



# Michigan Sport Touring Report

March 2017

Editor – Ian Orr

---

## Epic Adventure New Attempt

By Steve Chaikin

Most long distance motorcycle travelers seem to ride almost every day. It seems like riding the motorcycle is a main activity. My trip was different than that. The object was to see and interact with new situations and places. The motorcycle was the way to get from visit to visit. So most of my memories are from when the bike was parked and I was out and about.



I guess that I went Adventure Touring before that was a phrase. I read advertisements of adventure touring with meals and hotels arranged and a gear truck. Then, it was just “went traveling by motorcycle”. Plans, as such, were made before or after you got there. My general plan was to go around the world in about 4 years. There were no specific details once the sidecar was built and the rig together. I got in most of the 4 years and traveled through a lot of Europe and Africa. In retrospect, the African experiences were far more memorable. That’s probably because I’m

an American, and on a world scale, Americans are Europeans. We have common origins in our education, religions, manufacturing, music, and even art. South Africa had much of that then, but in between, there was a lot of territory. I never got to West Africa, so nothing I write applies to there, except by coincidence.

Some six years before, the idea for the trip had taken less than a minute to form. I had taken a summer off during college and traveled and hitch hiked. I was having a really wonderful and stimulating time when it abruptly dawned on me that the summer was over and I had 3 days to cross Europe to catch my flight back home. I still felt a bit angry about being confronted with reality. I wanted to travel again, but with flexible time limits and enough money to live cheaply but not scrounge. I'd go around the world, and it would probably take about four years. A car would be pretty expensive shipping across oceans, and a motorcycle with baggage strapped on too exposed to thieves. A motorcycle with a sidecar seemed just right! I would finish college, live almost as cheaply after graduating as when I was a student, save a good chunk of my income, and then just take off. It was to me a pretty simple plan, though, as it seems, not very common.

I'd rarely seen a sidecar except at enduros like the 2 day Jack Pine out of Lansing Michigan. Somehow, I needed to drive a sidecar to see what it felt like. A few winters later, I converted my Bultaco Matador dirt bike. Bill Silvis had put his Honda 90 motorcycle away in a closet for the winter. I borrowed the front wheel, and with some electrical conduit and brazing rod, made the Bultaco into a lightweight sidecar with unsprung rear axles. I lived on Whitmore Lake. Back then, no one that I knew had heard of ice screws, so we rode motorcycles with bare

rubber out on the ice very delicately, ready to skid out any instant. On the ice with the sidecar, there was almost no braking. You couldn't steer very much. Turn the bars a tiny bit, and it would turn very slowly. Turn the bars a bit more, and the steering forces would drop to zero. You could turn the bars lock to lock and the bike would just go straight. My neighbor Dennis was riding passenger with me in the sidecar at about 55mph across the glare ice and asked to try driving. The easiest thing was not to waste the time coming to a stop for Dennis to drive, so I stood up and we switched places while still going 55 mph across glare ice. A very stable rig. A déjà vu of that event happened later with the real sidecar. It was late in a January afternoon in the Blue Ridge Mountains when I got hit with a downpour of freezing rain. I was the only vehicle still driving as I got to a deserted campground for the night.



My motorcycle was a new 1969 BMW boxer twin, an R69S, with a sidecar chassis that I'd recovered from a junk pile. When it came time to buy the BMW, I had a friendly connection with a dealer in Germany. I ordered a brand new 1969 BMW R69S with factory sidecar gears and suspension. Knowing that many places would not have high octane gasoline, I had wanted the lower compression R60 model instead of the sportier R69S. However, my neighbor Dennis had purchased an R60 the year before from the same German dealer, and hadn't ridden it too much. We put the bikes side by side, and I ended up with his low compression motor and he got the sportier engine.

I had been looking out for a sidecar or a frame, but nothing appeared. But then I got really lucky. On a trip to Miami to see my parents, I struck up a conversation with a local BMW rider. He just happened to know of a wrecked sidecar frame in the graveyard of a local motor scooter shop. Even the employees of the scooter shop didn't know a sidecar frame was in the scrap pile. The owner came back from lunch, and I had my missing link. I had the frame straightened at an auto body shop. I'd built a couple of wooden boats before college, so I went about building a cargo box around the frame using boatbuilding techniques. Too many years later, I figured that the box was pretty big and put too much weight on the front wheel. The steering was kind of heavy, and it didn't handle soft sand very well. I built up the muscle to handle the steering pull, but I didn't figure out the sand problem until a couple of years later out in the Sahara Desert. I could remove the main cargo hatch for the sidecar and two people could sit inside, one in the lap of the other. It wasn't planned, it just worked out. When we visited some friends living near Montpellier in Southern France, the four of us would ride together to the beach for the day. One of the biggest cargo loads was during one segment where we had the usual camping gear, food, clothes, cameras, tool, spare parts, guitar, 2 saxophones, and an oboe. I guess that it was pretty odd, as the sidecar body was a big cargo box. I figured that with a solo machine, it would only be a matter of time until someone with a pocket knife cut a few tie down straps and stole half my gear. I needed a way to travel by motorcycle and lock things up, and a sidecar seemed the obvious answer. My motorcycling friends and I all rode dirt bikes out in local fields and some enduros. I didn't know any street riders, and probably had never seen a sidecar rig except in photos. I should have looked closer at the photos. It ended up quite large for a sidecar. The sidecar box was sort of streamlined, with a rounded nose and curved sides. I made it from plywood with standard boat building construction. There was a long main hatch and a smaller forward hatch.

After several years of saving money, I had a year's salary saved in the bank. I'd left my job,

sold my car and Bultaco Matador dirt bike, left whatever else I had in a friend's garage, and was staying with my girlfriend, and later wife, Linda. The day before I left I got a 24 hour flu and spent the night sleeping on the bathroom floor. I left Ann Arbor in January, 1971 the next afternoon with the temperature in the low 40's and a drizzling rain, with the idea of spending four years traveling around the world.

