

Apex

January 2021

Looking Through The Curve

Official newsletter of Bluegrass Beemers, Inc. Lexington, Kentucky
MOA #146 RA #49 <http://www.bluegrassbeemers.org>



At the TN end of the
Cherohola Parkway



Peaks of the Otter Lodge as it was in 2006

Bluegrass Beemers Email List

Yahoo! Groups is no more. If there is a desire for a replacement email list, I can look for one. Just let me know by sending an email to apex@bluegrassbeemers.org Thanks!

***Apex* is the official newsletter of Bluegrass Beemers, Inc.
Lexington, Kentucky MOA #146 RA #49**

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Deadline for submissions is the last day of the month.

Back issues of *Apex* can be accessed on our website

**Join us at Frisch's on Harrodsburg Rd.
in Lexington, Kentucky on any Saturday, 8-9:00 a.m.**

**BMW Club
Bluegrass Beemers**



2020 COVID Blue Ridge Trip

By John Rice

The Blue Ridge Parkway/Skyline Drive is a wonder. I have not been everywhere, but I've been a lot of places in the US, 49 of the 50 states (only 2 that I haven't ridden a motorcycle in...but I'm not done yet) and as far as I know, this stretch of road is unique. 574 miles without a stop sign or traffic light. Few side roads and intersections. And the curves. Nearly continuous, mostly excellent pavement and not a one that can't be taken on most motorcycles at the speed limit of 45 mph (now 35 in more places than before). But it's the radius of the curves that is most special. On most "public" roads one can't be certain that the radius won't change in the middle of a turn, some hinkey kink somewhere, a driveway entrance on the exit of a blind curve, a drop away hill, etc, etc. But on the parkway and skyline, every curve is perfectly made so that the rider (or driver, if you like those car-things) knows what's coming when you go in and can just get into the zen of it all. Even if there is traffic on the road, chances are good that they will pull into the next overlook, and if they don't, you can do so and just enjoy the fantastic view for a minute or two to let the other guy get down the way a bit. If one could close the thing to others for a day (a common fantasy) it would be possible (fuel and bladder permitting) to do the whole thing without touching a brake, just swinging back and forth in an endless series of side to side motion.

In my misspent youth, back in the early 80's when I first started coming to this wonderful

road, I was for a while too focused on speed, on taking each turn as fast as I was able to do. I missed a lot that way. One can view this road as rideable art, a huge canvas of marvels spread out in front of the viewer who can glide through it as if on the proverbial magic carpet, taking in the sights, the smells, the ever-changing flora and fauna while enjoying the delicious physical sensation of leaning into curve after curve.

We, some combination of Jay, Brenda and I, try to make at least one trip there, part or all of it, each year. Fall is the best time, in my opinion, but it is wonderful in any of the three seasons that it is open. This Year of Plague had curtailed much travel, but as the good weather options were drawing to a close at the end of summer, a brief window opened when Jay thought we could make a run.

We left on a late September Sunday morning in cool sunshine, the after-storm blue sky and puffy white clouds overhead, with the remnants of Hurricane Laura headed east barely in front of us and another wave of her rain coming up from behind. But we managed to stay in that good bubble as we buzzed through eastern Kentucky, into West Va, past Huntington, making the northward turn to follow Route 2 the Ohio River.

