

Wilson Road Ride

By Jeff Herrscher

On Saturday May 19, 2007 the small town of Wilson, KS was awakened to the sound of motorcycles thanks to the Sunflower Chapter of the AMCA. Nineteen motorcycles gathered to go on a ride through this area that would last the day. A '57 Harley Panhead refused to start that morning and it was speculated that its electronic ignition was shorted. The bike was loaded without even starting on the ride and another Harley Panhead (1950) was also loaded as the riders were together and didn't want to separate.

After taking pictures, the bikes were all being started for the ride when I remembered my cell phone was still on the charger in my hotel room. I ran in and grabbed it just when everybody was pulling out. All was quiet as I kicked my Chief to life. My stepson, Landen, waited patiently as I got the bike running and he got on the tandem seat I had just installed. As luck would have it, a train appeared cutting me off from the rest of the pack and detaining me further. Bill Gordon drove the trouble-truck and waited until I got down the road. There were a couple of "Bobs" on modern Harleys that brought up the rear.

Our route that day was essentially a figure-eight on the map but we didn't follow it like an "eight". We were to go west out of Wilson and turn North at Dorrance toward Wilson Lake. When I approached Dorrance, I kept alert for the turn but didn't realize until I was already past Dorrance that the small intersection I thought was too small was the one. I stopped, turned around and saw that Bill in the trouble-van and the two Bobs on the Harleys had taken the turn and were stopped by the same train that had held us up in Wilson. By the time I got to the train crossing the train had already cleared and I didn't even have to stop. Bill let me get in front of the van and I went across followed by the van and the two Bobs.

We went north toward Wilson Lake. The road would take us out on a point of land in the lake and the plan was to go there for a stop and then turn around and proceed on. The road on the point was real high-up and there was a camper pulling a boat going real slow in front of me. Just as I was thinking of passing, one of the Bobs pulled up next to me and said that the reason the camper was going so slow is that the road drops-off up ahead. Thanks, Bob! You saved me from going around the camper and bailing off the hill. That would have been a crummy way to end the day, before lunch even.

As I went down the steep road down the hill, I was met by our group of riders going the other way. Later Bob Christian told me that they hadn't even stopped. They just did a u-turn and went back south. I turned my Chief around and joined the rest of the group. We turned

east onto a blacktop road that would take us to Lucas. I think that road was my favorite. It was hilly with a lot of turns. It made me think of being on a roller-coaster the way you'd be up real high and then you'd drop down into a valley.

Before getting to Lucas I saw a trailer that looked familiar to me being pulled. We stopped and parked our bikes in a lot when the truck pulling the trailer pulled-up and out came Scott Hall and Buud Redmond who had brought bikes up for the ride. When they unloaded and joined us we were back up to nineteen. We got back on the road again and Craig Zabel's '31 Harley VL started sputtering and popping. When we got to Lucas there was a gas station there and Craig pulled in. I pulled in as well to check out my Chief that had been leaking an unusual amount of oil (even for my bike). After deciding that my oil leak wasn't to the extent that I had to stop, I proceeded to The Garden of Eden to join the rest of the group. Craig decided to stay at the station. Lucas is a small town, so I knew that we wouldn't be very far from Craig.

The Garden of Eden is the former residence of Samuel P. Dinsmore, a Civil War veteran who was very outspoken and created a half-acre of concrete sculptures on his land. A lot of his work was made to make political statements. To say the place is bizarre is an understatement. The body of Samuel himself is on the premises in a mausoleum he constructed. The tour guide will even hold a flashlight so you can take a look at him though a thick pane of glass. I was there when Buud Redmond took a look and said "He don't look too bad".

After leaving The Garden of Eden, we returned to the service station where Craig was still working with his VL. After deciding Craig had more than enough help, I showed Landen around so he could see what a real, old-time service station that still did repairs was like. There was a young guy there with an oil drum on a lift turned over a can so he could get the last bit out.

Eventually Craig decided to load-up the VL on the trailer behind the van. I had somebody else take a look at my oil leak. It was decided that it was leaking where the sump meets the crankcase and I should keep an eye on it but it wasn't extreme enough that I should load-up yet. From there we went east to Lincoln, then south to Ellsworth and lunch. After lunch we went east to highway 141 then south by Kanopolis Lake. When we got to highway 4 we turned west and gassed-up in Geneseo. By that time Landen had decided he had enough of riding the tandem seat on the back of the Chief. There was enough room in the trouble van for him to finish the ride in that.

We left Geneseo and headed west toward highway 14. At highway 14 we turned north and after getting up to speed, Jim Wellemeyer pulled-up and told me that my bike was doing a lot of smoking. I pulled over and shut off. I examined the oil tank that was low, but far from being empty. After kicking it through a few times, I decided to start it and asked Jim to watch

closely and let me know if anything catastrophic happened. After starting it, I let it idle and was able to take a good look underneath. The oil was just pulsating out from between the sump and the crankcase. I shut it off right then. Apparently the smoking Jim saw was from the motor wet-sumping and oil getting into the combustion chamber. Bill pulled the van & trailer up and I loaded the oily Chief. Now there was one Harley and one Indian on the trailer so it could be said that it was an even day.

The rest of the ride went on without a hitch. We went back to Wilson, loaded up for the trip home and had a good supper. It was mentioned that there are more good roads to ride on in that area. With the Midland Hotel in Wilson more than sufficient to take care of our requirements I speculate we'll be back.

Author's note: My leaking oil sump was solved with a new gasket. Since this ride I took the bike to New Mexico and it performed well except for a broken kick-stand and a spark-plug wire that came loose. Ah, these old bikes!