

Reno/Tahoe III - Aug 30-Sept 1, 1997

Who shall the lucky victim be this time? I think it will be George Rudchenko and his wife Michelle (Shelly). I talked them into going down with me cause George had never been down the central/eastern side of Oregon so he was looking forward to it. Shelly seemed a little apprehensive, but I think she was just as excited as we were. I warned them, it would be a long trip - 13 hours each way, but they were ready to go!

First thing Saturday morning, I was handed back the "Screw-Up Award" from George. He got it only the week prior at Voula's for it being closed when we met there. Mitzel's in North bend was closed at 3am, the time at which I planned to meet. That is exactly why I hate changing plans once they are made. A lot of thought goes into planning and changes are made erratically so details are not considered - this was the case. Denny's is open 24/7 so there is usually no guesswork involved. Anyways...

Onward and upward... Getting over the pass was a breeze and getting to Ellensburg was cold. Rain gear over the leathers helped, but it was still cold, but by now the sun was coming up. We took SR-821 and savored every turn. One thing we didn't account for was the extra drag created by the rain gear and the gas mileage took a big wet bite out of our asses before we got to Goldendale along US-97. George and Shelly tapped dry about 15 miles from the gas station, and I was already low. I headed on to get gas, and went bone dry 1.5 miles from the gas station myself. I coasted for about 1/2 mile and then it was time to push. My worst fears were pushing and having the bike tip over to the far side and taking me with it - luckily, it didn't happen. Having taken care of the situation, we were back on the road, having lost about an hour of precious time.

For some reason, the pace was fast, but not rapid. Breaks were long, and more frequent than I was used to. Taking along 2 smokers (soon to be ex-smokers) was really slowing the pace. Oh well, When noon rolled around, and we hadn't made Bend yet, I stopped worrying about time, and started to concentrate on riding style. George had a lot of good things to say and I took notes. He is definitely the most confident rider I've ever ridden with, and I think the confidence rubbed off. I feel much safer on the road than ever before, even after having whiffed a corner just 2 weeks prior.

Finally arriving in Tahoe - after 20 hours on the bike now, we fell asleep right away. I was truly exhausted.

Sunday, we all woke around 10am and decided that I would go show George the 207. We left Shelly behind and headed over the pass. Same as I remembered - impeccable! We got to the other side and decided to head back over the hill and do it again! I was really looking forward to hitting the 540 degree left-hander and getting the knee down this time.

We got about 1/2 way up the grade and George decided that he's got the line, and he's going to pass me. I had no idea that it was coming, but just as he's on the throttle and fully committed, a park ranger meets us coming around a corner and I hit the brakes, George came oh-so-close to bumping my tire, and we both felt like turds as he went by. A few turns later, the corner I've been waiting for.

I'm all set up, ready to do it, and darnit if we didn't come up on a car that completely blew the opportunity. We eventually got around him, but I was disappointed. After we got back into Tahoe, we decided that we would go do US-50 and take 207 back into Tahoe once more. The second time, same scenario - ready to go, only to come up on a car before the apex of the turn. Now, I was pissed!!!

The rest of the day was spent walking around town, gambling, and being tourists in general. We split up and decided that we would meet up at 6pm to ride to Reno for the evening. After looking at a map, we thought we would try to take SR-431 from Incline Village to Reno. Great road, very technical, but very bumpy and rough for a short stretch of it. It was dusk, and finding the corners was tough. I had Shelly on the back of my bike on this run to Reno so as to gain her confidence in MY ability. It worked - I remember her saying that my bike "RIPS" and she "definitely needed a smoke after being on the back." I felt good because I knew I was never 'pushing it' and that I was always in control. (Well, almost always...)

We spent about 5 hours in Reno, and left after midnight. George and Shelly vowed to stop smoking on September 1st, so at midnight, I collected all the paraphernalia and pitched it! They had smoked 3 cigs at the same time to get their last fix, and I got pictures.

Hey - why don't we take 207 on the way back to show Shelly!? I was up for it, and it seemed like the better of two choices. I was stoked - even though it was dark, we knew the road conditions and had nothing to worry about. Here it comes...I'm going for it...I doing it... DAMN, what's that rather large pile of garbage doing right in the middle of the turn? I had to laugh... I guess it just wasn't meant to be.

After eating dinner/breakfast and laughing at the idea of getting up at 6am to pull out and head for home (it was now 3am), we decided that we would sleep in, get up late, and take the quickest, shortest, most-direct route home (sort of). The roads we picked looked to be the same distance as those going through Susanville...NOT!

It took us 7 hours to get to I-5, and we were still south of Mt Shasta. We left Tahoe at noon, and now figured that we were looking at an all-nighter on the super slab. Bumpers - not my idea of fun. Shelly, by now, starting to display signs of frustration and fatigue. The most disturbing thing we saw was that big sign on the side of the freeway that said, "Portland - 400 Miles". Not a good thing to see when you are already tired. We bit the bullet, and were making good time on I-5 but the miles didn't seem to drop fast enough.

Finally in Portland - at 3:30 am. Shelly had had enough and made up her mind that her and George would get a motel in Portland and get some much needed sleep. I was determined to make it home, and I forced myself to do it.

The fog was terrible, and thoughts of deer in the road made me tentative about opening up. I blitzed from taillight to taillight, trying to keep someone in front of me to show me where the road was. Before I knew it, I was in Olympia at just after 5 am and couldn't believe all the cars on the road that early. The pace was 80mph so I simply mingled until I got home at 6:10 am. Time enough to shower, shave, and change clothes for work.

The quick ride home turned into an 18 hour ordeal to get home. Once again, I was not happy about the long time, but we discovered some good roads in California to ride. I would still call the trip a success. George and I are fairly well matched in riding style, and I think we were starting to read each others thoughts pretty well with regards to traffic situations.

Next time, I think trailering the bikes to California and riding from there, not wasting the gas, tires, energy, or time on the superslab would be a much better option for "sport riding" to Reno or Tahoe.