60 mph was a pretty comfortable cruising speed for the rig. With the low rear end ratio, 75 or 80 was probably tops. A few hours later, I found a motel in north eastern Ohio and stopped for the night. I took my good cameras and guitar out of the sidecar and put them safely on the floor of the motel room and went to sleep. I woke up and the door was open and all my stuff had been stolen. I was devastated. I called the motel manager, the police came by and took a report, but said that there was not much that they could do. Then everyone went away and I was alone in my bed crying into my wet pillow. I decided to look one more time to see if I had been dreaming. There, in the glow from the street light outside, was all my stuff just as I had left it. Wow! I HAD been dreaming. I'd never had such an intense, realistic dream in all my life. I was so relieved. I was so exhausted. I was so grateful that it had not really happened. However, the memory of that night stayed with me, and I was significantly more guarded after that.

The next day, I arrived in Washington, DC and stayed with my good friends Hank and Ellie. I went to one my favorite places there, The Map Store, where I got some pretty detailed road maps of Europe. When I left D.C. a few days later, it was 11 degrees. That night, it was down to 6 degrees at my campsite. I didn't have much of a sleeping pad, and my tailbone and shoulder blades would be icy until they warmed up the ground. But when I happened to move, the iciness would return until I warmed up the ground again.

The day after that, I hit the freezing rain. In just a few seconds, my face shield was opaque and I was riding blind. I immediately unsnapped it, but it was so brittle that part of it cracked off. I

just squinted and continued. The rig had two rear brake pedals side by side, one for the bike's rear tire and one for the sidecar wheel. If I pressed them evenly, I'd stop straight. However, if I tilted my foot, I could favor either side and steer with the rear brakes. That's how I continued along the curving mountain road, gently dragging either brake to steer if the front tire couldn't hold traction. I spent the night on a picnic table under an open shelter in a large public park by a lake. The next morning, I had to break a thick layer of ice from the handlebars to use the controls. As I left the parking lot up a small hill, the front tire broke loose sideways and the weight of the sidecar spun the rig around clockwise. It took several tries to get enough speed to coast up the hill without going off into the trees. I had that problem much more seriously a couple of days later.

The ice melted away and I got to Cousin Elsie's in Hendersonville, N.C. that afternoon. I needed a good warm-up. Elsie and I talked about sightseeing around the local countryside. She had a VW Beetle car and enjoyed driving around the countryside. She said that you could drive along some really small back roads, head down some long hill, and at the bottom would be a stream and a road along the stream that continued off and out of the valley. I didn't realize that we each had a different picture of a small road. She was picturing a small road as viewed from a VW Beetle while I was viewing a small road as viewed from a 250cc Bultaco dirt bike riding single track. Later the next day, as I returned exhausted and full of mud, she exclaimed, "THAT was a FARM road!" Anyway, I went off on a sunny day after a day and night of freezing rain. It was warm and sunny, perfect. I found a small road that went down a long hill to a stream. But there was no road along the stream, just a small circle and a dead end. Well, warm and sunny is nice, but not with mud on top of ice. I had a spare tire with a knobby, and I changed over to it. I could get enough traction to go up the hill, but not past one shady spot where the ice hadn't melted much. I ended putting the bike in the ditch at the side of the road, where the front wheel couldn't go side-ways, and shoved and

dug (I had a folding shovel) for an hour past the shady spot and finally back on my way back to Cousin Elsie's. Nice farm road.

A few more days later, I pulled into my parent's apartment building in Miami. They were happy to see me come, not too happy to see me go. My Dad found a cheap deal for a passenger ship taking an unscheduled one way trip to England, and I booked a ticket for me and the motorcycle.

About then, Spring Break happened, and Linda came down from college for a visit. We decided to take a day trip down to a place called Flamingo at the bottom of the Everglades. We stopped along the way and took lots of walking tours of birds and alligators. Finally, it was dark. We had supper and headed back home. Linda got chilled in the moist night air, and asked to move from the back of the bike into the empty sidecar box. No problem, she found a comfortable position. I got to the park gates and stopped to fix a glove or something. Out of the darkness, a Park Ranger appeared driving a jeep without lights. He had been hiding out, looking for alligator poachers. When I stopped, my front wheel turned to the side and the headlight was pointing into the tall grass. From a distance, it looked like someone "shining" for gators. He looked me over with lots of suspicion. There were not many sidecars in Florida, even less with enclosed cargo boxes. He accused me of hunting gators, and of course I denied it. He asked what was in the box. I said no gators. He was sure that I was a poacher, and asked me from several different directions what I was up to. I insisted that I wasn't a poacher and there were NO alligators in the box. Then a noise comes from within the box. He was sure he had me. "OPEN THE BOX!" he ordered. I obeyed, and a cute 23 year old blond appeared, laughing. I said nothing. The ranger was too flustered even to apologize. I can't make this stuff up.

The ship from Florida to England is pretty empty, 123 passengers with room for 700. I hang out with some members of a band. One of them invites me to stay at his family's flat (apartment) in Battersea, a suburb of London. I

get there before he does. There is a Fish and Chips shop below the flat. The shop has been there for years and the family has lived above for years. They all know each other well. I order fish and chips. I don't know it, but as a gesture of hospitality, he gives me a double order. All I know is that the next few times I order fish and chips, I feel shortchanged, it looks kind of small.

I head into London and stop by the British version of the American Automobile Association. They are very nice. They give me a copy of the member's booklet. I read a chapter on how to do your own valve job with a stick with a suction cup and some grinding compound. I now better understand why British cars and motorcycles of the time expect lots of tinkering. The average American driver is lucky to find the right fuse to replace. The average British driver is expected to do his own valve job on a 4 cylinder car parked at the curb beside his second floor flat, in the rain. Through some contacts with Pete Smith, the first secretary (or treasurer) of the Cycle Conservation of Michigan, I meet Dick Sutton, a very warm and engaging soul. Dick is a lifetime Triumph Motorcycle racer and dealer. I will camp with him later at the Scottish Six Days (observed) Trials. Dick holds the distinction of the last man in history to ride his motorcycle (Triumph 500) from his house to the International Six Days Enduro, compete and win a Gold Medal, and it ride back home afterwards. I finally head off into the countryside, sometimes camping, sometimes at a bed and breakfast, and sometimes being a guest in a home. The strange appearance of the sidecar rig definitely opens extra doors.

