

**"...taking it to the bike. "**

Greetings fellow wanderers. In my last installment I promised a story about the Circle of Pride group's legendary Labor Day bash in Conesville, Iowa. So here goes; Sat. AM my esteemed companions, Jack and Dick and I snarfed breakfast in the main pavilion, perused the swap meet, said our goodbyes and booked out westward along Hwy. 22 , following the mighty Miss(always the scenic route, don't ya know.) Putting merrily along- got to watching a float plane negotiating a landing. He buzzed the wide, flat stretch of water 4 times and pulled up at the last second each one. I was so wanting to see the thing splashdown , I almost did an undignified landing myself – right into the rear end of a horse trailer without brake or turn lights who suddenly decided to change course in the middle of a blind corner. Thanks for good brakes, Milwaukee!

Stopped for a cool respite in Muscatine. Heading out, we tagged along with a good-sized mob we figured to be party types. Good guess; better yet they knew the short cut I would've missed (no signs.) It having been 6 yrs. since I'd been here as well, I expected some changes but wasn't prepared for the SIZE of this sucker. The spectator lot alone was the size of the whole shebang last time- freakin' huge! To avoid hassles, the group owns the property. This keeps peace in the neighborhood- pay to get in the gate, leave and come back and pay again. Keeps partiers from wrangling with locals and raising Cain in the surrounding communities.

The welcome wagon was a dude on a softail hooked to a trailer made from a coffin – filled with four lovelies welcoming one and all to the celebration. They were in the mood to party themselves, equipped as they were with beers from multiple admirers. Did I neglect to mention they were also dressed(or, rather undressed) for the warm, sunny day that it was? We thought we'd brought all that we needed – who'd a known to bring beads - the ladies asked only for beads. Luckily, one guy an avenue down had raided a "Dollar Store" on the way down and the beauties were feted as they so richly deserved.

The drag strip fired up several times during the afternoon; shutting down for cool-down, tuneup, etc. between elimination rounds.

Last time I was here the dragstrip was a tad on the short side. The 1/8th. mile was the right length, there was a shortage of shutdown area. That problem's been addressed, the strip has been lengthened twice – lots safer now. Serious drag racers, these fellas. The announcer was a little hard on ricer racers but ALL the entrants gave it their best shot and were fun to watch.

Bopping around, checking the scene; noticed a number of permanent buildings that formerly were tents. The Circle of Pride group has been working long hours and it shows. There's still lots of tents; vendor's tents, mechanical bull tent, bike show tent, camper's tents. The showers are a nice addition as is the kitchen and the main building that houses the bar as well as the arm-wrestling tournament. The rodeo arena keeps busy all weekend: the ultimate fighting contest, the bull-riding , the bull-baiting and others we missed. Entertainment of all sorts abounds. Caught part of the "bag lady" act. She looked, acted and sounded like Ruth Gordon (remember her from Eastwood's "Every Which Way But Loose"?) in a trench coat. At the conclusion of the act, she kicks off her shoes, those saggy, baggy old stockings and she ... wait a minute ... I won't spoil it for you. If you get a chance catch her act – "The Bag Lady"- it's a hoot! Every night the main stage has entertainment. We caught the "Randall Zwartey Band" on Sat PM -they rocked exceedingly - did a spot-on rendition of the Rolling Stone's "Gimme Shelter" (a hard song to play .) and they flat –out nailed it.

Walking thru the campground to the main stage area we were hailed by a friendly group who asked Jack to take their picture. Got to talking and discovered they were an ecumenical bunch, indeed; hailing from all over the U.S.- Washington D.C., North Dakota, Missouri, Iowa and more . We asked how they all came to be together and they said they'd met 6yrs. ago and the same bunch had a reunion each year at this same party. We told 'em to watch for Free Riders Press, we'd try to get their picture in.

The most popular tent all day had to be " Dime bag Darrel's body painting." Spectators lined up all day , as did ladies willing to bare their bodies for the man's artistic touch. Artistic he was , too. If you've seen Playboy's painted ladies you have a pretty close picture of what the man accomplished. He did whimsical, artsy , landscape , animal likenesses and even a couple gals with no clothes at all to start with came out pretty well outfitted – you had to look close to tell they were not actually wearing clothes at all .

The main stage had a Charlie Daniels lookalike singing pretty entertaining ditties and slipping a little humor in now and then. Toward the end of his routine an acoustic guitar-player harmonized a bit then struck out into his own act, joined by his song-writing and singing wife. They had a polished gig and had the audience going pretty good. I hope I'm getting across the idea that one guy expressed quite well to me, " If you can't find something here this weekend that floats your boat – your boat's already sunk."

Six years ago when I was here I managed to talk to Possum (the main guy) and he told me that all the help from the vendors, the volunteers and all the anonymous people behind the scenes was what made this thing fly; he just helped steer . I couldn't find Possum this time, but I did talk to a few of the workers and to a man they told me that this party would not work without Possum; that he was unfailingly the driving force that made it all come together. Speaks volumes, doesn't it? Mutual respect and hard work make this a party I'm keeping on my social calendar. Till next time remember" Failure's not in the falling down, but in the staying down." Winona Bob

