

Chama, NM Road Ride

By Jeff Herrscher

On Memorial Day weekend, three members of the Sunflower Chapter set out on a road ride in New Mexico. The three members were Terry Sawyer, Jeff Roth and myself. This ride wasn't an AMCA event although all the riders are members of the AMCA. There were fourteen bikes ridden, the riders were from many different states, some as far away as Pennsylvania and all of the bikes were antiques (ten Indians, three Harleys and one Vincent). Upon arrival at the Elkhorn Lodge in Chama, Michael Breeding joked that everyone there had a picture of his bike in his wallet. Then I realized that the Chief he brought ("Yellow-dog") was the bike on our AMCA club cards.

There were three days of riding planned. Chama is near the northern border of New Mexico and some of the riding would take us into southern Colorado. The landscape in this area varies within short distances so we had riding planned for roads that went high over mountain passes and down into low desert areas and into canyons. Everybody had their machines in top running condition. I was glad that my Chief had a "shakedown" ride at Wilson, KS the previous weekend which exposed a breached gasket at the oil sump. I had since made the repair, tested the bike and was ready for this challenge – riding over rugged terrain with no trouble-truck.

The first day we rode north out of Chama into Colorado towards Antonito. The plan was to turn south at Conejos back into New Mexico, gas-up at a crossroads known as Tres Piedras and then turn west. The ride started-out on hilly, mountainous roads and gave way to flat, low roads with mountains in the distance as we got further into Colorado. Our gas stop didn't supply us with any gas, though. It seems that the station had closed-down since the route was planned. After quizzing everybody on the status of the gas levels in their machines, our leader (Todd Vinzant from CO) directed us to turn east to make it to the nearest gas (Taos, NM). It was noted that some of the motorcycles had larger-capacity tanks and if worse-came-to-worse a gas-transfer could be made by the side of the road. It never came to that, but every now and then somebody would slow down and turn-on their reserve gas tank.

We made it into Taos without anybody running out of gas and had lunch at a place called Eske's in Taos. A specialty of Eske's is green-chili beer. Mostly everybody at the table I was at had the green-chili beer so the waitress brought us several pitchers of it. I had the green-chili stew as well and in my opinion it was a lunch that was hard to beat. After that I was somewhat glad we had diverted to Taos.

Our plan after lunch was to depart Taos by the same way we came in. Once we got back on the highway we stopped at the Rio Grande gorge for some site-seeing. Most people are familiar with the Rio Grande river as it defines the border between southern Texas and Mexico,

but the river starts in Colorado and runs through New Mexico before running between Texas and Mexico and finally into the Gulf of Mexico. West of Taos the highway crosses a bridge that spans a huge gorge that the Rio Grande has carved. After we parked our bikes, I looked at what was being sold by the road-side vendors at the gorge and then walked out onto the bridge and looked over into the gorge for a spectacular view. When I got back to our bunch some of our riders were laughing at the comical site I made as with one hand I held onto my hat and with the other I was holding onto the railing while carefully making my way across the bridge. After starting our bikes again, we proceeded west back to Tres Piedras and then resumed our planned route west on highway 64 for some incredible riding. After Tres Piedras we got back into mountains and rode over a high pass. We stopped for gas in Tierra Amarilla before getting back to Chama, approaching it from the south and completing a loop that ended-up being over 200 miles in length.

Day 2: We left Chama going west towards Dulce. As the place we were staying at was a mile south of Chama, we started out by going north to Chama for the first gas stop of the day. It was there that as I was attempting to lean my Chief on its side stand and the stand folded forward. I was able to catch my bike before it fell completely over and it was decided that I could continue, but we'd have to find a suitable item at every stop to provide a "stand". The rest of the day we used logs, rocks, pieces of concrete, bricks and whatever we could find at every stop to prop my bike up.

Our lunch stop was at a roadhouse in the desert called "Navajo City". After securing my Chief with a couple of bricks, we ate on an outdoor patio with a terrific view. I heard somebody say that it looked like something out of the "Roadrunner" cartoons. After lunch (green chili cheeseburger for me) we proceeded north toward Ignacio, CO. We stopped there for a quick break and I spotted a place to park near a pile of old lumber which could provide some excellent stand material. I parked next to it and one of my riding buddies selected some choice boards for the task and I was able to dismount. When we left that spot we gassed-up before leaving Ignacio and I was assisted so I could get my credit-card out for a little pay-at-the-pump action without even putting my bike on a stand. We left Ignacio east towards Pagosa Springs. When we stopped at Pagosa Springs, after somebody found a big rock for my bike, we took a break at a restaurant on an outdoor patio overlooking the springs. There was a cool breeze blowing through there that hit the spot. After that we departed to return back to Chama, completing another loop that exceeded 200 miles.

Back at the Elkhorn Lodge I found that if I pulled my bike up real close to the front porch of the cabin I was staying in, I could lean my bike over to the right and the handlebar would rest on a porch post and would keep the bike upright there. I looked under the bike and took the stand leg off. The frame looked okay, but the stand was worn-off where there is normally a projection that rests against the frame. Michael Breeding looked at it and identified it as a sub-standard reproduction that was made in the early eighties. He said he might have one more of his good

reproduction ones left but I'd have to figure something out to do for the remainder of the trip. Todd Vinzant supplied me with a 4 x 6 chunk of wood and Tommie Freed modified it with a battery-powered sawzall and drill. I ran some small rope through the hole Tommie drilled and I had a custom-made wooden stand for the rest of the trip. After starting my bike and picking it up, the stand could be removed much like the early airplane pilots did with their wheel-chocks. I was still dependent upon my friends whenever I started or stopped, but there was no more searching for an impromptu stand at every stop.

Day 3: We left Chama going south. Since our lodge was just outside of Chama to the south, we were never actually in Chama that morning. Our first gas stop was planned at a small community called Tierra Amarilla that's just south of Chama. Just before going up a hill previous to our stop, my bike lost half of its power. I barely made it up the long hill far behind the rest of the pack. I was thinking "this is like riding a 741". When I made it to the gas station where everybody was waiting, my bike was held up by friends, the discovery was made that one of my spark plug wires had come off, the problem was corrected, I gassed-up, started my bike and resumed the ride without even putting my bike on the chunk of wood. That was the last mechanical malfunction my bike had the rest of the trip.

We continued and turned east on highway 64 towards Tres Piedras. We rode the same stretch of highway that we rode the first day but in the opposite direction over the mountain pass. At Tres Piedras we turned south which was the only direction from that intersection we had not been yet. We were back in desert again. Our destination was Ojo Caliente for lunch. At the only diner in town the waitress told us that we'd have to wait a little while to get served. She was right, we had to wait a little while but it was worth it. When she got to us we were served well and the food was great. I had huevos rancheros with (you guessed it) green chili. After lunch we gassed-up and rode through desert and canyon areas and stopped to take a break at a rest area that had a single picnic table under a single shelter out in the middle of nowhere. We were down low in an area that had high sand buttes and red sand canyon walls nearby. The place provided an incredible view. The temperature wasn't real hot but I could imagine it getting that way later in the summer.

After resting a bit, we continued west on highway 84, stopping to view a natural amphitheatre that formed in a canyon wall. It felt good when we got in the shadow of it and got away from the sun for a little bit. After spending a little time at the amphitheatre, we got back on our bikes and continued in a northerly direction back to Chama and the end of the ride. This ride can be considered to be rougher than the average but it was a lot of fun to someone who just likes to ride old iron. I know I won't forget it.