

FLORIDA GATOR TALE

Honda Sport Touring Association

September 2004



Exploring the Florida Keys

Submitted By: Larry Fitch

Why do all my trips seem to start so early in the morning???

When Terry Brown and I first discussed a trip to the Florida Keys, I thought that we would be able to depart at a normal hour. But Terry, who has been to the Keys many times over the years, had an insight as to the traffic conditions we might encounter along the way. In addition, we were planning on taking the road less traveled to get there, so the 5 AM departure time that Terry suggested seemed to make the most sense at the time. However, now that I was actually dragging my butt out of bed, I began to have second thoughts.

The Road Less Traveled

The one thing we really wanted to do was to try and remain clear of the urban sprawl of Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami Dade counties. Between the immense amount of traffic and the seemingly endless construction, we had looked over the maps to find a more adventurous and less hectic route. We settled on a combo of highway and back roads that broke down like this:

From Melbourne, Florida we headed south on I-

95 to Fort Pierce, where we exited and headed east on Route 70 to Okeechobee. For me, this was one of the best parts of the whole ride. The sun was rising behind us as we headed into the interior of Florida. Living on the coast as I do, I am always amazed at how different the



Larry Fitch, with Terry Brown's ST in foreground at the Southernmost Point

landscape appears as you head toward the center of the state. A fine morning mist was rising from the fields and lakes as we made our way the 36 miles to town. Once in Okeechobee, we turned south on Highway 441 and looped around the east side of the lake that gives the town its name.

This ride around the lake is a very nice and practically deserted road that seems to take you back in time to the way the state probably looked to the first settlers. Usually on a road like this my first compulsion is to add more throttle, but on this

day it was much nicer to run the speed limit and take in the sights as they flowed by.

Arriving at the bottom of the lake, 441 turns east, but a spur runs across to connect with 27

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This award winning newsletter is produced and edited by:
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Web Addresses:

If you're "connected" be sure to check out the National HSTA Site at:
www.ridehsta.com

And the Florida HSTA Site at:
www.flahsta.org

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Welcome to the Club!

We would like to extend a hearty and sincere welcome to the following recent new members. Thank you for choosing to join our group. Many long lasting friendships have begun here and we hope your experience will be a satisfying one!

Scott & Christa Jones - Navarre, FL - Ride not listed



The Fun Way to the Sparta Rally - 2nd Leg

Submitted By: Sam Ulbing

The Fun Way from Gainesville to the Sparta Rally - 2nd Leg
220 twisty miles

I slept well after the ride from Gainesville but woke up excited at 6 AM because I knew I'd be riding some of the best roads anywhere today. Only a couple miles north of Helen the fun began on the Richard Russell Highway, Rt. 348. Great curves and awesome views, near its peak this road crosses the Appalachian Trail so keep an eye out for hikers. The start of the Trail is only about 25 miles southwest of here and early in the year a lot of people attempt to hike the entire trail, but as Bill Bryson discovered in his book 'A Walk in The Woods', the hiking is more rigorous than most people realize and only a few make it even half way.

A short jog on Rt. 129 brings you to Wolf Pen Gap road (Rt. 180), one of the more challenging roads with several switchbacks. The blind right hand turn is particularly dangerous because the slope of the road makes it easy to stray out of your lane. I was reminded of the danger last year when, a little further up the hill a blind curve to the left with a steep drop off on the right hand side made me want to hug the center line when around the corner came a group of T-birds driving like sport bikes. I was glad they managed to stay on their side of the road!

Wolf Pen Gap road ends at Rt. 60 in Suches, home of TWO, Two Wheels Only campground, a favorite place for bikers to camp or just stop for a good inexpensive breakfast. A hunting lodge atmosphere prevails, with a stuffed bear, fireplace and easy chairs. A quick cup of coffee and I was back on the road headed toward Tennessee. Rt. 60 is wide and has both tight turns and wide-open valley runs offering bucolic views.

