

Marybell by Walter Wersching

It was late October 2004 when I first heard about Marybell, though I didn't know it at the time. I saw an ad in the local classifieds that stated "Old motorcycle for sale – 124 Sleeping Bear Lane, Busick, NC". I remembered where Busick, NC was from my trips to Roaring Fork Falls. It's located on rt. 80 just north of the Blueridge Parkway. It is a very small mountain community. I decided to take a ride up there next Saturday. If nothing else, I'll enjoy the ride in the mountains.

It was a pleasant day. The color was almost gone from the trees but was still a very nice ride. It was in the mid-50's in the mountains with plenty of sun. It took me some time to locate 124 Sleeping Bear Lane. It was an old farmhouse at the end of a gravel road. I rode up the deeply rutted driveway, walked onto the weathered unpainted porch and knocked on the old wooden screen door. A man in his 80's wearing a pair of dirty and torn bib overalls with only one strap over his shoulders opened the door. With a growl, he asked me "what the hell you want?" I showed him a copy of the ad and asked if I could see the "old motorcycle" he has for sale. He warmed up immediately and said: "You're here to see Marybell."

I didn't know what he was talking about but I followed him to a small weather beaten shed next to the barn. With a little effort, he opened the door. The hinges were very rusty and didn't want to move. He walked into the shed and removed the cover from the motorcycle. Dust engulfed the inside of the shed. Each particle was highlighted in the bright sunlight coming through the opened door. After a few seconds, I could see the motorcycle. To my astonishment, it was a 1965 Harley-Davidson Electroglide. The tires were flat and the bike was dusty but it was all there. It was beautiful! (The 1965 Harley was the last year of the panhead engine and the first year of the electric start. It had the best of both and was very rare.)

My eyes must have gotten as big as saucers. With a smile, the old man asked if I liked Marybell. I said yes definitely. He didn't want to sell her but he had to sell the farm. There would be no place for Marybell. I walked around Marybell looking closely at her. Someone spent a lot of time restoring her. Everything was just like it came from the factory forty years ago.

I introduced myself and learned his name was Jed Wilson. The motorcycle belonged to his grandson Josh. Jed invited me to sit on the porch for awhile as he told me about Josh and Marybell.

Larry, Josh's dad, bought Marybell new in 1965 and named it after a girlfriend he had in high school. He rode it for over twenty years until in 1986, a drunk driver ran him and Marybell off the road. The wreck killed Larry and all but destroyed Marybell. Josh was only fourteen at the time and Marybell was all he had left of his father. Josh decided to bring the pile of broken motorcycle parts back to life. It took him almost two years to get Marybell back on the road. He saved all his spending money and hunted everywhere to find parts to replace the ones broken in his dad's crash.

When Josh was sixteen, Marybell was roadworthy but was still missing many of her parts. Most of Josh's friends had crotch rockets and choppers. They teased Josh about Marybell being too heavy and slow. Josh didn't mind going slower. He really loved Marybell and the feeling he got when he was riding her.

Josh rode Marybell regularly all the while looking for the parts that would make her perfect. Marybell seemed to appreciate the effort. She never broke down even though some of her parts were badly worn. Everyone in town could hear the slow mellow tones of Marybell as she climbed the hills.

Josh had her just about perfect when he disappeared. He went hunting one fall day and was never seen again. They found his truck but never found him; even after weeks of intense searching. That was ten years ago. Marybell has been sitting in the shed ever since waiting for Josh to ride her again.

That was Marybell's story. Jed and I talked some more about his farm and where he was going to live. Then it came time to ask the all-important question: how much was he asking for Marybell? It was a very rare find in exceptional condition. The only drawback was that she had been in that shed under that cover for ten years. A lot can happen



Gotta Love The Fiction...

to the insides of any motor vehicle that sits for a long time. The repair cost can be very expensive.

I asked Jed the question and he told me to make an offer. I always offer low so we can negotiate to what he really wants for it. I offered him \$1,000 for Marybell. I almost fell off the chair when he said OK. The only stipulation was that I keep her original and ride her regularly. That was no problem. I love riding old Harleys and it would be a sacrilege to modify one in such perfect condition. He wouldn't take any money down. He said that she was mine when I came for her.

I was there with my El Camino the next day. I brought an air tank to inflate Marybell's tires so they'll roll up the ramp more easily onto the back of the El Camino. I gave Jed the money and wished him well. He was a very sad and lonely man. He really missed Josh. I thought that he was going to cry when I pulled away with Marybell in the back.

When I got her home, I carefully unloaded her and rolled her into the garage. I wiped her down to see that the black and white paint was still perfect along with all her chrome - no pits or rust anywhere. The next thing was to drain all her fluids. Petroleum based fluids like gas, oil, brake fluid, etc. turn toxic after a few years. In their toxic state, they can eat through metal causing holes in the carburetor, gas tank and even the engine.

The first thing I did was to drain the gas from the tank. Gas will stink and turn brown and gummy after a short time. This clogs up everything. To my surprise, the gas came out smelling fresh and was clear. I drained the carb and there was no deterioration. It looked as if she was parked a week ago – not ten years.

The next thing was to try and turn her over. Sometime engines get rusty and freeze up when stored. With a slight push down on the kick-starter, I knew that Marybell's engine was as free as when it left the factory, forty years ago.

The next was the engine oil. Again, Marybell surprised me. Her oil was clean, like it had just been changed. The same with the transmission fluid, front fork oil and even the brake fluid was clean when I bled the rear brake. I had never seen the fluids this well preserved in a vehicle that was stored for so long.

After all the fluids were changed, I checked the battery. It was dead. Normally I would have bought a new battery. Motorcycle batteries don't last over four or five years - much less over ten. But Marybell was definitely different. I charged the battery and it took a charge.

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