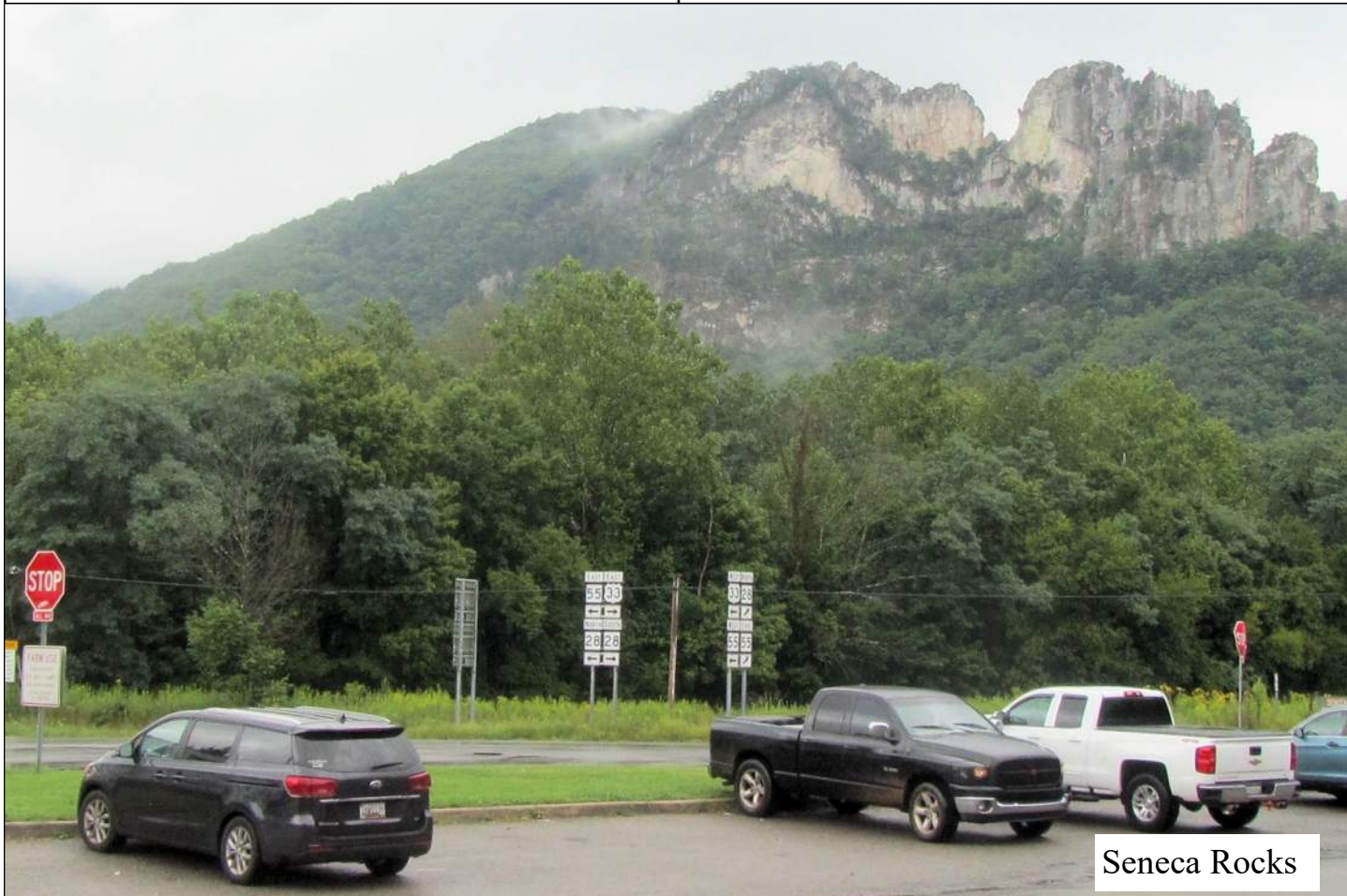
COVID-care meant that our only lunch option came at a small town Wendy's, seated at a distant outside table since there were few masks other than ours in sight. We picked up

Route 33, a superb motorcycle road with little traffic on this Sunday and leaned our way across the Mountain State (they say if one could flatten West Virginia, it would be bigger than Texas!) looking for a place to stay for the night.

In Elkins, we found the Issac Jackson Inn, an older place remodeled and morphed through the ages into this large edifice perched up on a hill overlooking the town. Unfortunately, the nice restaurant and bar attached to the motel

It was good food, served quickly by Randy, though I was defeated by a huge piece of what was advertised as peanut butter pie, but came to the table more like a half pound chunk of fudge with some meringue on top. I took most of it to the room for a pre-breakfast snack.

Pouring rain in morning, Hurricane Laura's second wave remnants have caught up, so after a leisurely breakfast at the motel, with a surprisingly good sausage/egg scramble bowl,



Seneca Rocks

was closed until Tuesday. We walked down to "Scotty's" a small local restaurant with a bunch of outdoor picnic tables set up six feet apart under an awning in a parking lot. Most people were wearing masks, including our server, Randy, who buzzed from table to table like an Energizer bunny on speed.

we left at 10:30 in a steady rain, headed east on Route 33. Now the enticing curves are wet and our wet shields restrict vision down to the asphalt in front of us. At Seneca Rocks we made a stop at Harper's general store, a place that has been in business, in the same family, for over 100 years and looks the part. No Wal-Mart big box here, just a country store crammed with anything you might need even

if you didn't know you needed it when you came in. We are greeted inside by the resident dog, a large *very* well-fed Border Collie mix who is insistent on getting petted by any visitor. If you quit and try to walk away, he puts his huge paw on your boot to keep you in place.

