

Retired and Riding Blog

March – June, 2011 Cross-Country Ride Daily Posts

Introduction (March, 2020)

After retiring in March, 2011, from a forty-four-year career in information technology, I was fortunate enough to be able to ride an excellent sport-touring motorcycle across the United States and back to our home near Seattle, Washington. I'd ridden many trips of one or two thousand miles on a variety of sport-oriented bikes, but this was THE big retirement trip on an ideal long-distance machine. My planning estimate was that this would be a 6,000-mile + trip. It turned out to be a 7,072-mile, five-week-long ride that went as perfectly as anyone could ask. I documented the trip in a blog day-by-day as I rode, and summarized the ride in a 10-page trip report right after getting home.

Although I've long wanted to collate all of my blog posts, I've never had the time, or taken the time, to combine them into something more coherent than the collection of over forty PDF files I've saved for nine years. Well, the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic just gave me time to spare, so here's the compilation. I've made no edits except to correct some punctuation and spelling errors and to format for consistency. It's an interesting record, at least to me, of what it felt like day-by-day as I was planning the trip and then riding across the country. Hope you enjoy whatever portions you take time to read.

John Lyons, March, 2020

Planning the Ride (Posted February 7, 2011)

Exactly five weeks remain after forty-four years. Information technology for the few who understood the concepts in the 60s has become entertainment for the masses in the 21st century, for some a necessary evil as they fight their way through annoyingly circular Windows menus, for many others a serious avocation. There were few people in the sixties who understood anything about computers. What the heck is a systems programmer? Binary, octal, hex, ferrite cores costing a million dollars a megabyte. Hell, my Casio watch has more memory than that. I just added a two-terabyte external drive to my 4GB 64-bit AMD quad-core-based PC; it cost me \$99 and worked as soon as I plugged it in.

The most amazing thing to me is that the layers upon layers of technology almost always work. It's reliable, solid, and totally taken for granted, especially by those too young to remember the days before cell phones and PCs. The biggest part of the old job was just making it work -- octal errata on 80-column punched cards patching business programs written in Univac assembler. It was an art form, satisfying at the most basic creative level, to solve a logic problem and write efficient reentrant code for those massive, room-filling, twinkling, power-hogging mainframes. I still miss writing machine code that controlled a quarter-acre room full of big machines, spinning disks, manually loaded tape drives. Coming in for a test window early on a Sunday morning, throwing the main power switch and listening to the relays snap closed for a full two minutes, watching as the lights started to flash everywhere.

Now we're doing electronic battle at a distance toe-to-toe with Department 2 of the Chinese Politburo. At least it feels like battle even though it's just the latest venue for the ancient art of intelligence gathering. If it were battle, we'd be toast.

Five more weeks to finish the myriad, mundane details of retiring from a major U.S. company: IRAs, 401(k)s, pension options, insurance. More time-consuming and bumpy than it should be, compounded by dealing with college finances and taxes in the midst of so many rollovers and redistributions that I thank God for excellent financial planners.

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It's time to plan the ride now. With luck it's only ten or eleven weeks out. Planning is a challenge and a pleasure: packing well enough to be on the road for six weeks, six thousand miles, fifteen or twenty states, who knows what kind of weather and riding conditions; communing with Map Source and stuffing waypoints and routes into the Garmin. The bike is pretty much ready, a new Kawasaki Concours 14 that has more computing power on board than that room full of big iron in the sixties. Some new Dunlop Roadsmart sport touring tires, full synthetic oil and filter, a good once over and a two-day shake-down trip should do it. Time enough to finish the taxes and sort out a few more basics: netbook or iPad, how much emergency gear to take, how to take the absolute minimum number of chargers --can't they standardize those damn things?

Retirement bike (Posted March 8, 2011)



New Kawasaki Concours 14 on US 12 on the way to Lolo Pass.

Whidbey Island view of the North Cascades (Posted April 24, 2011)



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Rode a 165-mile loop yesterday with the Concours fully loaded for my cross-country trip. Still dialing in the suspension settings and trying to get a few more pounds out of the load, but the bike felt good and handled well. The new Dunlop Roadsmart sport-touring tires handle extremely well. Encountered lots of bikes and other traffic on the major roads since it was a Saturday with near-perfect weather. Took the Mukilteo-Clinton ferry to Whidbey Island, always nice for motorcycles since they get on and off ahead of all the other motorized vehicles.

Packing 1: General Considerations (Posted April 27, 2011)

Packing a motorcycle for a long trip is a challenge. Pack too much stuff and you're really not sport touring anymore. You're just schlepping a load around on secondary roads. Pack the wrong stuff and you're probably going to be miserable or hypothermic or too distracted to enjoy the ride...or, more likely, all of the above. My friend Jeff Hughes wrote an excellent "Benchracing" column about packing a motorcycle in Sport Rider a while back. His bottom line was that less is more, and I have to agree even though less generally hasn't been my style. My bottom line is pack as little as possible, but remember that once you're out in it, you can't go home and get more stuff, and you generally can't stop just because it's raining all day.

This will be a five-to-six-week, 7,000 + mile motorcycle trip across the U.S. and back in May and June. Temperatures will range from the 30s in higher elevations to at least the 90s on the way back to Seattle. Rain is likely at this time of year, and this spring has seen extreme weather in the Midwest and eastern U.S., including flooding, severe thunderstorms, and tornados. For several reasons, including avoidance of late afternoon thunderstorms, it makes sense to start and finish riding days early. The main concern with that is the increased prevalence of wildlife near dawn. It's no joke that the single deadliest animal in North America, aside from humans themselves, is the deer.

Starting out mornings in cold temperatures in May is going to be common. Last August I found myself leaving Ketchum, Idaho, with temperatures in the 30s without functional electrically heated riding gear. I had been counting on using the Concours 14 cigar-lighter outlet with several adapters and connections to power my Aerostich heated vest. The voltage drop across all the connections was too great, and unfortunately there was no heat to be had. I put on every layer I had packed, cranked the Connie's windscreen to the topmost position, dialed up the heat on the bike's handgrips, and found myself comfortable enough riding through hours of cold drizzle that morning. I was amazed at how pleasant it was to have heat pumping into my hands and surprised at the difference decent wind protection made. A side benefit of an adjustable windscreen and heated handgrips is that they reduce the need to stop to add or remove layers or change gloves. That will help a lot on this ride.