One evening in Wales, I am invited to a church to hear a choir practice. The choir sounds very good. Then the whole audience joins together in a hymn. I am amazed, every second or third person around me appears to have a trained voice, powerful, beautiful, and in tune. The Welsh love their singing, and learn from an early age to support their diaphragm and sing powerfully and melodiously. It was really a treat to be hearing choral music from the middle of a

group of voices just as good as the ones on stage.

I get to hang out at the Scottish Six Days Trial. The stars are Sammy Miller, Mick Andrews, and a Lampkin. I unhook the sidecar and head out into the hills to some of the sections, but my low exhaust pipes are banging off the rocks and getting dented. I leave the bike and hike a couple miles, climb in a stream and help the riders that get stuck. Most of the expert points lost are in slimy stream beds. The other sections are on rocky paths winding up and down hillsides, with a few boulder fields for more fun.

Then I get to Edinburgh, Scotland. It is just before May 1, the Mayday holiday. There is a big celebration and parade called the Charities Parade. Many groups of mostly college kids decorate floats built on farm wagons. But the decorations don't hold up too well. Sometime long in the past, some ill-mannered participant must have thrown something at another float. Now every float carries an open barrel of slop and a bunch of long ladles. The slop is smelly, gooey junk from farms and breweries. In the starting area, every time two floats get within a few yards of each other, the slop flies back and forth. It makes your worst image of a food fight seem well behaved. By the time the parade starts, everything and everyone is a mess. There are crowds on the sidewalk where the parade travels, and the people throw coins into the street. The kids collect the coins for charities. Everyone has fun.

After taking the passenger ship to England the first year and a half was spent in Europe with several months in Barcelona, Spain. I returned home to get married and work for a few months. ...then I went back and spent 6 more months on the motorcycle, mostly in North Africa. I ended up four years later in South Africa but by then in VW Bus.

Linda came over for the summer, and I met her in Amsterdam. The second day in the city, we met a fellow BMW owner who lived in a barge tied up in a canal. We stayed with him while we were there. The canals were open sewers.

There was a bucket of water with a rope next to the toilet. To flush, you poured water down the toilet, where it went straight into the canal. After, you refilled the bucket from the same canal. As we headed south through Holland we stopped to admire a windmill beside the road. Someone next door came out and gave us a tour. I was amazed. It was a wind driven factory, apparently totally restored as a museum. There were three floors of machinery, all driven by wooden shafts and cog wheels from the windmill shaft down to the ground floor. The top level had a large round grinding stone. Then there were chutes into various machines to process the grain.

Late in the morning we encountered a severe rainstorm, and put on our rain gear. We passed a hilarious scene of a telephone booth with about four bicycles lying on the ground next to it and four gentlemen in coats and ties all squeezed together in the booth.

One of our loops in northeastern Spain took us through a town called Teruel while it was having its annual celebration. As we slowed for traffic, a group of kids had us stop and take a tour of the town. In the cathedral was a pair of mummies in beautiful stone caskets. There was a love story of rich girl loves poor man. Man goes away and years later comes back rich, just after she marries someone else, and they both die of broken hearts. In the open square in the middle of town, a bull with a long rope on his horns is running around with a group of men dragging the rope – until the bull turns around. Then the guys on the rope all run off while another group grabs the rope and tugs away. We headed on that afternoon and then camped for the night on an open hillside covered with sweet smelling mountain thyme.

At the end of the summer, we went back to Amsterdam and Linda flew home. I headed to Spain. Not long after crossing from France into Spain, I came across a couple of guys hitchhiking. They were apparently jobless playboys living and partying in a town called Port Lligat, home of Salvadore Dali. Evidentially, there was a fair amount of partying in town and they were part of the



scene. I detoured into the town, and spent the night in their flat. As a thank you, and to show off, they took me to Dali's house the next day and I met him for all of 90 seconds. He definitely had his own aurora.

I had planned to go to Madrid and study for a few months. When I got into Barcelona, some friends had already arranged a place for me to stay and a teacher. So I dropped the idea of Madrid and stayed in Barcelona. During that time, I bought a Spanish motorcycling magazine that had a travel story about crossing North Africa through the Sahara desert. My Spanish is pretty poor, so I didn't understand a lot of what I was reading, but the map was pretty understandable, so I figured to take that route heading south and east from Europe.

From Barcelona, I came back to Ann Arbor for a few months. Linda and I got married, she finished off her Master's degree, and I got a temporary engineering job and put some more money in the bank. When I got back to Barcelona, the bike's parking garage was being remodeled, and the bike was pushed under a stairway. The workers were very happy to see me. They had figured that I'd been drafted, sent to Vietnam, killed, and was never returning.

We went back to see friends in Montpellier, France for a couple of weeks. The mufflers were worn out and loud, and the bike was burning oil. I took it to the BMW dealer to replace the broken rings and install new mufflers. They replaced the mufflers, but didn't fix the rings, even though they charged me for it. As I was entering into Spain, it was still using oil. I stopped in Malaga, Spain and found a scooter mechanic that knew his stuff. I was carrying a spare set of rings and gaskets. He found more rings from a small Peugeot truck that fit the bike, so I would still have spares. A few days later, we were off again, everything fixed.

We finally loaded onto a ship to make the jump from Spain to Morocco. On board the ship was a Land Rover with a research crew that was

properly fitted out for the desert. They had the standard full length roof rack with many extra gas and water cans, sand ladders, jacks and a winch. I felt very puny alongside, but put any doubts into my denial closet.

Many, probably all, of my memories are totally out of date. There is a town in Algeria called Tamanrasset. It is the last town south in Algeria, over half way down the Sahara Desert, with hundreds of miles of dry, barren ground in all directions. I could walk across the town in about six minutes. I have a photo of the middle of town, taken in early afternoon.