You'll end up in Coppertown, Tn. where the old copper mine/processing plant still sits. The Tellico Plains Mountain Press offers this insight: Copper was discovered in 1843 and the strip mining was intense. In fact, the devastation was so great the Copper Ba-

sin was once considered the largest man-made biological desert in the nation. Over 50 square miles (32,000 acres) was stripped of vegetation resulting in mounds of soil being washed away with each rainfall. Sulfuric acid fumes filled the bowl-like topography and led to the nation's first look at the long-term effects of acid rain. Riding past the old mine you can just envision the smog and soot when it was in full operation. Thank heavens the last mine closed in 1987 and most of this is now national parks and restored.

At this point most riders head up Rt. 68 through Ducktown where you can tour an old mine site to Tellico Plains, but I prefer to lengthen the ride and go west along Rt. 64 to Rt. 30. Rt. 64 passes the site of the 1996 White Water Olympics and now the river is supposed to host more than 300,000 paddlers every year trying either the easy sections or the notorious persistent class III, IV and IV+ whitewater rapids.

Rt. 30 and then 315 are narrow roads mainly through the Cherokee National Forest, which bring you back out on Rt. 68 just north of Tellico Plains; a good place to fill both your gas tank and your stomach. The BP gas station has reasonable prices and a small store that makes great sub sandwiches. I like to get one to eat at one of the overlooks on the Cherochala Skyway. There are also several small restaurants. The 36-mile long Skyway took 34 years and \$100,000,000 to build so be sure to ride it - you paid for it!

As the map shows (Pg.5) this road has lots of twists and elevation changes. It is wide and well paved being a National Scenic Byway and a favorite of the sport bikers. The speed limit is low: "the North Carolina side is 45 mph on the Tennessee side it is questionable. We have been told it is 30 mph, but there is a REDUCE SPEED sign at the state line where it becomes 45 in NC. There are two 30 mph signs between Tellico Plains and the state line, some 35 miles *." The road is awesome at a 'slightly' higher

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Free Ads

Motorcycle related items - wanted or for sale, riding buddies or room mates for events can be placed right here - for free! Just send them to arrive by the 15th for the next month's publication. Send to Bill Royal, 1521 New Bedford Drive, Sun City Center, FL. 33573 or email to wgr@sprynet.com.

For Sale

RoadGear Riding Pants size 30/34, worn 1 time, \$100.00,

BMW Air-Flow 2 pants size 38R (Euro) approx 34 US size, vented, worn 1 time \$150.00

Leather Jacket- Fieldsheer, excellent condition, size 40/42 White/Blue/Black \$150.00 obo

MOTOPOST Spyder Jacket, Red & Black, size Med \$150.00 obo
Phil Ridgill 904 287 9654 or rfoxrdr@bellsouth.net

1991 Honda ST1100, excellent condition, 88k, Leather Sargent Seat, Luggage rack, Standard windscreen & 4 inch taller wind-screen for winter, MEZ 4 tires, Works Performance rear shock & Stock shock, Race Tec Fork springs, new brake pads. \$5000 OBO. Phil Ridgill rfoxrdr@bellsouth.net

2002 Honda CBR1100XX (Silver)

13500 miles Gen-mar risers, throttlemiester cruise control, Full Ventura Luggage System (2 racks, 3 bags) Honda extended warranty. Excellent condition. This bike makes an awesome sport touring mount. \$7900.00 - Mark Hanke 321-403-4289 cell Melbourne, FL.



Exploring the Florida Keys

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South. Highway 27 South from this area moves across vast open areas of sugar cane fields. In many places the ground was scored black from the fires that had been set to clear the previous year's crops. The road is 4 lanes and posted at 65MPH. In addition to being devoid of a lot of traffic, it is also desolate. Terry on his ST1300 camel had no problem in making it well into the ride before fueling. However, my V-Strom with its more modest 5.8 gallon tank made me wish that I had heeded Terry's advice to top off the tank before heading down this road. About 40 miles or so down the way, my first reserve light came on. Keeping a steady 65 MPH speed, I tried to conserve the little bit of fuel I had left in hopes of finding a gas station before too long.

A little farther down the road and now my second reserve light is on! I have thoughts of Terry leaving me by the side of the road while he heads off to find gas and bring it back to me. How long would we be delayed if this happened? I did not want to think about it.