This trip, especially the trip east, will include a large number of non-riding days. I'll be visiting my aunt and uncle near Columbus, attending my niece's college graduation in Wooster, Ohio, visiting my sister in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, and visiting with my good friend John Holt and his family in Reston, Virginia. If this were purely a riding trip, I'd eliminate some of the extra items that I plan to carry this time. I think of these things as luxury items, but it seems reasonable to be able to dress presentably and not impose on my hosts to do laundry every other day. So, I'm taking a pair of loafers, lightweight socks that can double as sock liners in really cold conditions, an extra pair of underwear, three button-front shirts, and a light V-neck sweater. The shirts are high-tech Ex Officio products that can handle heat, sun, cold and wetness with equal aplomb. The sweater is a wonderful LL Bean cotton/high-tech-fabric item that unfortunately they don't sell anymore

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Packing 2: Major Decisions (Posted April 27, 2011)

Most of these decisions come down to trade-offs between probability of occurrence and downside risk, although the iPad vs. netbook decision was more about weight, space, and capability.

Should I buy a netbook or an iPad to carry on the trip? That turned out to be easy: an iPad and don't look back. With 3G data service, you're always in touch. With the iPad Kindle app, you can leave the Kindle and its charger at home. With the Inrix Traffic app you can check traffic real-time and forecast traffic all over North America, and not just on DOT-wired freeways. In fact, data from the GPS on my iPad will actually be feeding data to Inrix as I ride. I added a beautifully made Zaggmate case with an integrated Bluetooth keyboard to make typing easier and faster than typing on the virtual keyboard on the iPad. I can leave the larger paper notebook at home and still write up notes and post on Facebook and this blog at the end of the day.

What should I take in case of breakdowns in the middle of nowhere or unavailability of motel rooms?

The basic scenario here is that you're stuck without shelter somewhere cold, wet, or nasty. If weight and space weren't limited, you could just carry a nice little tent, sleeping bag, sleeping mat, and maybe even a camp stove and food. That's too much weight and space for the way I like to ride. With decent planning and a new, well maintained bike, the probability of this scenario is very low. I'll carry a space-blanket-type emergency bag, water, and a flashlight, enough to get through a night if I really, really had to when combined with the layers of clothing I'll carry.

What tools and repair items should I carry? The probability of a new Kawasaki Concours 14 breaking down is quite low. The probability that I'd be able to fix a major problem on this high-tech bike along the side of the road is even lower. I'll carry a decent metric tool kit that I've put together and not depend on the pitiful excuse for a tool kit that comes with most new bikes. I'll throw in a tubeless tire repair kit, silicone tape, electrical tape, and stainless-steel wire. I'll add a couple of electrical connectors I could use, in combination with stuff I'm already carrying to power my heated vest, to jump start my bike or someone else's if the need arose.

Should I carry a handgun? Based on my experience, motorcyclists are somewhat more likely to "carry" than non-riders are. A surprising number of people I've talked to said "yes" to this question when they heard that I would be riding alone most of the way on this trip. I'm comfortable with handguns, own several, and am licensed to carry a concealed weapon in the State of Washington. That even translates into some reciprocal carry privileges in other states. If I were to carry anything, it would be something fairly serious: a Smith & Wesson .357 revolver with some very nasty "carry ammo" in speed loaders.

So, what conceivable scenario would result in the need for me to pull out a .357 and shoot someone? Nothing realistic that I can think of. First, you can't draw a gun while riding and wearing armored gloves. Second, you're more likely to escape a nasty situation by just riding a fast bike fast if you have to. I've had a few people over the years deliberately try to run me and my bike off the road. Shooting one of them might be a boon to society at large, but it's clearly not the right answer and not likely to work. I'll try to be careful about where I stop and where I stay. I can think of scenarios where I'd use a gun to protect my family, but I can't think of a realistic situation where I'd want to take a human life to protect only myself. I have other options, and getting the hell out of there is the best one.

Finally, I might decide to ride back home via Canada. Carrying a firearm across that border would be a likely way to end up in a Canadian prison for much of the rest of my life. For that matter, drawing or

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using a handgun in a lot of U.S. states could have the same result. The other thing about carrying, and I speak from experience, is that you have to guard the thing everywhere you stop; having a handgun stolen is a very bad thing. No handgun.

Packing 3: The List (Posted April 28, 2011)

Photo of everything going on the bike except for the stuff in the top trunk (and the rider). Unless you're really into riding and/or are planning a motorcycle trip, you should probably skip this, but I've put a lot of thought into planning this trip, so I thought I'd go ahead and post it. In fact, I've thought about this so much that I drafted this from memory. Planning a trip is definitely part of the fun.



I started out using a very nice Motofizz Multi Tank Bag from Aerostich, but after my first shakedown ride, I switched back to my trusty old, rather small Cortech magnetic tank bag. The Motofizz felt like it was sitting in my lap, and I was just carrying too much stuff.

Motorcycle and accessories

- 2010 Kawasaki Concours 14 ABS (dark blue)
- Custom-fitted leather seat from Rich's Custom Seats in Kingston, WA
- Garmin Zumo 450 GPS and mounting hardware
- Adaptiv TPX radar detector, mounting hardware, and LED alert light
- Kisan headlight modulators
- Reflective tape on top box and panniers

Clothing and on-person items

- Aerostich Roadcrafter one-piece Gore-Tex riding suit (w/ shoulder, elbow, back, hip and knee armor)
- Pass-through Quick-Connect cable in Roadcrafter to connect heated vest
- Kawasaki KIPASS key fob and other motorcycle keys
- Shoei RF1100 full-face helmet (w/reflective band and SOLAS reflective tape)
- Hearos 33db blue foam ear plugs
- HAD neck band
- Lightweight jeans and belt, CWX T-shirt, Ex Officio undershorts, riding socks

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- Lightweight quarter-zip fleece turtleneck
- Cortech armored riding gloves
- Alpinestars Soho Gore-Tex riding boots
- Spyderco “Native” folding knife
- Wallet
- Cell phone
- Passport**
- Watch and Road ID bracelet
- Other cold or hot weather gear as needed (otherwise stored in rear top case)

Cortech magnetic tank bag (6 lbs. total, including filled water bottle)

- Paper maps and itinerary print-out
- Log book, small notebook, pen, pencil, small highlighters for maps
- Inova X5 LED flashlight w/lithium batteries
- Prescription sunglasses
- Spare set of keys and backup Kawasaki KIPASS key fob
- Various membership and frequent user cards (MSTA, AMA, hotels, National Parks, etc.)
- Tank bag rain cover
- 1-liter Nalgene BPH-free water bottle
- 12v cell phone charger (plugs into Concours 12v outlet)
- Heat controller for heated vest (mounted with Velcro tape)
- Tire pressure gauges (1 pencil and 1 digital)
- Aerostich three-finger waterproof glove covers (for sudden rain showers)
- Kleenex and cleaning wipes
- Honda spray polish and rag (for cleaning face shield)
- Kawasaki baseball cap (waterproofed)