The main street through town is a dirt road. It curves past one story clay buildings that have small shops and houses. There is not a car in sight. A single man is crossing the brown street. He is a classic Tuareg tribesman, wearing a light blue robe. He has a long scarf wrapped around his neck. The tourist propaganda claimed that the men wore veils instead of the women. In reality, the scarf is something to wrap around your face for protection from blowing sand and dust, and still see a little. That town now has a population of more than 70,000 people. There are wide paved boulevards, sports arenas, parks, and lots of swimming pools. The town that I remember could be a museum piece for the city that is there today.

The first afternoon into Morocco, we stopped at a gas station for fuel, and asked where we could camp for the night. They said that we could park the bike in the guarded parking lot next door and sleep in the station. That

sounded great until they said have a nice night, went out, and locked the steel grate behind them. I was now locked inside the building, with the bike outside, and not very sure that no one would mess with it. I didn't sleep much, constantly looking to see that the bike was okay outside.

We next camped in Rabat. I drove down onto a sandbar in a riverbed for some sand practice and promptly got stuck. The sand wasn't that soft, and the bike should have handled it, so I once again put my fears into my denial closet. A couple of days later, I cooked up a pot of bean stew in my pressure cooker. The next day, I got really weak, and my pee was like red wine. We found an English speaking doctor, who mis-diagnosed me with hepatitis. We broke camp and checked into a hotel on a Friday. It was a long weekend. I was really weak, constantly throwing up, and couldn't hold down any food or drink. A young Moroccan down the hall knew what was wrong, but he didn't speak English and we couldn't speak French. He kept saying, "le feve!" but we couldn't figure it out. On Monday, he got us into a taxi over to the small clinic of a French doctor who spoke English. I had a hereditary allergy to the beans that I had eaten before, and the chemistry destroyed about half of my red blood cells. "le feve" was the fauve beans that I ate. Somehow in the morning, we learned that our friend was Spanish Moroccan, and spoke Spanish at home. If we had tested a single word of Spanish during the long weekend, we would have switched to that language and understood each other. Anyway, a couple of blood transfusions and days later, I was off again.

Things started to smooth out after that. Fez had a fascinating medina. Algiers was pretty interesting and we met some other travelers. We needed tires, and found a motorcycle shop to get them. The owner gave us names of family members along our route to help us out. That string of hospitality ended a few days later when the owner of a cycle/scooter shop offered to put us up for the night. At the end of the day, he had some bedding set out on the floor. Suddenly, to my surprise there were 3 beds set

up and the night watchman was sent home. I was concerned that he was going to sleep alongside us. I made sure that I was between he and Linda, but damn, he was grabbing for ME all night as I put out knees and elbows and pushed him away.

We stopped in one town near the edge of the desert to cash some traveler's checks at a bank. The bank was on a side street a block from a school yard. As we pulled past the fence, the entire school came running out to crowd around us. The kids must have been 10 deep. The girls couldn't resist reaching out and stroking Linda's long blonde hair.

It got really hot. Linda found that she was more comfortable wearing her down jacket to keep the heat out than light weight clothes that let the heat in.

The town of Ghardaia was really picturesque. It was built across several hills with abrupt lines between the irrigated green and walled town and the dry desert at its edge.

We spent some time in the town of El Golea, which had a nice campsite with a kitchen area and showers. The day we tried to leave, the wind was blowing heavily. As we got out of town, the wind picked up and we found ourselves in a sandstorm. At some point, visibility dropped to about zero, and I couldn't see the ground under the front tire. Driving blind, we stopped right there. Linda had fears of not surviving this one. When the wind eased a bit, we turned around and went slowly back to town. A couple of hours later, we were sitting in the town square, drinking some cold sodas. As I looked at the bike, something seemed really strange. After a couple of minutes, I figured it out. The bike, not having been washed for quite a while, was glowing and spotless. Somehow, the sand had taken all the dirt and grease stains off of the engine, which gleamed. The spots of rust and corrosion were gone from the spokes and rims. The black paint on the fenders and gas tank really shined. The desert had given the bike a detail job. It never looked better since new. It also probably gave me some more piston

clearance, as I'm pretty sure that sand got through the air filter. Sand was dropping out of the stitching in our jackets weeks later.

The next town was Ain Salah. There was some sort of festival going on, and many groups had come from surrounding villages to celebrate together. After dark, there were dance performances in the town square. The men, all wearing light blue robes and holding muskets, formed in a circle. A group of mostly women stood at the side with an assortment of drums. An elder, the conductor, stood in the center. In the dark, as the drums set the rhythm and tempo, the dancers pranced in a circle, first one way then the other. They crouched around and stood tall, dashed or crept to the center and then back out. They raised and lowered the muskets and swung them around. At the finale they all fired in unison with the muskets' thunder and light. You didn't know when that was going to happen. The conductor made it as suspenseful as he could, faking it many times until the big BOOM and FLASH. Then they all filed out and the next group formed in place.

In that area, desert heat and fuel range were the two biggest concerns. The longest stretch between gas stops that I was soon to face was about 600 miles of gravel and sand. The bike had a 6 gallon tank and I had two more 5 gallon cans. But I would still be at least one 5 gallon can short, and probably needed a 2nd one for margin. The motor was really sucking gas. To power 3 wheels through the sand, I had to be pretty hard on the throttle in 3rd of 4 gears. The first day through that stuff, I stopped after a while and looked into the gas tank to check the gas. I was shocked how low the level was. I dumped in my first several gallons way sooner than expected. I had expected 30-40 miles per gallon, and with 16 gallons, that was good for 400-500 miles. I doubt that I was getting 25mpg. On top of that, I had about 7 gallons of water, and needed to carry at least another 5-10 gallons of that in case I was stuck for repairs, etc.

The heat, and heat stroke, was the other main concern, and probably the one that tipped me

into halting. The bike REALLY handled poorly in soft sand. A British writer, Chris Scott, who many years later wrote several books on adventure motorcycling in the Sahara desert, said that most of the fatalities were in the hotter summer months. One day in Ain Salah, Linda (my wife) got sick and came down with a high fever. We packed up the tent and checked into a hotel. The thermometer in the room floated down below 100F sometime after midnight. Talking with others around, dehydration was suspected and she just started drinking a lot of water. She quickly recovered. If I had gotten overheated, digging out of sand, in hot sand and sun, there wouldn't be too many decent options. It was just the wrong time of year. There was only one other traveler at the time, a Volkswagen van with 4 German guys. We were told that in the winter months, there were typically a dozen to 15 vehicles traveling through. I guess that I bailed out from being one of Chris Scott's data points.