Finally, a roadside sign informs us that relief is only 5 miles away; I check the two blinking icons that indicate my remaining fuel, and then check my trip meter: 178 miles. On a good conservative ride I can squeeze about 190 miles out of a

tank of gas. I started to breathe a little easier. It appears that I would make it after all.

Terry and I rolled into this oasis in the middle of nowhere and were able to replenish the bikes and take a needed break. The \$1.99 per gallon price was a bit steep, but considering the circumstances, I did not feel any reason to complain. And I still fared better than Terry, who paid a premium price of \$2.19 a gallon for the premium fuel necessary to keep the ST happy and running well.

We ran into a group of riders just returning from the Keys who told us that we were some 75 miles from Key Largo, the top of the chain of Keys that ended about 117 miles later in Key West. Terry and I headed off refreshed and refueled, and made our way the remaining few miles down 27 South and then made an easy merge onto 997 South. This road parallels US1 through Florida

City and into Homestead, bypassing all of the traffic on the way. Once in Homestead, 997 ends as it merges with US1. This will be our final road for the rest of the trip down to Key West.

The Keys – A First Impression

I should mention at this point that I have never been to the Keys. The farthest south I have ever been in Florida is Miami, so I was really anticipating the experience. Terry, on the other hand, has been going to the Keys since he was a kid, so once we made it out onto US1, he took the lead and moved us on down the way.

The first 25 miles or so of the ride takes you through salt marshes and flat land, eventually delivering you to Key Largo. The

first glimpses of the blue-green water were amazing. The sun was shining, but the wind was blowing. Hard. A steady 15 MPH wind out of the east really made for some tricky driving from time to time as we headed over small bridges and causeways. Key Largo was a decent size, and once on the key, some of the wind was abated by the buildings and high trees.

Just south of Key Largo is the town of Islamorada. It was here that we

would spend our following night, but today we just made a stop for lunch at the Islamorada Seafood Company. The food is awesome at this place and they also have a huge retail establishment that has anything you could ever hope for in the way of fishing related material. For me, the best part of this store was the fact that in the center of it was the Pilar, Ernest Hemingway's boat that he lived on in the keys and is said to be where he wrote many of his classic works. I am a big fan of "Papa's" writings and the chance to actually go on board this boat and look around was quite a thrill.

With lunch over, Terry and I reluctantly suited up, as the heat of the day was starting to become quite noticeable, and got back on the road. Next stop: Key West. The remaining ride was uneventful, with the exception of the persistent, strong winds that

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Lunch View in Islamorada



Exploring the Florida Keys

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really kept us on our toes. Crossing the 7 mile bridge (yes it is exactly 7 miles) between Marathon Key and Little Duck Key was really an experience with the wind gusts threatening to blow you right off the side. Glancing from side to side as we rode over the open expanse of water, I just kept thinking how amazing it was that we were literally riding our motorcycles in the Atlantic Ocean. Officially, the waters here are called the Straits of Florida, but as an old Navy guy, I thought it was wild that we were out in the middle of all this water, with nothing but a thin ribbon of asphalt and concrete separating us from the sharks. Along the way I saw the remnants of what the early travelers to these parts had to ride on and I actually felt a little bit better. Terry related a story to me later about crossing over the old part of the road on a motorcycle when the whole bridge was steel decking as opposed to the smooth asphalt we had under our tires. Now that must have been quite the experience.

Before long we arrived in Key West. Tired after a whole day on the road that started very early in the morning, we checked into our hotel, got cleaned up, and headed to Duvall Street to see what was happening.

Relax, You're Already Here

As a rule we do not drink and ride, so we hopped in a cab and Terry directed the driver to take us to the intersection of Roosevelt Avenue and Duvall Street, where we got out of the cab and struck off on foot. Duvall Street is the center of all the action in Key West – it leads down to Mallory Square, and we slowly made our way there, stopping in at various gift shops and T-shirt Stores (have to get a T shirt!!). Nobody really seems to be in a hurry in Key West. The phrase “Relax, you’re already here” was displayed on T-shirts, bumper stickers, etc., and Terry and I fell right into the theme, arriving at Mallory Square to watch the festivities leading up to the star attraction of each day: sunset. Sunsets in Key West are beautiful, and it seems that the whole town, tourists and locals alike, turn out for it. Jugglers, one man bands, magicians, and other street performers provided the entertainment as we waited for the sun to dip below the horizon, signaling the end of another amazing day.