Concours storage compartments

- Kryptonite disc brake lock (front glove box)
- Kawasaki tool kit and spare fuses (under seat)

Rear top case (6 lbs. net)

- Held Rainstorm gloves (for all-day riding in the rain)
- Vented leather summer riding gloves (without gauntlets)
- Insulated Cortech Gore-Tex winter gloves
- Aerostich Kanetsu Airvantage heated vest with zip-off sleeves
- Aerostich lightweight windbreaker
- Evaporative cooling vest and neckerchief
- Lightweight driving loafers*
- Lightweight socks (2 pairs) *
- Lightweight cotton V-neck sweater*
- Spare 9003/H4 halogen headlight bulbs (2)
- Small camp towel
- Tilley hat

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Right pannier (15 lbs. net including bag liner)

- Tool roll
- Small nylon bag w/flat tire repair kit, silicone tape, electrical tape, safety wire
- Small Ziploc bag w/electrical connectors/cables
- Heavy, medium, and lightweight riding socks (4 pairs total)
- Tilley nylon pants w/zip-off legs
- Ex Officio lightweight tech fabric “dress” shirts (3) *
- Lightweight nylon warm-up pants and cotton T-shirt
- Small selection of Seattle magnets and key chains as gifts for hosts along the way
- Lightweight nylon bag for laundry
- Small container of Lexol wipes for the leather seat (6 oz.)
- First aid kit

Left pannier (15 lbs. net including bag liner)

- CWX T-shirts (2)
- Ex Officio undershorts (3) *
- Shaving kit
- Ziploc bag w/laundry detergent packets, Zeasorb powder, soap, shampoo
- 64GB 3G iPad with Zagg/Mate case-keyboard
- Audio-Technica noise-cancelling headphones in compact case
- Small nylon bag w/iPad accessories (charger, cables, camera adapter, etc.)
- Nikon D3100 Digital SLR w/AF-S DX Nikkor 18-105mm lens and 16GB Class 10 SD card
- Small nylon bag w/camera accessories (spare battery, spare SD card, charger, polarizer, etc.)
- Kawasaki Concours 14 owner’s manual
- Lightweight emergency survival bag (2.5 oz)
- Medicine kit (antihistamine, Tylenol, Naproxen, antacids, etc.)
- Corkscrew/bottle-opener
- Paper copy of credit cards, driver’s license, etc.
- Spare pair of prescription glasses
- Spare package of Hearos 33db ear plugs
- Spare lithium batteries for Inova X5 flashlight

* Extra items to be used on non-riding days (niece’s college graduation, etc.)

** Passport for possible return route through Canada

The Fun Factor (Posted April 28, 2011)

I thought about the fun factor quite a bit on my Sun Valley trip last August. I was having fun on wet roads, through some rain, even through a brief hail storm. The only day I stopped enjoying the ride and couldn’t claim the fun factor anymore was the day I started home. It was cold and the heated vest didn’t work since I hadn’t wired it in at that point (it was August and pretty darned warm most places for crying out loud). But the Concours 14’s windscreen and heated grips kept me comfortable – still having fun on some nice roads. Crappy breakfast in some little Idaho hamlet – still having fun. Rain went from drizzle to real rain – still comfortable enough, still having fun. Hit 20 or 30 miles of gravel road surface that had been rolled, but not coated with asphalt, driving rain, some fog, twisty mountain passes,

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couldn't tell if there'd be any traction around the next turn – NO LONGER FUN. I stopped for coffee, checked the weather with some locals, and headed west for I-84 instead of for the nice, curvy roads recommended by my friend Dave Sulser. Took all day to get out of that rain and I was pretty beat when I pulled into a Best Western in Pendleton, Oregon

In the course of that ride I almost crashed – too fried, not in the moment, not paying enough attention, I rode over one of those cattle grates with big stainless-steel rollers, wet of course, on an entry ramp onto I-84 with the Concours just slightly heeled over to the right. Rear wheel slid out to the left real fast. I straightened the bike and kept everything neutral – steady throttle, etc. – and recovered. The adrenaline shot from that woke me up faster than three cups of coffee, and I did pay attention on the rest of that ride.

One More Thing - Isn't there always? (May 2, 2011)

Some of my riding friends in the Chicken-Run group know much more than I do about setting motorcycle suspensions, but I learned some good lessons preparing for this trip, and I feel they're worth sharing. Setting suspensions is really an art form, albeit with science behind the art. Motorcycle racing teams actually have specialists who only work on suspension setups.

For the non-riders reading this, I should explain that motorcycles are far more sensitive to load, weight distribution, and suspension behavior than cars and trucks are. For that reason, most modern motorcycles have provisions for multiple suspension adjustments. Although some bikes and aftermarket shocks like Ohlins provide more adjustments than I'm going to describe, the Concours 14 is typical of current bikes. There is one shock absorber with an external spring at the rear end of the bike. There are two shock absorbers, AKA "fork tubes", supporting the front end of the bike. The fork tubes contain internal springs. Each of these three shock units allows for two adjustments: the amount of preload on the springs and the amount of rebound damping allowed by the valves in the shocks. Preloading in effect stiffens the springs. Rebound damping controls how fast the shocks return from being compressed and stops what would otherwise be a pogo-like effect when going over bumps in the road.

The fork adjusters are the two black and silver "knobs" nearest the bottom of this picture.



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The photo below is a close up of one of the two fork adjusters. Turning the nut clockwise increases preload. Turning the knurled knob clockwise increases rebound damping.



This photo shows the lower part of the rear shock. The rebound adjuster is the screw facing the camera toward the bottom of the shock. The preload adjuster is a large knurled knob not shown in this photo.



So, with 300 miles of fully loaded riding under my belt I was still feeling that the Concours suspension setup wasn't quite right. The first shakedown trip was with a heavier load on board than I'm now carrying. I added two clicks of preload to the rear shock and increased the rebound damping by a quarter turn. After riding some nice curvy two-lane blacktop, I could feel that the suspension was over-damped. It's kind of a dead feeling... a quick bounce and then the suspension action stops very quickly. Definitely not right. For the second test ride, I added another click of rear preload and backed off the rear rebound damping to its "normal" setting. Better, but still over-damped. I backed off the rear damping another $\frac{1}{4}$ turn, and then decided to go get some help from someone more expert than I am. It was taking too long using trial and error.

