



By Myself

By Jim Scott

I have ridden a lot with other people. Some not so good. Others far better than me. I have adjusted pretty well. Only one incident which turned out worse for the guy who hit my posterior. And the lesson I have taken is that I really like small groups, or one other person. I do like having someone for conversation at stops, leading when I want to unplug my sense as to where in the world I am, or should be, procuring fuel when I run out, and sharing in libations and music around the camp fire. They also come in handy carrying the snacks, beer, and wine from the stop-n-rob to the room in the event of a diversion to a motel evening. My old friend Pat Fleming, now of Little Rock, Arkansas, was the best at this. Doug, Joe, Dave, Tricer, and others were great to travel with as well, but Pat and I seemed to have a symbiosis that got us through a lot.

I think the major factor in our success was the understanding that "You ride your own horse." This was the mantra of our trips. He is a much better rider than I am. When his Zen kicks in, he makes my Zonk quite pronounced. His bikes were faster and more agile. His training was more extensive and he worked at refining it. Long and short of it, I did a lot of catching up. Not that I held him back....well, maybe a little. Rather, we each enjoyed the ride in our own way.

Once in the mountains of Colorado, he had me lead so he would stay in some sort of control.

Since he moved 800 miles away, we don't get to do what we enjoyed much anymore. Maybe once a year. So I have found myself riding alone a lot more....and enjoying it. Something that came when I started collecting Social Security while my friends were still contributing. There seems to be a few more required stops at my age. Nice not to have to inconvenience another to accommodate my comfort. Routine stops often lead to conversations with other riders, or those who wish they were. My schedule allows for that when I don't find myself holding up my companions. It also allows me to get on my way instead of waiting for someone else to shut up.

I admit, there are moments of sensing the alone-ness of traveling solo. Diversions like radios, Mp3 players, and the above mentioned stops can dilute those times, but they creep in. A good understanding of one's place in the world will usually assuage them. I compare myself to people who settled an uncharted voyage across this country. I wonder what kind of faith it took to leave comforts, familiar lands, families, and friends to discover what the world offered. The amenities of a good machine, nice roads, available accommodations, and the pleasantries of a good ride soon crowd out any melancholy.

These offerings came to mind while I was reading a book titled Leanings 3. If you read a magazine called Cycle World, you will remember that term Leanings was the column heading for Peter Egan, one of the most distinguished and respected motorcycle writers out there. He has retired from doing a regular piece, but he had compiled a number of his works into the above mentioned book, which I recommend. In July of 2006 he wrote one called The Fine Art of Riding Your Own Bike. I found myself nodding in agreement and actually saying "Yes" out loud to no one's hearing. He talks about riding in the front of a group, riding in the group, and bringing up the rear of a group. It dawned on him that some leaders are too fast; some too slow. Some in the middle are attentive and careful; some a tad sloppy and scary to be close to. Some at the back....well, they are usually there for a reason; either their own, or someone's recommendation. I have been in all of the above. I know from whence he speaks.

Two of us once convinced a friend to ride the winding highway along the Wisconsin River to Prairie du Chien. We put him in the middle. Him being short on experience. Pretty soon, the leader was out of sight doing pretty much the speed limit, and I damn near rear ended our friend on every corner. Eventually we caught up to the leader when we found him parked in a driveway waiting for us. My frustration level was way above my pleasure level. Another time, the same three of us were heading south on a four lane road. This time, our friend was where he liked to be; in the back. We had to pull off and wait at an overpass for him to catch up, us doing the speed limit. There are numerous stories in the same vein.

The bottom line is that group rides can be whatever you want to make them. Solo riding can grow on you. The best way to enjoy any of them is to ride your own horse....your way.

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