Outside Harper's we meet a tall young man from Ukraine, taking pictures on his helmet cam and narrating them in accented English on a recorder. When he sees us emerge, he asks about our bikes which are similar to his 2013 F800GS. Upon learning that ours are a 2012 and 2014, he insists on lining them up in date order, with Harper's in the background, for a photo shoot.

He has come from his country to work in New York City, using his weekends and vacations to tour the US by motorcycle. He seems very animated, in keeping with his youth, and open to new experiences in this foreign country. Earlier this year he had been stuck in Ukraine for COVID quarantine, and borrowed an R1200GS from a relative and wants one now for off



Jay and the Ukrainian on the porch of Harper's General Store



Lined up in date order

road! We had an in-depth discussion about knobby tires for such bikes, though it was clear that his dream of taking a 1200GS on muddy single-track trails was far beyond our current abilities.

Leaving Seneca Rocks, heading east, we had dense rain all the way into Front Royal. Though our foul weather gear usually fends off the damp, eventually water will find its way in if given enough opportunity. (I've often said that about 90% of maintenance, home or motorcycle-related is keeping liquid in where you want it and out of where you don't) and I'm finally wet in a few places. We have a late lunch in the old downtown at the Mill restaurant, at an isolated table on the side with our riding clothes dripping on the floor.

Riding in the rain is not the most fun part of traveling by motorcycle, but there is something about doing it, the focus, the requirement for smoothness, the feeling of accomplishment at every successfully completed bend, that is enjoyable in its own way. "I can still do this" feels good.

We checked in at the Baymont, at the end of Main Street where we have stayed before when it used to be a Quality Inn favored by motorcyclists and backpackers on the nearby trails. The motel is now on its way down the franchise chain ladder, heading for its eventual iteration as a parking lot and then a construction site. Its main attraction has been the proximity to the Skyline entrance and walking distance to several good restaurants in pre-COVID days when one could actually go into restaurants. We talk a bit with the desk clerk, a late-20 something woman with an impressive collection of tattoos covering most of what's visible except her face. She tells us that she doesn't think Front Royal is a tourist town and seems unfamiliar with the Skyline

Drive which starts a few miles away from where she is standing.

Across the street from the motel is the "Pavemint", a converted gas station that in the past has offered a wide selection of craft brews, interesting eclectic food and a general vibe of good times. Now, in COVID-World, one cannot go inside, there are individual picnic tables set up in tent-like kiosks around the grassy area in back and the necessarily limited menu is served on paper plates. I look forward to coming back when—if—"normal" returns.

A few hours after daylight there is the usual fog and mist on the Skyline, getting worse as we ascend to the ridges and head south. Still, these things are just part of the experience and it is nice to be up here in this alternate reality, away from what our daily lives have become. Recent storms have left some debris on the road, tree branches and leaves, to keep up our attention. Deer and squirrels are busy in these early hours, picking up their required calories for the day without paying much attention to these human visitors to their domain. No traffic impedes us, suggesting that the other humans have sensibly slept in this morning, waiting for the temperatures to rise and the fog to clear. Their loss, I'd say.

For us, the fog in the valleys is spectacular, heightening the sense of altitude and again, the sense of isolation. It is like a protective blanket insulating us from the strife of life down there at the surface.

Further down the Skyline, the mist turns to rain washing over our face shields and making the leaves on the pavement a bit more of a concern. Now we spend less time looking over to the valleys in our efforts to keep from launching into one.

The rain diminishes as we near the junction of Skyline and Blue Ridge Parkway, though the fog continues here and there. Jay's clutch has been acting up intermittently, going from normal to being unable to fully disengage, so we detour into Waynesboro for lunch and to see if we can find a good spot to fiddle with the troublesome control. There is, we are told, a motorcycle shop here, but the directions

Back up on Parkway the mist has deepened, closing in with visibility down to feet in some places. We decide to get off at the next cross-road, but by then, it is clearing and we think we'll take our chances. Our optimism is rewarded with a long stretch of good visibility, and the pavement, though damp, is still good enough traction for an age-appropriate version of fun.



It's a bit foggy on the Blue Ridge

given do not seem to get us there. Given the choice between continuing to look for it or lunch, we opt for Panera, where we find good victuals out on the wet patio.

Jay's clutch has inexplicably gone back to normal functional mode, making us wonder if "moody" is a proper mechanical diagnosis.