As usual, the people at Lake City Powersports in north Seattle were friendly and accommodating. Logan, the service manager, had previously offered to help with my suspension setup, so I rode to the dealership with the full load on the bike last Saturday. Logan rolled the bike into the shop, and turned things over to Rex, one of the expert technicians in the shop. With the help of another tech guy, Rex measured the "sag" at each end of the Concours: the differences in the heights of the rear and front ends of the bike with and without the rider – namely me wearing full riding gear. The rear end sag was

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about right but the front end had too little sag. Not good. You want the front and rear ends of a bike to react the same way to shock inputs, both in amount of compression and rates of compression and rebound. Rex set the front sag to match that of the rear, had me bounce on the bike a few times, and backed off some rebound damping on the front shocks (equally on each side, of course). He rechecked everything very carefully and told me to call if I had any questions or problems on the trip.

On the ride home I took a roundabout route on some curvy roads. The bike felt so much better that I wanted to just keep riding. The difference resulting from those relatively small suspension changes was jaw-dropping. Amazing!

Revised Itinerary May 4 to 30 - 3,400 miles (May 3, 2011)

Revised the route May 3rd to avoid snow in the Rockies near Glacier National Park. The route over Stevens Pass on May 4th may be wet, but hopefully not icy or snow-covered even though there's some snow falling on May 3rd

- 4-May Lake Forest Park, WA, to Coeur d'Alene, ID, 315 miles
- 5-May Coeur d'Alene, ID, to Great Falls, MT, 367 miles
- 6-May Great Falls, MT, to Culbertson, MT, 367 miles
- 7-May Culbertson, MT, to Devils Lake, ND, 294 miles
- 8-May Devils Lake, ND, to Duluth, MN, 351 miles
- 9-May Duluth, MN, at Duluth, MN, - shop at Aerostich
- 10-May Duluth, MN, to Manistique, MI, 331 miles
- 11-May Manistique, MI, to Clarkston, MI, 396 miles
- 12-May Clarkston, MI, to Galloway, OH, 260 miles - visit with aunt & uncle
- 13-May Galloway, OH, at Galloway, OH, - non-riding day
- 14-May Galloway, OH, to Wooster, OH, 105 miles
- 15-May Wooster, OH, at Wooster, OH, - Wooster baccalaureate
- 16-May Wooster, OH, to Mt. Lebanon, PA, 128 miles - Wooster commencement
- 17-May Mt. Lebanon, PA, at Mt. Lebanon, PA, Non-riding day
- 18-May Mt. Lebanon, PA, at Mt. Lebanon, PA, Non-riding day
- 19-May Mt. Lebanon, PA, at Mt. Lebanon, PA, Non-riding day
- 20-May Mt. Lebanon, PA, to Reston, VA, 256 miles Wine tasting at John Holt's!
- 21-May Reston, VA, at Reston, VA, Non-riding day
- 22-May Reston, VA, at Reston, VA, John Holt's birthday
- 23-May Reston, VA, at Reston, VA, Non-riding day
- 24-May Reston, VA, at Reston, VA, Non-riding day
- 25-May Reston, VA, at Reston, VA, Non-riding day
- 26-May Reston, VA, at Reston, VA, Non-riding day
- 27-May Reston, VA, at Reston, VA, Non-riding day
- 28-May Reston, VA, to Snowshoe, WV, 222 miles - 32nd Memorial Day Chicken Run
- 29-May Snowshoe, WV, local loop - 32rd Memorial Day Chicken Run
- 30-May Snowshoe, WV, to points west - No plan for the ride home yet

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Day 1 Wednesday, May 4, 2011: Central Washington



There's no good way to ride across central Washington, but Rte. 28 was less bad than some. This is a typical view of unending wheat fields and farms, straight roads, no cars. I rode about 50 miles without encountering a single vehicle going my way. There was one nice curve just east of Odessa, WA. My comment as I leaned into the left-hander was "Thank goodness for a curve!".

Overall, a nice ride today. I'm eating a leisurely dinner and sipping some Malbec at the Best Western in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, a very pretty area. I left home at 8:10 AM and arrived in Coeur d'Alene at 4:15 PM. Stopped in Cashmere, WA, looking for a nice coffee shop where we've eaten before. Finally figured out that it is now a Mexican restaurant...ah well. Took the opportunity to take off my heated vest and change gloves. Ended up having "brunch" at Starbucks in Wenatchee, WA, where I ran into a fellow rider. One of the nice things about riding is that kind of thing tends to happen. He recommended riding a bit south and taking Rte. 28 across rather than US 2, which is what I did. Stopped for gas once and then filled up here next to the hotel.

Stats for the day: Total distance ridden was 338 miles. Average speed moving was 53 mph. Max speed according to the GPS was 99.3 mph... probably hurrying a pass in 3rd gear around a couple of cars and a truck. The Concours just hums along, and it's not particularly obvious when you get rolling 80 or 90. I found that happening on the boring sections of Rte. 28...the speed kept creeping up. "Let's get this over with!" screams my subconscious. Look down at the speedo...oops, I'm going 90. Gas mileage was a bit low going over the Cascades, but overall average was 41.9 mpg.

When I left the house, it was 43 degrees out. The temp dropped as the altitude increased, a crude altimeter. The low temp for the day was 30 degrees just below the top of Stevens Pass. I had my heated vest and the Concours handgrips heat dialed up to about the mid-point and was comfortable enough. It was sunny all the way, and when I got to somewhere around Ephrata, WA, the bike said it was 61 degrees, fine riding weather.

My personal comment for the day is that I found myself kind of tense for the first hundred miles or so. I think the months of anticipation and preparation had me thinking too much about what could go wrong. I started to relax (the whole point of the trip, right?) after Wenatchee and finally settled into the Zen of riding a fine machine for the rest of the day.

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Tomorrow's ride will include an awful lot of Interstate "superslab", the price I have to pay to avoid some of the snow-covered roads in the higher elevations of Montana. More later. Wish some of the Chicken-Run riders were here :-)

Day 1, Wednesday, May 4, 2011: The Cascades

Although I didn't get any pictures, riding through the Cascades yesterday morning was spectacular. The jagged peaks are not just snow-capped this time of year. They're totally snow-covered from somewhere around 3,000 feet on up. Looking back to the west after leaving Wenatchee, I saw that a good chunk of the horizon was filled with white, rugged mountains. Really beautiful! Riding through that on Stevens Pass, I have to admit to being more focused on the temperature and the road surface than the view. I was in it, more than I was looking at it. At the top of the pass the plows had left sharply cut 10-15-foot cliffs of stratified snow just about up to the road shoulders. Although it's melting, it's still pretty much winter up there.