The bike handled REALLY POORLY in soft sand. I'd be on the throttle, powering through the stuff when the sidecar wheel would start to plow a bit, putting a lot of extra drag out to the side. Immediately, the whole motorcycle and sidecar would twist sideways, with the handlebars at an angle and the front wheel still pointing straight ahead. The sidecar and rear wheels would plow diagonally through the sand, creating a rooster tail a couple of feet above my head, and dragging the bike to an abrupt halt. I'd get off and lift the sidecar wheel up in the air while Linda took over the controls, revved the engine, dropped the clutch and charged forward. That usually got us mostly out of the soft spot and able to continue. I just couldn't find a technique to avoid this without going slow enough to just get bogged down. Thinking about repeatedly performing this exercise in 120 degree temperatures a couple of hundred miles from any help was a bit scary.

There was a calendar timing factor also. Our route had to go through the southern border of Algeria, through Niger, and then into Nigeria, where we could then head east through the Congo, eventually to East Africa. Our Nigerian Visa would soon expire. At that time, Nigerians



were quite angry with US citizens. A local civil war, the Biafran war, had ended, with the Nigerian central government blaming the USA for prolonging the war. If we had arrived at the Nigerian border after the visa expiration date, we would have been turned around, having to cross back over the entire desert even later into the hot summer.

One morning, after digging the bike out of a sandy parking lot near the middle of "downtown" Ain Salah, I finally, and very sadly, made the only sensible decision and gave up crossing the entire the Sahara Desert. I had realized for several days that the plan just had too many really dangerous aspects, and this was the trigger.

An hour later, the next chapter of our adventure appeared. Wandering through an open area nearby, we struck up a conversation with a couple of American airplane pilots sitting in a Land Rover. They were with a project in its second year to do an aerial survey of the entire country looking for signs of mineral deposits. They had three airplanes, pilots, electronics operators, a mechanic, cook, and data analysts. One of the electronics operators screwed up too often, and it would cost an entire day's work. After chatting a bit, during which time they scoped out that I had worked as an electronics engineer, Sam said to me,, "Want a job?" Wow, I thought, "Stay here in the desert, play with airplanes, and get well-paid? SURE!" Sam told me to come over to the hotel the next morning at 10am, when they'd be done with their morning flights. What followed could be my worst job interview ever. Sam arrived late, an hour and a half late. The first thing he said was, "Sorry that I'm late. One of the planes crashed on take-off this morning. Since we have one plane less, we have enough crew and don't need you." Wow, so I'm applying for a job flying in planes that crash in the Sahara Desert! It turned out that the plane had some damaged landing gear, and was soon flown out in its own for repairs. They still needed me, but not as urgently, so they couldn't hire me on the spot. I'd have to travel up the corporate office in the capital, Algiers,

and apply through normal channels. It still sounded like a fun thing.

A day or two later, we headed back up north. We took a different route than on our way down, passing through a lot of oil well country. One day, we saw a camel caravan out on the flat desert floor. I parked the bike and walked out about ¼ mile to take a picture. They stopped for me and lined up for a group photo.

Later that day, we came to the town of Laghouat, planning to visit for a day. We passed some oil refinery operations on the way in. The town was under major expansion, with a grid of new wide roads and blocks of empty bare dirt. One piece of advice that travelers share is that, if there is a traffic accident, just get away from the scene as fast as you can. To the locals, you are rich and can pay to fix things. You might be only one of 5 passengers in a cab, but they'll invent something to make you take the blame and charge you for the repairs. Anyway, we're still a few empty blocks from the center of town, when a youth on a moped with a loud open exhaust goes speeding past us, staring back at our sidecar rig. And he keeps riding with his head turned backwards, and he's still at full throttle, and still looking backwards! He drifts across the road to the other side. Meanwhile, there's a middle aged man on another moped coming the other way and minding his own business. The kid hits the man head on, full speed, belly to belly, chin to shoulder, four arms outstretched. They come to an abrupt stop, hang together motionless for a second or two, and then topple over on their side on the pavement. I think, "Oh Shit!", make a U-turn and head back out into the desert. I've got enough gas anyway.

Looking at the map, we figure that we can cross over some mountains and get to the capital, Algiers, the next day. The scenery changes from flat open desert to green hills and farms. We enter areas that wow'd us as real desert on the way south, but now look quite green compared to the actual desert. We drive until later in the afternoon, when we come

to a spot where the road is covered with a snow drift and impassible.



That morning, we had been in temperatures of 90 to 120 degrees, and now it is almost freezing. We decide to call it a day and camp in the middle of the road, the only flat ground. We both wake up the next morning sneezing with colds. We go back down the mountain the next day and take a lower level route to Algiers.

While waiting for the job applications to process, we stay in a campsite run by a Dutch couple that has LOTS of stories from their years as news reporters traveling around North Africa. Theo too once traveled by BMW with sidecar, one of the WWII Afrika versions. Theodore's father had been a musician, and Linda had a Master's degree in classical music. They spent many nights playing phonograph records of Baroque music guessing whether it was Bach (which one?) or Telemann or Corelli. They laughed and giggled all evening as they shared their common love of Baroque music in a place where fine European culture just did not otherwise exist.

After the paperwork came through, we parked the bike at the TRW office and flew commercial to Tamanrasset, the last town in the Algerian desert. I get motion sickness very easily. I started training on a DC3. We'd take off at dawn and fly at a low 500ft above the desert, recording data. When the sun came out, it would heat the desert and create too much air turbulence to maintain a constant altitude.