As the sun set, my attention turned to the ever growing complaints from my stomach. Finding a place to eat is an easy thing, and the restaurants along the water and on Duvall Street serve up fare of all types and in all price ranges. If you are looking for a more “chain” type of experience, Duvall Street is also home to a Hard Rock Café, as well as Jimmy Buffet’s Margaritaville. But for me, the local places provide the best experiences, and neither of us was disappointed. We were able to find a place where we could dine al fresco, and we both had some of the hottest damned blackened fish we had ever tasted. The weather had turned cooler as the evening encroached, but the sweat was coming off of both of us as we ate.

After dinner, we joined the growing crowd moving up Duvall Street in search of somewhere to enjoy a few cocktails. Most of the bars have live music, and you need only follow your ears to find the

type of music that best suits your taste. We found such a bar and spent the rest of our night listening to good music and enjoying some cold beers. Finally, the events of the day began to catch up with us so we hailed a cab and made our way back to the hotel.

Homeward Bound – Almost

The next morning we packed up and made one last trip down to Duvall Street. Leaving the motorcycles in a very expensive lot (\$10.00 per bike), we set off on foot once again and explored some of the shops and specialty stores. Among them is the Key West Tobacco Company. Here I was able to procure some very fine local hand rolled cigars that were being created in the front window of the store by a very skilled and experienced roller. I have since had a chance to enjoy a couple of these cigars and they are as good or better as anything I have ever tried out of a box.

As the day began to wear on, it was time to leave. After a quick stop to have the obligatory photo taken in front of the Buoy marking the southern most point in the continental US, we made a quick pass around the far side of the island, enjoying amazing views of perfect water and azure skies. Yesterday’s steady wind was once again attacking us from the east, requiring us to pay extra attention to our riding, lest we be blown into oncoming traffic. It was during all this that I realized just how much of a wide load my V-Strom is. My riding buddies often heckle me about the immense width of the bike, and the wind today seemed to take every opportunity to remind me of that fact. But still we persevered and soon we found ourselves back in Islamorada, where we would spend the night.

Three Things to Remember

After a windy but otherwise uneventful ride, we rolled back into Islamorada, and stopped for the day at the Islander, an older but recently refurbished hotel that harkens back to the way hotels used to be before the advent of chain properties. After checking in and getting settled, Terry was off in search of some conch fritters, but my road weary body was looking forward to a soak in the hotel pool. Both of us found what we were looking for, and afterwards we sat on the deck of the hotel’s tiki bar and enjoyed the unbelievable views that were granted from our vantage point. White sand, coconut trees, and tropical breezes (the wind had actually died down a bit) moved me to make the statement that I am sure is made by everyone on their first visit to this paradise: “I’m moving here.”

Once again our stomachs directed our course, and dinner at Lorelei’s restaurant across the street from the Islander filled the order. The best choice is the seafood sampler, which gives you a great flavor of all that the Keys have to offer. I could have gone back to the hotel and right to bed after dinner, but there was one more activity planned for the evening, and it was the main reason we decided to stop for the night in Islamorada.

A short walk down the road from Lorelei’s is a place called Woody’s. While not much of a place on its own, the reason for

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going is to see the house band: Big Dick and the Extenders. Terry had briefed me on the band and its notorious front man, Jack, before we arrived. "There are three things to remember at Woody's," he told me. "First, don't sit up front; second, don't make eye contact with Jack; and third, don't shout out anything or say anything stupid." Well, the first two would be easy enough, but anyone who knows me knows that the last one would be tough.