Just having breakfast (it's included in the room rate) here in Coeur d'Alene and planning to roll out at about 8 AM. Weather is good: temp 39 and warming, broken overcast, dry. Route to Great Falls is 367 miles on I-90, Rte. 12, and I-15. Map Source says it'll take a bit over 5 hours of riding.

Day 2, Thursday May 5, 2011: Idaho and Montana



If you have to ride Interstate, it's a much better experience if you can find some combination of scenery, curves, and mountain passes, preferably with a decent surface. I-90 through Idaho fits the bill as does the middle section of I-15 between Helena and Great Falls, Montana. They were the high points of the Interstate part of today's ride. As a loyal Washingtonian, though, I have to say that my favorite section of Interstate is still I-90 eastbound as it climbs upward to Snoqualmie Pass out of Issaquah, Washington.

Much of I-90 in Montana was under repair with some very slow one-lane sections. Much of the rest was very choppy and in need of repair. Reminded me of Alaska where the roads are under constant repair when the weather is warm enough. I took this photo at the first rest stop in Montana, where I-90 is descending from 4,680-foot Lookout Pass. I'm convinced that I made the right decision in routing around the higher sections of US 2 and Idaho 200, both of which would be nice rides later in the season. There's still lots of snow in the higher elevations.

Stats for the day: left Coeur d'Alene (gotta love spelling that :-)) at 8:30 AM PDT and arrived in Great Falls at 4:30 PM MDT...lost an hour. Distance travelled today was 363 miles. Total distance travelled so far is

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711 miles. Average overall speed while moving is 58.4 mph. Average gas mileage since leaving home is 42.8 mpg. Put 5.37 gallons in the 5.8-gallon tank in some little burg in Montana with 218 miles on the trip odometer that I use to track miles per tank. Both the bike and the GPS were squawking at me to find gas, the GPS more politely, with an offer to find the nearest gas station. Max speed today was 97.8 mph, probably passing something on US 12.

I'll send another entry tonight with a photo from a high pass on US 12.

Day 2, Thursday May 5, 2011: Montana II



This is a view from a scenic lookout at MacDonald Pass on US 12 about 20 miles west of Helena, Montana. This was the best section of US 12, with lots of curves on both sides of the pass. Montana has posted speed limits now, with a 75 MPH limit on the Interstates. What surprised me was that the posted limit on US 12, which is mostly two-lane blacktop, is 70 MPH. I guess the Montana tradition of speed lives on.

Speaking of speed, I should explain something to the non-riders among you about the max speed stat I've been posting. The rule of thumb when passing on a motorcycle is to get it done quickly. Shift down a gear or two (or three), get the revs up, be patient, look for a safe opportunity to get around the traffic in front of you, then GO. On a sport-touring bike like the Concours that gets you quickly to a fairly high speed, but only briefly. Once safely back in the right lane, I roll off the throttle, shift back up to whatever gear I was in, generally 6th, and slow down to a more reasonable pace. Since I'm wisely not looking down at the speedo when I'm busy doing that, I check the GPS max speed later. It's accurate, unlike many motorcycle speedos, which invariably read high (at least Japanese-made bikes do), and interesting (at least to me). The Concours is rock-solid steady at every speed I've had it to, with no vibration, no instability, no mirror blur, so the sensory inputs you're getting don't tell you all that much. Lot of wind noise at any speed over about 40 MPH. That's why I wear 33db ear plugs when I ride.

Oh yes...temperatures for the day varied from about 37 F in a couple of Montana passes in the morning to 66 F on I-15 north of Helena. I had the heated vest and heated grips on in the morning for a while. Later I shifted to just two light layers under my Roadcrafter riding suit and from insulated gloves to normal leather armored riding gloves. Comfortable all the way. No rain at all. We'll see how long that lasts.

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Just finished a nice dinner here at the Best Western in Great Falls and then popped a couple of Naproxen. I'm a bit stiff after 700 miles in the saddle and definitely want to get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow will see me 376 miles down the road and back on my original, planned route. I'll spend the night in Culbertson near the eastern border of Montana.

Day 3, Friday, May 6th: Great Falls to Culbertson, Montana



Even after a cup of coffee and a light breakfast I could tell I wasn't focusing as I rolled out of the Best Western in Great Falls at about 8:15. Loading and riding a motorcycle safely takes some thought, evidently more cerebration than I had going at the time. Somehow, I had managed to pack a neck band that I wear when riding and had to search through the packed bike to find it. A little way down the road, I realized things were sounding too loud -- I'd forgotten to put in my ear plugs. Before the day was out, I'd forget ear plugs again. I stopped at a gas station within a mile or so and regrouped. For some reason the Concours idle was a bit low, so I adjusted the idle speed, changed from winter gloves to my normal riding gloves, put in ear plugs, and consciously tried to focus. It seemed to help.

The temperature as I rolled out of town onto US 87 north dropped to 41 degrees, so I turned on both the heated handgrips and heated vest. US 87 is two-lane blacktop with no shoulders and drop offs on both sides in most places. Speed limit is 75 mph, in the Montana tradition of speed on any road. Picked up some light rain for about 20 miles, not enough to bother with glove covers (as a true Seattleite, my gloves are the only non-waterproof item I wear when riding). The only nice curves in 122 miles brought the elevation of the road up to true high plains level and added a gusty wind from the north to the riding fun. What made it interesting was the buffeting from the double-trailer semis barreling southbound at 70-75 while I was going northbound at about 80 into a headwind. One of them almost lifted the 940 lb. weight of the loaded bike with me onboard right off the road. Something I'd never noticed in a car before is how much less turbulence comes off a semi with a streamlined fairing on top of the cab...almost unnoticeable, dramatically different from the unfaired trucks.

In Havre, I rejoined US 2, back on my originally planned route, and stopped for second breakfast (LOTR fans) at McDonalds. Interestingly, this was the sole McDonalds I encountered on my entire LONG ride through Montana. I guess the sparse population and lightly travelled roads ruin the business case. Discovering one of the advantages of age, I enjoyed a "senior coffee" at McDonalds for 60 cents rather than the usual dollar.