We'd end the flight and go back to base for the rest of the day. I got totally airsick and always spent the last half of the flight with my head over a trash can. When we'd get back, I went to bed for the afternoon, got up for supper, hung out a bit, went to bed, and repeated the routine the next day. After a bit, someone brought some Dramamine from Algiers, and it worked. Then I was on a twin engine Piper, just the pilot and myself. We were flying at low altitude through mountains. The pilot had to fly down into valleys, pull up towards the hills, curve around mountain peaks, and down again. Sometimes it felt like the wings were just a few yards from the mountains. We were riding a gentle roller coaster all morning. There was rarely any sign of any life. If something happened to the plane, we'd really be in trouble, too much to worry about, so I just enjoyed the ride.

After a few weeks working with the airplanes and equipment down in the desert, we flew commercial back to Algiers, got back on the sidecar, and traveled to Tunisia, took a ship to Sicily and Naples, Italy. We drove up through Italy, spending a few days with a friend that had a 400 year old farm house in Tuscany, with ripe cherry trees. Then we went through Austria, and finally to Munich. At the time, Germany had a really good deal to get a customs document called a Carnet de Passage, so it was the place to buy a car. We bought a VW Van and sold the sidecar to a couple of American teachers over for the summer.

**A special thanks to Steve Chaikin for his article featured this month.**

**Remember...** All published articles earn a free breakfast and your articles will be appreciated by your fellow members and the newsletter editor, and you will also earn points toward the **2017 MOTY Award!**



## MSTR Heads Up

Here's a listing of some of the upcoming local events and meetings within the next few weeks. If you know of a local motorcycle event in

Michigan or Ontario the MSTR would be interested in send Ian Orr an e-mail at [Communications@mstriders.com](mailto:Communications@mstriders.com) with the details.

### MSTR WEST Breakfast Meeting

**Saturday, March 11, 2017, @ 10:00 AM**

West breakfast meeting is at the **Alibi Bar & Grill**, 1394 E. Riverside Drive, Ionia, MI ([www.alibionia.com](http://www.alibionia.com)). Please send an email to Gala ([gschip@me.com](mailto:gschip@me.com)) so she can plan on providing breakfast for everyone who attends. Breakfast will be available for \$11 plus tax & tip. Bart Reiter will be moderating this meeting.

### MSTR EAST Breakfast Meeting

**Saturday, March 25, 2017, @ 8:30 AM**

East breakfast meeting is at **Doc's Sport Retreat** in Livonia, MI. Doc's is located at 19265 Victor Parkway. East of I-275, north of 7 mile road and across from Dave and Buster's. Augie Fernandes will be moderating this meeting.

## MSTR 2016 Rides



One of the goals of the MSTR is to organize a few multi-day rides each year specifically for our members in some of the premier riding areas in the Midwest and

Southeast. All MSTR rides are limited to those who are current members of the MSTR. The full 2017 schedule is still in development. There are several rides that have been scheduled and a few still being planned. The dates for many events have already been set and are listed on the Events page of the MSTR Website ([www.mstriders.com](http://www.mstriders.com)).

## 2017 MSTR

### Deposed Depots Grand Tour

**March 25 – November 19, 2017  
Michigan**

Happy New Riding Year! With spring fast approaching, and the riding season just weeks away, the details are being finalized for the MSTR 2017 grand tour. The theme for this year is old railroad depots. Michigan has a rich history of railroads. Before the advent of the automobile and today's road infrastructure, businesses relied on the railroads for transportation of raw materials and products from and to the far corners of the state, and railroads were the fastest means for people to get around the state. Most towns that the railroad passed through had a depot where people and cargo could get on or off the train. Some were large and elaborate, others were a small one room building near the tracks, but all were easily identifiable as a railroad depot. Today, many of these have been abandoned or repurposed and relocated.

I'm calling this year's grand tour the 2017 Michigan Deposed Depots Grand Tour. As in the past, we will have 14 checkpoints, with 8 in the Lower Peninsula, and 6 in the Upper Peninsula. A grand tour has minimal organization – there are no routes, no planned hotel stops, and no organized group rides – only checkpoints. It is completed at your own leisure, whichever weekend or weekday you choose to go for a ride. You can visit one checkpoint each day, or a few

## *Fair Weather Frolic*

**Dates: See below  
Marietta, OH**

each weekend, or plan a route around the state to visit all 14 in one trip. You can do it alone, or you can find one or more riding buddies to share the experience with. Additionally, you can earn up to 3 extra credit points for each checkpoint (42 extra credit points total) for stopping to see other Michigan attractions. These can be other depots, museums, historical points of interest, scenic attractions, tourist attractions, and unique Michigan restaurants. Most importantly, it is a good excuse to go out for a ride on your motorcycle and see some of the history and beauty that Michigan has to offer.

This ride is for people who can only afford one day off for a trip and can easily ask to take Friday off with little notice.

The ride will only happen on one of the proposed weekends and IF the weather for that weekend looks like we will wake up to ~50+F temps each day with little to no possibility of rain.

Schedule:

- 1st Day (Thursday) – ride/drive down in afternoon, after work
- Friday - ride
- Sat - ride
- Sunday - possibly ride in the morning for a few hours, saddle up, drive home

Possible dates:

- March 23- 26
- Mar 30 – Apr 2
- Apr 6 – 9
- Apr 27 - 30

Russ McClelland will call the ball on Tuesday of that week if the weather is in our favor, and if you can join us, reply back to Russ quickly and organize quickly how you're going to travel. If the weather is never favorable, then the ride won't happen on any of the weekends.

Russ's trailer can accommodate 4 bikes. For those that wish to ride, please feel free to meet us there. I live in Walled Lake/Novi for trailer meetup point.

**Ride Organizer: Russ McClelland**  
[russell.mcclelland@gmail.com](mailto:russell.mcclelland@gmail.com)



**Grandest Deposited Depot of them all  
Michigan Central Station, Detroit**

I'm still picking the depots we'll be visiting, but intend to have it all finalized in time to send out information packets and begin visiting checkpoints on March 25. All photo proofs of your visits will be due to me by November 19.

So get that oil changed, get new tires mounted and properly inflated, and get ready to see what Michigan has to offer. I look forward to seeing all of your pictures from your travels to railroad depots around the state.