We waited for what seemed to be forever, but finally the show started. Jack, AKA Big Dick, is a massive guy who claims to be full Cherokee Indian. The show starts with him telling some jokes and warming up the crowd. This is where rule number one comes into play. Folks sitting up front quickly become the center of Big Dick's jokes, as well as the recipients of his sarcasm. I should point out that this is an "adult content" type of show and the language was very colorful to say the least. Apparently some of the other patrons were not aware of rule number three, and attempted to either heckle or one-up the big man. Big mistake. First of all, he has the microphone. Second, he is very quick and extremely cutting. I was very happy that Terry and I were sitting near the back and I did in fact manage to keep my mouth shut for the evening. Once Big Dick had had his fun with the audience, the band settled in to some of the best blues I have ever heard. Big Dick is an accomplished bassist and his band consisted of veteran musicians that had the joint cooking in no time. I could

have listened to these guys play all night, but both the long day and the quickly approaching early morning departure that we had planned caused Terry and I to depart. A short walk back to our comfortable room and I was asleep before my head hit the pillow.

The Rest of the Journey

The morning came quickly, and with it came the return of the persistent winds. These winds would accompany us the rest of the way home, and proved to be more of a nuisance than a threat now that we were once again on the mainland. For the return trip we planned to make our way up US1 and A1A, but weekend activities in Ft. Lauderdale and West Palm Beach -- along with gradually climbing temperatures -- persuaded us to change our minds and make the rest of the journey home via the I-95 super slab. At 80 MPH on the highway, we made the remainder of the trip home in short time.

Rolling back into my garage in Melbourne, my trip meter had recorded just a little over 700 miles round trip. Not bad for a three day weekend. The trip had gone smoothly, the company was excellent, and the sights and sounds of the Keys were firmly embedded in my mind.

If you are looking for a great way to spend the weekend in the saddle and explore a truly tropical locale, then I would highly recommend that you think about putting Key West on your list of places to ride.

The Fun Way to the Sparta Rally

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speed, which all bikers except the sedate cruisers run. Many 25 mph blind curves add to the excitement and generally there is no gravel. Be aware that it is also a favorite of the police. If you go in summer it will likely be pretty warm in Tellico Plains but by the time you reach the summit at 5390 feet, it is apt to be cold and cloudy, a shame because the views are fantastic on a clear day.

Another 12 miles gets you into Robbinsville but I prefer the cut off past the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, named after the poet who wrote "I think that I shall never see,

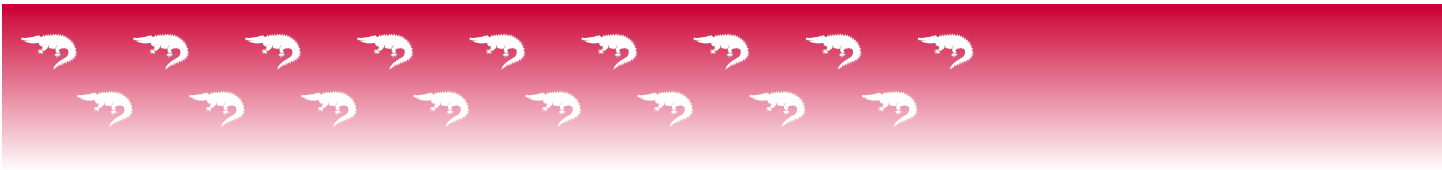
A poem lovely as a tree....", on a narrow and twisty road with potholes that runs along a small lake. Coming back out on 129 and turning left heads you to "The Dragon", Deals Gap. As always, Deals was a blast. '318 turns in 11 miles' the sign says, who knows I was too busy setting up for the next turn to bother counting. Keep in mind that due to the great number of accidents from speeding motorcycles, the speed

limit has been lowered to 30 mph and it is enforced! Foothills Parkway over to Townsend was under repair so they routed traffic down Happy Valley Road. Unfortunately for one couple on a Harley it wasn't so happy. Seems they went too wide on a sharp and very low speed turn. An upside down motorcycle in the trees



is not a pretty view but fortunately everyone was okay, a good thing as the cell phones didn't work from there. The experience reminded me that the most difficult exercise for me in the experienced rider course was the slow speed turn. After seeing the Harley I've decided to practice these more often! I spent that night in the Comfort Inn in Townsend, Tn just a few miles from Gatlinburg.

* From the web site <http://www.tailofthedragon.com/dragon.html> which is an excellent site for information on this area.



Upcoming Rides/Events

Ride/Events are compiled for your convenience from a variety of sources. HSTA sponsored rides are indicated with the "♦" symbol. If you are considering making any of the rides we suggest you call the contact ahead of time to confirm the ride is still on as listed.