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Rejuvenated after a leisurely stop, I headed east on US 2 thinking I'd continue to make good time. Wrong. Road construction. This time it was a half-mile backup of cars and trucks waiting for the single-lane to switch back to eastbound. Then a good two miles of dirt, dust, and gravel before things opened up for a short while. Then another construction zone! As the road opened up (finally), I was, of course, behind a long lineup of trucks and cars that coalesced into clusters of two to seven or eight vehicles. I did a lot of passing to get to the typical Montana open road situation of no traffic in sight in front or behind. One of those passes was around 7 or 8 closely packed cars and trucks. I know I twisted the throttle a little harder than usual at some point, which no doubt explains my max speed stat for the day.

It was a long ride...actual miles ridden: 373, but I think I'm adjusting to the routine. I didn't feel as tired or stiff as I did after the first two days. The photo enclosed is at Cree Crossing on US 2 in eastern Montana, a location replete with both Native American and geological history. The Kings Inn Motel in Culbertson was an old, slightly worn, traditional American motel, clean and comfortable, but forget Internet access and breakfast. I'm actually writing this blog entry at The Ranch restaurant in Devils Lake, North Dakota. I'll do the blog entry for Day 4 after I get back to the Holiday Inn.

Stats for the day: 373 miles ridden today; 1,094 miles ridden on the trip so far; temperature 41-57 degrees; overall moving average speed to date 59.7 mph; overall gas mileage to date 44.4 mpg; max speed for the day 109 mph.

Day 4, Saturday, May 7th: Culbertson, MT, to Devils Lake, North Dakota



This photo of greater downtown Culbertson, MT, is from last night. I haven't taken any shots in North Dakota; there just wasn't a good view with a place to stop today. Having never been to North Dakota before, I didn't know what to expect. Well, eastern Montana and western North Dakota are (unsurprisingly) very similar. According to the locals, it's been a rough winter here with lots of snow. There were patches of snow...big patches...all over the place in what seemed to be some higher elevations 20 miles in both directions from the MT-ND border. That plus lots of dirt and dust. I think all the dirt is from a combination of road construction and the recent spring thaw (what they used to call "schlump" in New Hampshire). The mud has dried to become dust on the road, evidently a welcome sign of the beginning of true spring in these parts.

I forgot to mention that I've encountered no significant rain on the trip so far, even though on Friday there was cumulus buildup all around me and rainstorms clearly visible across a good chunk of the eastern horizon. After stopping for lunch yesterday at a Dairy Queen in Malta, MT, I actually put the rain

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cover on the tank bag and put on my Held waterproof gloves. I think I noticed about three drops of rain in the next 160 miles, not something I would've wagered any money on. I need to be careful what I wish for, but the bike is so dusty and bug-splattered that a good hard rain might be a good substitute for an actual wash.

Services like gas and food have been sparse on much of the ride so far. I need to be careful about where the next tankful of gas is coming from and not wait too long to find somewhere to eat. Two of my meals in Montana and North Dakota have consisted of a protein bar and water, both of which I carry in my tank bag.

Just before Williston, ND, US 2 becomes a separated four-lane highway, but not limited access. The pavement quality improved greatly in the eastern part of the ride today. The good news is that you can make really good time on this lightly travelled four-lane highway; the bad news is that not only are there no curves, you don't even get to enjoy passing ("overtaking" as my British friend, Clara, likes to say).

Many fields all through Montana and North Dakota are flooded from the spring thaw. Devils Lake is overflowing. There's wetland all around here, but not this much normally. I've seen ducks, geese, seagulls, some kind of very fast flying shorebird (a kite maybe...don't know). Speaking of wildlife...At first, I wondered if the wildlife warning signs in Montana were depicting some very athletic Montana deer, but they're antelope warnings. I've seen signs of vehicle-wildlife encounters on the roadways throughout Montana in the form of magenta splotches on the pavement, but no live or dead animals until Friday and Saturday. The count so far: four dead skunks (quick swerve!), one dead antelope, one snake that I think I squashed (didn't realize what I was seeing in time to react), and one live antelope. Antelope are incredibly slender and long-necked. When I first saw one standing legs-together in the distance, I started the auto-identification scan that humans tend to do and at first thought "ostrich", no, can't be...ahh...antelope. Very fast-moving creatures! Could be hard to avoid in some situations...as evidenced by the magenta splotches.

This next topic may be of interest to the motorcyclists reading this, but probably not to others. I've owned the Concours for almost a year, and this trip has afforded an opportunity to really try some things and think about things that I haven't had time to get into before. First, in spite of some of the comments made by testers in motorcycle pubs, I like the KIPASS fob system just fine. It's like a semi-auto version of the full-auto entry system on new Toyotas. I never have to take out a key to start the bike. It's not inconvenient to take the key out to open the panniers, although being able to hang the fob on a keychain would be nice. Second, I've been activating the ECO mode to change to a lean engine map and have had it on quite a bit since Coeur d'Alene. I'm sure that it's improved the gas mileage by several mpg with no noticeable (to me) performance impacts. You have to reactivate ECO mode after every engine start by holding the display mode trigger on the left handgrip in for two seconds. Overall average mileage on the trip so far is 44.4 mpg. I've tried holding very steady speed and throttle on level road, and here's what I see with ECO on: at 3,500 rpm in 6th GPS shows 72-73 mph and instantaneous mileage on the Concours display is consistently 50 - 55 mpg. BTW, there is a separate "ECO" indicator on the display that comes on wherever the fuel consumption is below some point...basically it goes off if you open the throttle significantly and comes back on when you roll off the throttle.

I love the instrument panel display on the Concours, particularly being able to cycle through modes by just pulling the trigger on the handgrip. Best is the tire pressure monitoring that reports psi in each tire after you start rolling. I put 42 psi (by the book) into each tire before the trip. As I start rolling, the

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pressures on the display show as 43-43. As the tires heat up, the pressures consistently go to 44 front - 45 rear. No more tire pressure gauge every morning! No matter what you have up on the display, there is an in-your-face alert if pressure in a tire drops below 32 psi. Finally, since a lot of this trip so far has been cruising straight, open road, I've put the K-ACT ABS setting into "high combined" mode. This allows me to initiate a stop quickly with either the brake lever or the brake pedal. The most noticeable change in high-combined mode is that the brake pedal really hauls you down by activating quite a bit of front brake. I'll change back to standard mode in West Virginia if not before :-)

Enough. Time to get some sleep. Tomorrow I head for Duluth and a two-night stay with a member of Motorcycle Travel Network. Aerostich on Monday!

