

Chuck Boylan, riding his FJR and I, on my Vstrom departed Metairie at 6:30 am on Thursday, July 20th in order to avoid the morning traffic thru New Orleans and get some miles in before the temps were uncomfortable. Our day one destination was Blairsville, GA taking interstate highways for 400 miles to Gadsden, AL and then two lane roads the rest of the way. It was a typical hot day in July, although we were able to avoid the late afternoon liquid sunshine that hits on so many days. We made it to Gadsden for a mid-afternoon lunch and cool down. The air conditioning felt good with the outdoor thermometer at 97 degrees. After our break, we headed East on roads with a lot less traffic and a lot more curves than the interstate highway. Four hours of riding brought us to Blairsville, GA for the night. The Best Western Hotel was clean and had a quiet clientele. Security for the bikes was not an issue, since they were parked right outside our first floor door. We finished the day with a good dinner at Monet's Italian Grill located across the parking lot from our room.

Both of us were looking forward to day two as we knew the roads would be good all day long. We headed southeast toward Helen and then up to Clayton, GA where we picked up Warwoman Road (one of my favorites in that part of GA). We got on Hwy 28 thru Highlands, NC with smiles on our faces and continued North to pick up the Blue Ridge Parkway. We took the BRP all the way to Little Switzerland. Traffic was pretty light on the BRP and we were able to travel at a sporting pace. A Harley escorted us for 10 miles and we were both impressed with his ability to handle the curves. We pulled into the Big Lynn Lodge @ 2:30 pm and 20 minutes before a passing shower washed down our bikes. Registration at the Lodge and rally was smooth. After getting the bikes unloaded and a refreshing shower, we took a ride down the mountain in search of an adult beverage.



The rally has been at the Big Lynn Lodge for the past eight years. Accommodations were rustic cabin style rooms and separate cottages. It was nice to open the windows and feel the cross breeze thru the night. Quite rare to not sleep with air conditioning in July, but with the overnight temps at 63 and low humidity, it was very comfortable. The Big Lynn Lodge advertises proximity to the BRP and that is the accurate. Sitting on the porch of our room, we could watch the traffic drive by.



(Big Lynn Cottages)



Included in the cost of the room is a full service breakfast and evening meal. It is a good thing that meals are included, as the restaurant availability in this area is pretty limited. Seating in the main dining room was by room number, making for a great way to get to interact with other rally attendees. The food was all prepared on-site and was quite good. I was impressed with the lodge staff's ability to accommodate the 85 rally riders. After dinner on Friday night a four piece band played for a couple hours. Doug Prichett created a dozen routes (gps & paper maps) varying from 4 hours to all day long. After getting his input, we narrowed Saturday's ride down to either the "5000 Curves" or "Twisty West" route.



At breakfast on Saturday morning, a couple riders advised that we ride with caution on either route, as some of the roads are challenging for even local riders who know the area. We headed out on the Twisty West route and found out why Doug called this one Twisty. We had some great roads, with more switchbacks than I have ever ridden. We rode for over three hours and stopped for lunch at the Main Street Café in Marshall. We were ready for a break, but in a really good way. Both of us were impressed with the technical challenges of the route that Doug created. He certainly knows the roads and can put a great route together. Be advised that navigating his route without a GPS would be near impossible tho. After lunch we picked up on the route and two hours later arrived back at the Big Lynn Lodge. Mother Nature was good to us again, as we only got sprinkled on for 5 minutes, but a strong downpour hit about a half hour after we got to our room.

Before going to dinner we rode down the mountain on and essentials run and about a half mile from the lodge came upon a black bear by the side of the road. Nice seeing wild life, but not something you want to come too close to on a cycle.



For several years, a very skilled massage therapist from Asheville has been present to work out the kinks on rally attendees. Chuck used her services a couple times and I watched her work on someone else. I was impressed with her skills and in awe of her ability to work on patient after patient for 30-45 minute sessions. This was deep muscle and tissue work requiring a lot of leveraging and manipulation. This therapist lives by the motto that she works on people truly in need!

(View from the back of the Big Lynn Lodge)



After another good home cooked meal in the main dining area, the rally committee provided updates on the rally, discussed rider safety concerns (there were two separate injury accidents), conducted annual business, and presented door prizes. The prize committee went all out with almost every attendee receiving a door prize. After the formal part of the meeting broke up, we met with Doug to discuss the good roads to hit on our return toward Alabama & Mississippi. After experiencing his routes, we knew he was a great resource to use for finding great roads.



On Sunday we started South on the BRP to avoid travelling thru city traffic in Ashville. From the BRP we took Hyw 215 down to 178 into South Carolina before heading West into Georgia and on toward Alabama. Doug gave us some fun roads that were both scenic and void of traffic . . . exactly what we were looking for. By the afternoon when we were out of the mountains, the heat and humidity starting coming back.



We made it back to Gadsden, AL and hit the interstate highway. Heading South to Meridian, MS we spent Sunday night at the LaQuinta Inn.

The weather outlook Monday morning called for rain on some part of our final leg. We rode a couple hours until the rain was imminent before donning the rain gear. We ended up riding in some of the heaviest rain I have experienced on two wheels. Fortunately the worst part only lasted for 25 miles. We rode in wet conditions for about 60 miles before hitting the Louisiana state line and made it home without incident by mid afternoon.

Final thoughts on this ride ... The long ride to and from the rally was worth the three days of very good roads. Don't be surprised by the number of people who trailer a bike to the rally. The GPS routes Doug creates will put you on some roads you would not try or even consider your own. If you go to this rally by yourself, link in with some like-minded riders (for your own safety). I had a blast in the mountains around Ashville and am looking forward to returning!