♦ **HSTA Florida North Lunch Ride - Saturday, September 18th - Gator Joe's - Ocklawaha, FL.** Lunch at 12:00 Noon. They are located right on Lake Weir, at the end of SE 135th Ave which is at the intersection of CR464 and E. Highway 25 right at the center of Ocklawaha. There are lots of great riding roads around to get to this location and they can easily accommodate our size group. They are also about the most central point in north central Florida, just 100-120 miles from Jax, Melbourne, Avon Park and Tampa by all secondary roads. GPS Coordinates: N 29 2.457 W 081 55.750 Contact: Sam Ulbing - 352-262-6221 or n4uau@cox.net

Future North Rides:
 November 9th - NEW IDEA! A mid week lunch, location TBA.
 December 11th - Crackers Bar, Grill and Tiki, Crystal River.
 October 23rd - Blackwater Inn, Astor, FL. (Bike Week)
 November 20th - The Gathering, Branford, FL.

♦ **HSTA Florida South Lunch Ride - Saturday, September 11th - Nav-A-Gator Grill - Arcadia FL** We were supposed to go here last month but that didn't happen thanks to Hurricane Charley. They are open again and ready so let's show up and help support them with a good Saturday lunch business! It's located at the DeSoto Marina on the Peace River just off CR 769 (AKA Kings Highway) which runs between I-75 near Port Charlotte and SR72 just west of Arcadia. GPS: N27° 3.643' by W82° 0.171' or go to www.nav-a-gator.com for directions. Hope to see you there! Contact: Bill Royal - RideFL@flahsta.org or (813)633-8155

Future South Rides: (TBA - To Be Announced) October 9th - TBA November 6th - TBA December 18th - TBA

♦ And all the rest of the HSTA National schedule...
 For non-HSTA members reading this on the internet, be advised that attendance at these National Events requires HSTA membership. You can join at the event and your event fee gets waived (one time only)!

Date	Event	Location	Contact
September 10-12	Ozarks BS Rally	Theodosia Marina & Resort - Highway 160 Theodosia, Missouri (417)273 4444	Ed & Linda Young (417) 926-3075 magna@fidnet.com
September 17-19	SE-Star	Holiday Inn Express64 White Oak Lane Dillard, Georgia (706)746 3585	Trey Hall (615) 574-9927 strey1100@aol.com
September 24-26	Byway Boogie	Heber Springs, AR	Arild Mellembakken 870-322-7777
Oct 1-3	River City Ride	Baymont Inn - 2495 Landmark Avenue Corydon, Indiana (812) 738 1500	Don "Moose" Parish (317) 936-5818 mparish@hrtc.net
Oct 8-10	FOF - XII	Tradition Inn - Farmington, MO (877)355-6205	Bob LaMear (636)938-3788 racerboy@fms4u.com
Nov 4-7	Texas Hill Country Ride	YO Ranch Resort - 2033 Sidney Baker Kerrville, Texas 78028(877)967-3767	Joe Paolilli (830) 537-5552 joep@beecreek.net

Around FL - August

Submitted By: Bill Royal

First off, my sincerest apologies to Phil Ridgdill for the complete omission of his Ramblin Around piece this month, as well as Sam Ulbing and Larry Fitch for "editorial discretions" with their articles. I simply had a lot of great material and not enough room to put it all in! This isn't a position I find myself in very often, but it's great that you folks are supporting your newsletter by making the submissions.

Next, we had to cancel the South Lunch ride due to Hurricane Charley and by now, everyone knows what a devastating storm that was across South West and South Central FL. The good news

is that the affected areas are slowly coming back towards normal and we will be attempting this month's South ride to the Nav-A-Gator, which was right in the storm's path and was closed for about two weeks. I think it would be nice if we could have a great turnout to help them get back into the swing of things! The North ride to High Springs really packed 'em in at Floyd's diner with a near overflow crowd of 27 riders. We had 10 riders with one way mileages in excess of 160 miles with 7 of them claiming 190+ Way to GO! No more room for this month but look for details on a special award made for Longest Distance—Female Rider to STAR 04 in next month's edition—Ride Safe!