



**The HOG Trip**

By Kenn Hartmann

By virtue of buying one of the last Shovelheads in 1984, I received a membership to HOG & their invite to a VIP tent at the motorcycle races at Road America. The invite was packaged with a patch, a pin, a newsletter & a road map to anywhere USA & beyond. Old time bikers were glad of The Motor Company's takeover from AMF but wary of the corporate future.

I had been staying in a basement flat off Cicero & Division with a Mexican girl whose real name was one thing but her alias was another. 'Alias what?' I asked. 'Alias anythin yu want,' she said. 'How about Consuela?' I asked. 'No,' she said, 'definitely not!' She showed me her green cards; there were 4 or 5. 'Pick one of these,' she said, 'that's who I'll be.' I picked Rita, but she gave me Anna. I always blew the candle out before bed, for safety I thought, until she explained a ritual called Novena. I had my own ritual in the darkness of the basement flat. I had my Shovelhead chained to a chain link fence in the gangway outside the window. I had a string of beer cans tied together & balanced on chain guard, brake pedal & air-cleaner. I dropped a few pebbles into each can – high tech security. That & Anna's pistol on nightstand next to box spring she called a bed. The local gang bangers gave me a pass because I was Anna's boyfriend & that as beautiful as she was she was also volatile & dangerous.

In the pre-dawn hours, I rolled out of Chicago & arrived in Wisconsin at West Bend in time for the 8am HOG-sponsored ride to the racetrack in Elkhart Lake. The cops blocked off intersections & people lined the county roads to see us roar through Kettle Moraine country. At the track, I parked between a Ducati & a Panhead. The owner of the '65 nick-named Panny invited me to hangout with his rocking gang. A few yuppies nearby were certain the HOG VIP tent was filled with celebs like Malcolm Forbes & Liz Taylor. The racers screamed past on the track. Panny said, 'let's go grab some beer & find Jay Springsteen.' He asked my name & I gave him an alias, I figured what the hell? Later that night, we cruised through misty bog & cranberry marsh biker bars of Fond Du Lac & Sheboygan counties. When addressed with my alias I'd say, 'Who??? Oh, yeah, sure, let's ride.' The bars closed & we geared up beneath the last crackling neon flicker. This was my own motorcycle; my first Harley & I twisted the throttle hard; we lunged onto a dark empty road. Two bikes ahead & the headlamp reflections bobbed off shadows of pine along black highway. In my mirror just the faint glow of my own taillight. I thought about Anna & Chicago or what I left behind. I felt the chilly grip of lowlands & cool midnight swamp. Our bikes naturally fell into formation around swooping bends & I embraced the dream – the reality of wild wind in my face, no shield just wide-eyed joy, not caring how far or where, just a sweet sound coming from pipes howling beneath the moon. Not drunk from taverns & gin mills, but delirious from the ride & the sweep of Harley history pulsing through my veins, like riding rampant into an immense David Mann nocturne mural. I followed the bikes up a gravel driveway to a farmhouse where they gave me a room. In the morning, Panny & his wife made breakfast.


It took a couple days to get back to Sweet Home. I stopped in Horicon for a night & I thought of my father who had died six months earlier. We once had an argument about the massive marsh. I boasted, "That swamp ain't that big – I bet I could walk across it." My father pulled over on the shoulder & said, "don't be absurd!" I told him, "Wait 'til winter." I stopped in Lake Geneva for a couple nights. Got tattooed. I guess you can chalk this whole episode as HOG getting me out of the city.

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