Our stop for the night is at Peaks of Otter Lodge (POO is the acronym they use, it's emblazoned on the t-shirts they used to sell before the virus closed the gift shop. Not sure who was present at the meeting where that marketing idea was green lighted.) We have stopped here for meals in the past and always said it would be nice to stay here. It is. The lodge is classic old style, lots of wood and

stone, high ceilings, with guest rooms in buildings around a lake, each with a balcony overlooking the water. The restaurant here has always been a destination eating spot, but COVID regs make it a bit less fun than it has been in the past. Still, dinner is very good, well-fixed trout for me, pasta for Jay. We retire to our room for balcony sitting and solving the world's problems, but even with the assistance of Elijah Craig, we can't suss out the clutch's intermittent snits yet. It just doesn't make sense, but then neither does most of the world's problems since it seems that the world and the clutch do not want to just do things our way.

In the morning, while waiting for the fog to dissipate, we fixed Jay's clutch in parking lot. The problem was excessive free play in the new hydraulic actuator, though the stop nut had not moved from its original position and the fluid level was the same. We still have no explanation why it suddenly happened or why it was intermittent with no apparent common factor between the episodes. We decide that some things will remain a mystery and we simply will accept our good fortune.

The Parkway is a road with its own personality, sometimes wonderfully compliant, sometimes obstinate. Just a few miles south of the clear road we had from the POO, we hit fog so thick it was dangerous. We couldn't see and perhaps even more importantly, no one could see us. Route 43 appeared like a thrown life-line and took us down to Buchannon, where the weather in the valley was clear and sunny, too warm for the gear we had donned for the mountaintops. Looking up from the floor, we could see the dark gray cloud shrouding the ridges where the Parkway ran. We would have had to come down here eventually anyway, since a portion of the Blue Ridge up there is closed for an indeterminate time due

to a large landslide. Outside Roanoke, we found a good Eurosport/BMW dealer and wandered the showroom for a while, fantasizing about some of the shiny new two-wheelers on offer. Fortunately for us, at our stage of life, nothing there offered enough improvement over what we have to make us reach for a checkbook. I tried on some riding pants but I'm not as athletically built as BMW clothing models that don't have the padding of a geriatric who has been in self isolation with comfort food since March. Jay bought some high-tech ear plugs that come with a really nice aluminum case.

Route 221 up over the mountain gave us some really good curves, scuffing the toes on our boots a time or two, back to the now fog-less Parkway where we again got too warm, for the gear we had put back on. A stop was required for another change-out accompanied by a cookie and caffeine at a roadside place with outdoor tables.

Blowing Rock was in the range of places we could reach by supper time and seemed a good option. The Parkway in this section is along a high ridge with constant curves and elevation changes, with the sinking sun making it a chiaroscuro patchwork of daylight and deep shade. Deer started coming out for the evening and one spotted fawn, munching grass on the verge, seemed not to know I was there as I slowed for her, finally raising her head after I beeped the horn. She didn't even stop chewing. Some fit folks in Spandex were riding their bicycles in formation, reluctantly letting us pass. I'm impressed by their ambition to be up here, in the waning daylight, with all the hills yet to go to wherever they are headed for the night. We got to Blowing Rock at about 5-ish, checked in at a motel and strolled up to the Storie Street Grille for dinner. They were only letting in a small number of people per

sitting, but we were earlier than the “rush” and were almost alone in the dining room. This town is one of Brenda’s favorite places on the Blue Ridge, so later we walked the streets to let her know by phone what was still open. Every shop had a “mask required for entry” sign on the door, but many folks on the street were uncovered.

Sunny and warm in the morning, perfect for a short walk across the street to The Famous Toastery for breakfast, where the “Everything Omelet” lived up to its name. On the Parkway it is cool, but clear, with bright blue, cloudless, post-storm skies. It is tradition to detour up on Mt. Mitchell, but this time the restaurant is closed, depriving us of our usual peach cobbler with a view. South of Asheville, another regular pie stop is Mt. Pisgah, but today the restaurant is full at its reduced COVID capacity with next available table an hour away, so we eat take out on the porch outside. A young couple coming up from the south strike up a conversation in the parking lot. The man is on a Concours, his female friend on an R1 sport bike, an odd couple indeed. I find it hard to say that any one part of the Parkway is my “favorite”, but from Pisgah south it is a long stretch of elevation changes and perfect sweeping curves down to Cherokee, a shining example of a roadbuilder’s art. Even if in some dystopian future there were no more vehicles, this should be preserved as an example of what can be.