Stats for the day: left Kings Inn Motel in Culbertson, Montana, at 7:43 AM MDT, temp 41 F; arrived Devils Lake, North Dakota, 3:00 PM CDT, temp 64 F; 300 miles ridden today; 1,377 miles ridden on the trip so far; total trip average moving speed = 60.8 mph; max speed for the day 98.3 mph; total trip average gas mileage = 44.4 mpg.

It's 7:37 AM Sunday morning here in Devils Lake. (Happy Mother's Day to all you mothers out there :-) It rained last night and washed some of the dust off the bike. Cool this morning, but it looks nice enough. I'll be on the road on the way to Duluth as soon as I load the bike.

Day 5, Sunday, May 8th: Devils Lake, ND, to Duluth, MN



If western North Dakota resembles Montana in geography and feel, then eastern North Dakota bears a similar resemblance to Minnesota: neat, tidy, greening, water everywhere. I had a nice enough dinner Saturday night at a restaurant called The Ranch in Devils Lake. When I walked out to start loading the bike on Sunday morning, everything was wet from an overnight rain shower. Very convenient. Free bike wash...at least the rain flushed off some of the heavier dust accumulation.

Sidebar: Checking the Wikipanion current location map on the iPad, I found that Devils Lake has an interesting history, both recent and older. The town is named for the nearby lake, which was named based on a misunderstanding of the Sioux name: water-spirit-bad. The settlers assumed this referred to bad spirits, hence the name "devil". Turns out that what the Sioux were referring to was bad water; high salinity in the lake made for bad drinking water. The "spirit" in the Sioux name alluded to the mists

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frequently seen over the lake. Interestingly, the lake has no outlet and an unprecedented increase in rainfall that started in the 1990s has quadrupled the surface area of the lake. The result is that over 400 houses have been moved or destroyed by the spreading waters, perhaps a portent of what's starting in our oceans. Riding into town from the west I could see water everywhere, and people were fishing right off the road where there were still trees and bushes popping up out of the water.

I got some bad gas in Devils Lake. The bike, I mean, not me :-). Filled up at a Cenex station before checking into the Holiday Inn, parked the bike for the night, and rolled out of town in 48-50-degree temperatures at about 8:15 AM. The bike seemed to be running okay, but I noticed right away that the current gas mileage figure on the Concours display panel was staying in the mid-30-mpg range. No matter what I did in terms of speed, revs, gear selection, etc., there it stayed. My friend and colleague Larry Bugbee mentioned to me recently that he sees a consistent difference in gas mileage in his Mustang between gas in California or Nevada and the gas he gets in Washington and Oregon. I thought (and hoped) this was the cause of my suddenly decreased gas mileage. When I filled up the tank again with 4.2 gallons of 91 octane, bingo! The current mileage jumped back into the 40-mpg range and continued to improve into the 50s on level roadway. That one tank of bad gas dropped my average mileage for the whole trip to date from 44.4 mpg to 43.9 mpg! Perhaps more highly tuned or powerful engines like those in Larry's Mustang and most motorcycles are particularly sensitive to gas quality, or maybe all engines are, and we just normally don't notice. The effect was dramatic: I filled the tank on the bike after only 170 miles or so instead of the 200+ miles I usually get from a tank. Perhaps the EPA should be regulating this more stringently. Clean burning or not, fuel that causes a 25-30% DECREASE in gas mileage has got to be a bad thing for global warming.

This fifth day on the road was uneventful. Most of the ride was on four-lane, divided highway. Of course, all of it, except the final part of the ride into Duluth, was on US 2. The two-lane section of US 2 through the Chippewa National Forest was very pretty. No curves worth mentioning, but I did get to pass a few cars and trucks.

Rain was threatening much of the day. There was a large, wet weather system to the south. I wore rain gloves and put the tank bag cover on, but the heaviest rain I rode through didn't even wet the roadway. There was a lot of damp pavement, but no serious rain. The temperature had warmed to as high as 68 degrees by the time I reached Floodwood, 40 or 50 miles west of Duluth, so I peeled off a layer of clothing and switched gloves. I was sorry I had done that because as I approached Duluth and Lake Superior, the big, cold lake's effect on the microclimate dropped the temp from 68 to 45 within just a few miles. I turned on the heated handgrips and raised the windscreen all the way, but still shivered until I reached my day's destination.

I had planned to stay at a Motorcycle Travel Network house in Duluth, but after stopping there and getting some local information, I decided to stay at the Comfort Suites Hotel down in the Canal Park district, right on the waterfront, on Sunday and Monday nights. That put over a dozen restaurants and scores of interesting and photogenic places within easy walking distance.

I'm writing this at breakfast on Monday morning looking out at the whitecaps on Lake Superior. Evidently a cold front rolled through last night and brought rain (and another free bike wash). It's cold and blustery outside, but it's not raining at the moment. After I finish this entry, I'm going to ride over to Aerostich, which is only about a mile from here. I plan to walk around the Canal Park area this afternoon and take some pictures. Then I'm going to eat dinner at the same cafe I enjoyed dinner at last night. It's

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called the Lake Avenue Cafe, a fantastic little cafe. Very eclectic wine list and menu. I had a superb Merlot last night, recommended by one of the owners, a cup of ham and sauerkraut soup (incredible) and a small Greek pizza...just enough to leave me well sated after a light breakfast and only coffee and a roll for lunch at Caribou Coffee in Bemidji, MN.

Other observations from Sunday's ride: The people in Minnesota are noticeably more friendly and outgoing that I've experienced on the rest of the ride. I've had a lot of people walk up and ask about the ride, the bike, give suggestions about routing, check weather for me, etc. Lake Wobegone indeed! By the fourth day of this trip I noticed that I'm no longer particularly stiff and tired at the end of the day's ride. I must be adjusting or toughening up, because it's just seeming routine now. Of course, keeping the daily ride lengths in the 350-mile range helps a lot. I'm not feeling hard-pressed to make a schedule. In fact, yesterday I was deliberately taking it easy on the road.

Stats for the day: left Devils Lake, ND, at 8:15 AM CDT; arrived Duluth, MN, 4:30 PM CDT; 363 miles ridden; temperature range 45-68 degrees F; overall trip average moving speed (GPS) 60.2 mph; max speed for the day (GPS) 94.2 mph; overall trip average gas mileage (Concours) 43.9 mpg. TOTAL MILES RIDDEN 1,757.

I'll plan another entry tonight after my shopping and sightseeing day today. Tomorrow morning I'll be heading out for Manistique, Michigan, and will cross into yet another time zone.

