable, and the meal was not outrageously priced as one would expect at such a posh resort. After breakfast, we took another side trip to Lake Moraine - truly gorgeous. I'm running out of accolades for this trip - I may have to re-use some!

Wow, Hwy 93 never stopped impressing us! Ice fields, glaciers, twisty mountain roads with impressive climbs, wildlife all over the place, and the Rocky Mountains on both sides are only a few things you'll see along this road. You can't help but stop every 5 minutes to take a picture of something different - or the same sight from a different angle! The stunning rock formations make you wonder why you haven't been here before! Speed was no longer an issue - today was a short day, and picture opportunities were a plenty.

Once in Jasper, we checked into our hotel, and went back into town for dinner. A guy that we had been seeing all day rolls into town and asked us if we had been stopped along the way. We replied, "No" and he informed us that he was sighted for speeding 30km/h over just outside of town. We laughed (to ourselves) and again, I without thinking before speaking, said, "Better you than us!", knowing that we had come through that area only 10 minutes before him. It was the kind of situation that even had we got a ticket, we wouldn't have minded because we were so awestruck with the beauty of the land.

**Day 9: Jasper, AB to Kamloops, BC - 294 miles** - The ride was still good, keeping the speed down due to the fact we were in Canada and didn't want to support the economy other than by buying expensive gas. We arrived in Kamloops after only 6 hours of riding and Peter had decided that he would shoot straight through to Seattle. I was looking forward to taking a long nap in Kamloops after staying up late the night before.

We went out for dinner, and then out for a drink. Wouldn't you know it, the Hell's Angels showed up in Kamloops and decided that they would drink at the same place we were at. We picked up our multi-colored, full-face helmets, and walked out the door. The police that were babysitting the other bikers outside, didn't even give us a second look as we walked down the street.

**Day 10: Kamloops, BC to Seattle - 331 miles** - Finally, the last stretch on our journey home. We took Hwy 5A out of Kamloops to Merritt. Highly recommended! We followed the Coquihalla Hwy and darn near froze our butts off going over the pass at 8am. We had decided that we wanted to get home early on Sunday, and therefore we hit the road at 6am. We stopped in Hope for breakfast, and from there, it was a straight shot home.

Jim had recognized a friend from college who was working as a border guard, so we passed the border relatively quickly and painlessly.

If you are wondering about the total mileage, no need - that is a statistic I'm proud to share - 3446 miles in 10 days, and only about 15 total miles of rain over the entire trip. We spent a total of 82 hours on the road, including meal and fuel stops. One piece of advice that should be obvious on any long trip - check the construction conditions along your route - it may prove to save you time, and worries. If Peter had rode the way we did to Missoula, he would not have made it!

I would like to give personal kudos to Bob Kramer, who provided awesome trip routing; to the hotels that put up with us (I mean that put us up); and to myself for making quality reservations. (I'm merely repeating what people told me.) I believe that this is a vacation that no one will soon forget. And on that note - see you on the next ride!