**Ride Organizer: Keith Danielson**  
[keith.danielson@wowway.com](mailto:keith.danielson@wowway.com)



## MoArk Adventure 10

April 12-15, 2017  
Missouri/Arkansas

**\*\*\* The final “cat-herding” for MoArk 10 will take place on March 25<sup>th</sup> at the East breakfast meeting.**

This ride is a “curve-chaser’s” delight. Three days of riding and 1,000 tire-shredding miles in the Ozarks to start out your riding season. Check your tires for wear prior to this ride – the roads here will chew them up aggressively.

### Ride HQ: Day 1 (April 12):

Super 8 ([www.super8.com](http://www.super8.com))  
930 Valley Creek Drive, Int. of Hwy 67 & 32,  
Farmington, MO, 63640.  
Phone: 573-756-0344

### Ride HQ: Days 2 & 3 (April 13 & 14):

The Comfort Inn ([www.comfortinn.com](http://www.comfortinn.com))  
1031 Highland Circle, Mountain Home, AR,  
7265.  
Phone: 870-424-9000.

This ride begins in Farmington, MO. We’ll meet there for dinner on Wednesday, April 12. There will be a mandatory rider’s meeting at the Super 8 around 9:00 PM following a dinner at Dexter BBQ (next door to the hotel). On Thursday, we’ll be taking a twisty route from Farmington, MO to Mountain Home, AR. We’ll be staying Thursday, April 13 and Friday, April 14 at the Comfort Inn. On Friday we’ll be riding on some of the best roads in Arkansas that are south and west of Mountain Home. We’ll return to Farmington, MO from Mountain Home on Saturday.

Get your name on the sign-up list of those planning to attend at any of our monthly meetings or send an email to Gregg as noted below. Be sure to make your hotel reservations early. As of February 26th we have 37 MSTRiders signed up

**Ride Organizer: Gregg Mitchell**  
[pancho9450@earthlink.net](mailto:pancho9450@earthlink.net)

## ROUGH RIDER 1/2-K RIDE

Saturday, May 6, 2017  
Michigan

The 5th annual *Rough Rider 1/2-K* day-ride is just over than 2 months away. JT Pedersen is working on the details and will have a sign-up list available at upcoming breakfast meetings.

Organizer: JT Pedersen,  
[jt.pedersen@live.com](mailto:jt.pedersen@live.com)



**Michigan Renegade Mountain Ride**  
**May 14–20, 2017**  
**Waynesville, NC**

Two days of travel and five days of riding in the premier riding area of the South East: The Great Smoky Mountains.

### Ride HQ: All week

**Best Western Smoky Mountain Inn**  
130 Shiloh Trail, Waynesville, North Carolina  
28786  
**Phone: 828-456-4402**

A block of rooms are being held as follows:

- Check-in: On or after Saturday, May 14, check-out: Saturday, May 21.
- \$70/night + tax. Same rate for King and Double, 24hr cancellation. The Inn may also allow you to book early and stay later at this rate - you might need to sweet talk them a bit. Request the MSTRiders rooms and rate

Get your name on the sign-up list of those planning to attend at any of our monthly meetings or send an email to Ian as noted below. Be sure to make your hotel reservations early. As of March 5th we have 54 MSTRiders signed up.

**Ride Organizer: Ian Orr**  
[Communications@mstriders.com](mailto:Communications@mstriders.com)



## **ROUGH RIDER 1K VI**

**Saturday, June 3**

For the sixth time the annual MSTR Roughrider 1000 will begin at 4:00am the morning of June 3, 2017, and continue thereafter until completion of 1000 miles of continuous motorcycling, within 24 hours, less gas and a dining stop. Terry Odom is working on the details and will have a sign-up list available at upcoming breakfast meetings.

Organizer: Terry Odom,  
[tjopc1@gmail.com](mailto:tjopc1@gmail.com)

**MSO**

## **Mid South Odyssey**

**June 15–18, 2017  
Middlesboro, KY**

Steve Gross will be the event organizer for the Mid South Odyssey ride in Middlesboro, KY. Steve is working on the details and will have sign-up lists available at the April and May breakfast meetings.

Organizer: Steve Gross,  
[stevegross@ameritech.net](mailto:stevegross@ameritech.net)

**BGB**

## **Blue Grass Boogie**

**July 13–16, 2017  
Morehead, KY**

We're looking for a volunteer to be the cat herder for the Blue Grass Boogie. The routes are already done and we'll be staying at the same location. If you've ever wanted to organize an event it doesn't come any easier than this. Contact Ian at [Communications@mstriders.com](mailto:Communications@mstriders.com) for details.

## **BBR 2**

### **Barn Burn Raid 2**

**August 17–20, 2017  
Marietta, OH**

This is an early ride-hotel announcement. The ride hotel has agreed to hold a block of rooms at a reduced rate and recommended booking these rooms now to ensure availability due to other (non-motorcycle) group bookings.

**Ride HQ: All week  
Best Western Plus Marietta Hotel  
701 Pike St, Marietta, OH 45750  
Phone: (740) 374-9660**

A block of 40 rooms are being held as follows:

- Check-in: On or after Wednesday, August 16, check-out: Sunday, August 20. \$76/night + tax. Same rate for King and Doubles. Request the MSTRiders rooms and rate
- I requested ground floor for all the rooms, which they will try to meet
- After July 19 the blocked rooms will be released to the general public. If there are rooms available AFTER July 19 we'll still get the \$76 rate. If we need more than 40 rooms we'll still get the \$76 rate
- As with all MSTR events with a pre-arranged reduced rate room these are ONLY available to MSTRiders. Anyone not on the attendee list provided to the hotel prior to the event will have their room rate increased to the standard rate

The sign-up list for BBR 2 will be available at the March West and East meetings. The routes will be similar to last year's BBR event.

**Ride Organizer: Ian Orr**  
[Communications@mstriders.com](mailto:Communications@mstriders.com)

# SEE

## Solar Eclipse Event

August 21, 2017  
White House, TN

A total solar eclipse will occur on Monday, August 21, 2017, which is the day after the 2017 Barn Burn Raid. Vince Cardinale is gathering names of interested riders to gauge interest as follows:

Observe the eclipse from or near White House, TN, which also provides the most direct and shortest return to the Detroit Metro region. There are several hotels in or near White House, which is approximately 6h 40m from Marietta, OH by expressway.