We have chosen Fontana Dam Village as our stopping place, the site of the infamous “motorcycle gang threat” BMWRA rally many years ago when the local sheriff’s department heard that biker hordes were coming and prepared for Hell’s Angels instead of middle-aged and older folks on quiet Bavarian two-wheelers. Our room, for reasons known only to the maintenance staff, had the water supply

to the toilet connected to the hot water side of the plumbing. It had a slight leak in the shutoff valve, so the water in the tank was being constantly refilled with the hot stuff. Don’t want to offer Too Much Information, but a perch mere inches over near-boiling water is an experience one should have at least—and probably only—once. It is memorable.

The Village has a large restaurant near the lodge, but we elect to eat outside on the deck to maintain our distance. It is the same excellent food but a bit different from the former cafe experience. A group of motorcycle tourists from Florida are here, all on large touring machines, HD’s, Gold Wings and an enormous Triumph Rocket 3. When we ask who owns that one, they point in unison to a fellow they describe, unnecessarily, as “the big guy”. If he was riding anything else, he would make it look small.

We end the evening porch -sitting at our room with the rain beginning to trickle down.

Friday dawned with steady rain, and when we finally decided we had to get going, we caught up with the pack of big bikes, putting on their rain suits a short distance down Route 28 at the wide spot where the police helicopters parked during the Fontana RA Rally. (Why, I ponder, did they leave the lodge in the rain without them on?) They pulled out ahead of us and preceded at a glacial pace, headed up to “the Dragon”, Route 129. I suspect it was on their tour agenda for today and they had to do it, but I can’t see that road being a whole lot of fun under the circumstances. We stopped for breakfast at the Lodge at Deal’s gap, remembering the time years ago when we camped here as the construction for this facility was just beginning. This morning there is an interesting mix of cruiser guys in no rain gear and sport bike jockeys in wet leathers,

waiting out the weather. Our destination for the day is the Cherahola Skyway and it does appear that the rain is moving away from it. The pavement there is still damp, but good enough for some enjoyable lean angles.

At the Tennessee end, the store that once sold good riding gear is closed, but we used their parking lot to figure out which way to go next. A nice lady from museum next door tried to help, but wanted to send us toward Gatlinburg on Friday night of Labor Day weekend. Thanks, but no way.

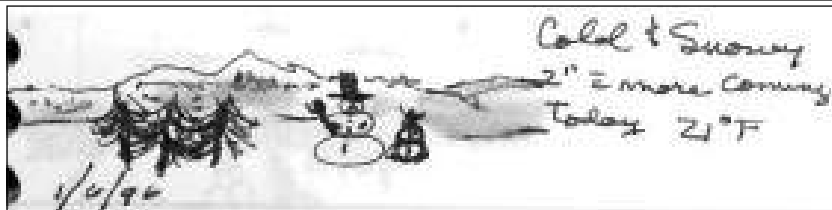
Route 68 north from Tellico Plains has some good parts left, but mostly has been “improved” into blandness. Our late lunch came in Crossville at Grinder’s Coffeehouse, where we could find tables out on the sidewalk. A couple strolled by, an older guy, near our age, with his much younger wife, and stopped to talk about riding in this part of Tennessee. They both ride, he tells us, and they have a variety of machines including a DR 650 and a Moto Guzzi Stelvio. He says he’s lived all over the country as a law enforcement officer for 45 years, including in Colorado and North Carolina, but believes that central Tennessee is “the best motorcycle riding anywhere”. It is very good, I’ll allow, but we’ll have to disagree on the “best” designation.

The rain caught up with us before we got to Cookeville, where we found another Baymont, this time a refurbished former Howard Johnsons. Its main attraction for us was the good Mexican restaurant that shared its parking lot where we enjoyed way too much very good food at a table far in the back. I’m a fan of the dark, rich, chocolatey Mexican mole’ sauce, which not every such restaurant can manage well. This one was excellent.

Clear and cool in the morning. Breakfast outside at Panera’s where I didn’t expect that a bowl of steel cut oatmeal and a cinnamon swirl bagel at a chain restaurant could be so nice. As we made our way through the iconic old part of Cookeville, I recall that this place was once the home of the Tryals Shoppe, back in my Observed Trials riding days in the 70’s and 80’s. It was the go-to place for gear related to that esoteric branch of motorcycle sport and when I closed out my little dealership in 1976, Brenda and I made the trip down here in my van with what was left in my inventory to trade it for a new Bultaco. All that, the shop, the gear, and my abilities, is in the past now so we just keep heading north.