The optimal local viewing location would be the Cherry Mound Baptist Church parking lot, which will enjoy 2' 39" of totality.

- Partial phase starts at 11:58AM (CDT)
- Totality starts at 1:26PM (CDT)
- Partial phase ends at 2:53PM (CDT)

All participants should wear eclipse glasses such as these: [eclipse glasses](#). Check the [eclipse map](#) to see the full eclipse path.

Don't wait too long on this. A total solar eclipse is an international event so good rooms will go quickly.

Contact Vince by March 11<sup>th</sup> at [vincent6355@att.net](mailto:vincent6355@att.net) so he can gauge interest.

## MSTR Newsletter & Website

The MSTR Newsletter and Website ([www.mstriders.com/](http://www.mstriders.com/)) belong to you, the riders. They both can only be as good and as interesting as you make them. If you've got something to say about a ride, your bike, perhaps a trip you're planning, whatever, send it in for the newsletter and/or website to:

Ian Orr: [Communications@mstriders.com](mailto:Communications@mstriders.com)

## MSTR Photo Gallery

The MSTR maintains a SmugMug photo gallery (<https://mstriders.smugmug.com/>) to allow riders to upload and download pictures of various club events. Upload and download passwords are sent out to participants for each event. Click on the above link or visit the MSTR website and select the MSTR Photo Gallery link to check out all the event pictures.

## MSTR Dealer Members & News

**BMW Motorcycles of SE Michigan**  
[www.bmwmcsem.com/](http://www.bmwmcsem.com/)



**BMW North America  
National Spring Open House**  
Saturday, March 25, 2017  
10 am - 4 pm

Demo Rides  
Storewide Savings  
[Stay tuned](#) for further details...

**BMW of Grand Rapids**  
[www.bmwmcgr.com/](http://www.bmwmcgr.com/)



Riding season is officially here. Before you open it up on the open road, drop by BMW Motorcycles of Grand Rapids on Saturday, March 25, 2017 for BMW Motorrad's National Open House. Find everything you need to gear up for the best riding season yet: all the latest apparel and equipment, the newest BMW motorcycles and special financing offers on select models. When you visit BMW Motorcycles of Grand Rapids between March 21-25, 2017 you could win your choice of a brand new EnduroGuard, StreetGuard, or Black Leather riding jacket. While you're at the

dealership, just post a photo of your dream BMW motorcycle on Instagram with the hashtag [#RideAndShine](#), and you'll automatically be entered to win. We will be having a customer appreciation breakfast with pancakes and sausage! Lots of great deals to be had on parts, accessories, gear and even motorcycles! Don't miss out!

---

## College Bike Shop

[www.collegebikeshop.com/](http://www.collegebikeshop.com/)



## Ducati Detroit

[www.ducatidetroit.com/](http://www.ducatidetroit.com/)



## Fox Powersports

[www.foxpowersports.com/](http://www.foxpowersports.com/)






Please patronize the following businesses owned by your fellow MSTR Members, whenever possible.

**Chip Ashton**

**CJ'S HEAD & HOLE SHOP**  
*Head & Boring Service for 2 & 4 cycle engines*  
248-683-6344

1140 Shady Lane ♦ Waterford, MI 48327

**BellaCorse** SEL-MOTION MOTORSPORTS MARKETING  
POB 760403, LATHRUP VILLAGE, MI 48076  
TEL: 248.569.2850 FAX: 309.422.2407  
[www.bellacorse.com](http://www.bellacorse.com)



**MICHAEL SELMAN**  
sales@bellacorse.com

1-248-853-4333

**Glenn V Brechner Welding, Inc.**

303 S. Grey Rd  
Auburn Hills, MI 48326

web site [www.mywelder.net](http://www.mywelder.net) e-mail [qvbweldinginc@aol.com](mailto:qvbweldinginc@aol.com)

"metal welded or brazed repair or production"

**Get a GRIP!** **PETE MEYER**

**HAMMERGRIPS**  
CUSTOM CUT TANK GRIPS



[bighammer@chartermi.net](mailto:bighammer@chartermi.net)  
(231) 499-7935  
1800 Nelson Rd.  
Traverse City, MI 49686


**OZONE BIKE WORKS**

Dave "O" Ostaszewski  
State Certified Master Motorcycle Mechanic  
We service all makes, models, foreign and domestic.

Union Lake, MI • 313.663.2836  
[daveo@ozonebikeworks.com](mailto:daveo@ozonebikeworks.com) • [ozonebikeworks.com](http://ozonebikeworks.com)

**OUR COMPLETE LIST OF PERSONALIZED SERVICES**

- Mechanical repair and maintenance of all brands
- Cylinder boring and valve-jobs
- Carburetor cleaning, restoration and synchronizing
- Plastic and metal repair
- OEM, powder coating, replica and custom painting
- Accessory installations (GPS, electrical, lights, exhaust and suspension)
- Tire changing and disposal
- Free pick-up and delivery within 20 miles
- Servicing sport, dirt, touring and cruiser bikes.



**WILLIAM W. WEBB, PRIVATE ATTORNEY**  
248-647-9000  
Author of the The Traffic Ticket Maze  
<http://statebar.net/trafficticket.pdf>



BMW Motorcycles of Grand Rapids



Blane Kamp  
General Manager

616.530.6900  
Fax: 616.530.8421  
5995 South Division Grand Rapids, MI 49548  
blane.kamp@bmwmcgr.com / www.bmwmcgr.com

January 2017  
FREE



midwestmotorcyclist.com

**Midwest Motorcyclist**  
Celebrating 19 Years  
The Complete Guide to Motorcycling in the Midwest



Last Ride of 2016

Also in this issue:  
The Future of Motorcycling  
The Fall 2016 Slimey Crud Run  
Tested: Taichi RST 608 Winter Glove

Happy New Year!



**DUCATI DETROIT** 248.792.8999  
MICHIGAN'S EXCLUSIVE DUCATI DEALER

33828 Woodward Ave  
Birmingham, MI 48009 | [DucatiDetroit.com](http://DucatiDetroit.com)