We take a meandering route home, tracking back and forth along various paths to try to find good roads and stay away from people. COVID problems, mask-less crowds and closed restaurants, meant going through four towns, spending two and a half hours trying to find lunch, finally opting for desserts (I had two...pear crisp and Shaker Lemon Pie) at Shakertown.

Back when I was doing jury trials for a living, the intense activity, the concentration, ended suddenly when the jury left the room and closed the door for their deliberations. Then I could sink into the chair at counsel table, deeply fatigued, with the sensation that all the air had been let out of the balloon. Now I have a similar syndrome at the end of every trip. The bike gets parked, the garage door closes and the 60 foot walk from there to the house seems much longer. It’s over, for now, and I look forward to the next one.



FATHER TIME NEED NOT TARRY IN OL' JANUARY,
WHEN WHEN CINDY PREDICTS "FOUR TO SIX",
LET HIM PLOD RIGHT ALONG, WE'LL BE SINGIN' A SONG,
WHEN WE'RE BACK DOIN' TWISTIES AND TRICKS ...

Here's the group for today;

- 1). Ray Roullet
- 2). Jim Brandon
- 3). Mike Gregory
- 4). Chester Martin
- 5). Tom Sutherland
- 6). Phil Baugh
- 7). John Rice
- 8). Hubert Burton
- 9). Pete Galski
- 10). Boone Sutherland
- 11). Joe Barb
- 12). Roberto Munoz
- 13). Paul Elmer
- 14). Chris Warner
- 15). Mitch Butler
- 16). Greg Quinn
- 17). Danny Phillipis

Boone

(and also - 217 Pilot in 8th AM)
FOUR - SHARKE DEALER

Books available on loan

The following books are available on loan. Email me when you want to borrow one, and I will bring it to breakfast (or whatever other arrangements need to be made...I can deliver within reason) and I'll put your name beside it on my list.

I don't mind if people keep them a while (it takes me forever to read a book now....I keep falling asleep and then have to re-read the last 10 pages or so) but I don't want to give them away for good. At least not yet.

John Rice



Bahnstormer By LJK Setwright
Streetwise By Malcolm Newell
The Bart Markel Story By Joe Scalzo
Mann of his Time By Ed Youngblood
Yesterday's Motorcycles By Karolevitz
The Scottish By Tommy Sandham
This Old Harley By Michael Dregni
Racer: the story of Gary Nixon By Joe Scalzo
All But My Life: Bio of Stirling Moss By Ken Purdy (OK, not a motorcycle book, but who doesn't like and respect Stirling Moss?)
Investment Biker By Jim Rogers
Obsessions Die Hard By Ed Culbertson
BMW Twins & Singles By Roy Bacon
Bitten by the Bullet By Steve Krzystyniak & Karen Goa
Cafe Racers of the 1960's By Mick Walker
More Proficient Motorcycling By David Hough
Tales of Triumph Motorcycles & the Meriden Factory:
By Hancox
Sport Riding Techniques By Nick Ienatasch
Total Control By Lee Parks
Smooth Riding By Reg Pridmore.



A Twist of The Wrist (Vol 1 & 2) By Keith Code
Triumph Tiger 100 and Daytona By J. R. Nelson
This Old Harley (anthology) By Dregni
Side Glances By Peter Egan
Mondo Enduro By Austin Vince
Big Sid's Vincati By Matthew Bieberman
101 Road Tales By Clement Salvadori
Riding with Rilke By Ted Bishop
Legendary Motorcycles By Luigi Corbetta
Red Tape and White Knuckles By Lois Pryce
A Man Called Mike By Hilton (bio of Mike Hailwood)
The Perfect Vehicle By Melissa Pierson
One Man Caravan By Robert Fulton (first known circumnavigation of the world by motorcycle)
Monkey Butt By Rick Sieman
Ariel: The postwar models By Roy Bacon
Short Way Up By Steve Wilson
Endless Horizon By Dan Walsh
Leanings (1 & 2) By Peter Egan
Into the Heart of Africa By Jerry Smith
The Last Hurrah By Des Molloy
(Autographed copy, with DVD of the trip)
Whatever Happened to the British Motorcycle Industry
By Bert Hopwood
Down the Road By Steve Wilson
Motorcycling Excellence
By Motorcycle Safety Foundation
Leanings 3 By Peter Egan
Ghost Rider By Neal Peart
Revolutionary Ride By Lois Pryce
How to Drive a Sidecar Rig by David Hough