Day 6, Monday, May 9, 2011: Non-riding day in Duluth, MN



My luck with the weather is holding, a credit, no doubt, to my wife's prayers. I spent an enjoyable, lazy day in Duluth shopping at Aerostich, seeing the sights, enjoying some good food and wine, and resting. After experiencing no rain worth mentioning for 1,757 miles, I found myself on a day of rest in Duluth with rain pouring down, blustery wind blowing like stink, and temperatures in the high 40s much of the day. It was a good day to NOT be riding.

After a leisurely breakfast at the in the best hotel free-breakfast room I've ever seen, in the Comfort Suites in Canal Park, I suited up and rode the wet, bumpy, brick streets of downtown Duluth to a mecca for serious motorcycle riders, Aerostich. If you didn't know what you were looking for, you'd never notice the unprepossessing, brick building where they make, sell, and mail what is widely regarded to be the best motorcycle clothing you can buy. I spent an enjoyable two hours being well cared for in their surprisingly compact onsite showroom. They had one or more of most of the items in their catalog on

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display. I used my Boeing-team-provided gift certificate to buy a luxurious pair of Japanese-made, cold weather riding gloves, a "wind-blocker" jacket/liner, and a refill pack of tubeless tire plugs for a tire repair kit I'm carrying. I've worn the Aerostich jacket the rest of the day today in the cold rain, and it's great! My thanks go to all my Boeing friends who contributed to a perfect gift for me. I actually have some credit left on the gift certificate! While I was there, the young woman who was helping me replaced a zipper slider on my Roadcrafter riding suit and made a couple of other small repairs...no charge.

I'm loving Duluth. The Canal Park area is wonderful. There are thirteen restaurants within a couple of blocks, some great shops, the Lake Superior Maritime Museum, and excellent views of the city, Lake Superior, the Duluth ship canal, and the famous Aerial Lift Bridge. The enclosed photo is a shot I took just before dinnertime of a large (I'd guess 800 - 1,000 foot) bulk ore carrier passing through the ship canal. The Lake Avenue Cafe is a wonderful find. I've had dinner here both nights and am writing this entry at the cafe as I finish dinner. One of the owners suggested a superb Napa Merlot last night, a Rialto Cellars wine, supposedly made in a garage by a couple of expert winemakers who buy leftover grapes and blend the result into some luscious wines.

It's been a really excellent non-riding day. I chatted with a lot of interesting people, locals, Canadians, riders, non-riders, all friendly, all offering some good tips on places to see and roads to ride. I'll repack the pannier liners and tail trunk tonight, rise early, breakfast, and head out tomorrow morning for Manistique, Michigan, on the northern shore of Lake Michigan. With luck and a good Internet connection, I'll send another entry from there.

Stats for the day: distance ridden about 3 miles, max speed about 35 mph.

Day 7, Tuesday, May 10, 2011: Duluth, MN to Manistique, MI



Larry Bugbee commented in an email that the Concours always looks clean (it's not) and that I never posted any pictures of myself. Well here's one response: a self-portrait of me at a short rest stop in Wisconsin. I really needed the layers this morning. I had the Aerostich Kanetsu Airvantage vest not only on, but inflated to help hold the heat close to my skin. It was 37 degrees along the Lake Superior shore in Duluth and through Superior, WI. The water must be really cold! I talked with a Canadian couple I met at Aerostich yesterday. They live on Thunder Bay on the north shore of the lake and told me that Thunder Bay is still frozen! Evidently, they have to bring an icebreaker in every spring to clear the ice from this enclosed bay. The temperature actually felt like the coldest of the trip so far, even though

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Stevens Pass in Washington was at 30 degrees when I rode through. The humid air near the shore must cool you more rapidly than dry air at the same temperature. Evidently the specific heat of humid air is higher...if that concept makes any sense.

The ride across Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan (the "U. P.", as the locals refer to it...just like Minneapolis-St. Paul are called just "The Cities" in these parts)...anyway the ride was pleasant enough, relatively warm away from the water, and traffic-free until I got to the section of US 2 that tracks along the Lake Michigan shore. The temperature got up to about 58 degrees in the middle of the ride. I changed to my regular riding gloves at that point. Thank goodness for the heated grips on the Concours, because the temperature dropped to a blustery 48 degrees as I neared Lake Michigan.

The only event of note was that my GPS had a bad day, as John Holt says. I had the route loaded, with the GPS set for shortest distance and automatic rerouting. Everything was fine until for some reason the Garmin Zumo decided to have me turn left on what I thought was a continuation of the state route I'd been riding on. Wrong. It was a very secondary, secondary road, narrow, bumpy, some crud on the surface, but it had some curves and rolling hills. I was just starting to get into the rhythm of that particular road, when BAM! the pavement ended. I got on the brakes pretty hard and stopped about 3 feet from the dirt, gravel and grass in front of me. There wasn't much room to turn a fairly big, heavy bike around. I must have gotten on the gas a little too much as I completed the 180, because the Kawasaki traction control kicked in for the first time since I've owned the bike. It may have saved me from a little extra excitement...hard to tell...but the KTRAC warning light was flashing like crazy.

I'm finally on Eastern time now and kinda tired, so I'll keep this short.

Larry, I'll try to remember to post a close-up of dirt and about a gillion dried bug splatters on the "clean" bike. The only wash it's had since before leaving Seattle is from rain.

Stats for the day: left Duluth, MN, at 7:45 AM CDT; arrived Manistique, MI, at 4:10 PM EDT; temperature range 37 to 58 degrees F; 343 miles ridden today; total trip average moving speed (GPS) 58.9 mph; max speed for the day (GPS) 94.2 mph; total trip average gas mileage (Concours) 43.8 mpg; TOTAL MILES RIDDEN 2,108.

Day 8, Wednesday, May11, 2011: Leaving Manistique, MI

It's raining heavily with repeated thunderstorms passing over the Upper Peninsula this morning. On the weather radar it appears that this front is moving east and maybe sliding a bit north, which means that I should get out from under it as I go south. The problem is that I have to go east first and take the high bridge over the Straits of Mackinac, which is going to be interesting in heavy rain, lightening, and high winds. I'm taking my time getting out of here to see if conditions improve somewhat. Schedule shouldn't be a problem, because I can significantly shorten travel time by taking the direct route rather than the scenic one down to the Detroit area.

It looks like Columbus, where I'm heading on Thursday, is pretty warm...upper 80s. I plan to ship a few extra "winter" items home soon to lighten the load. The gloves and jacket/liner I bought at Aerostich absorbed most of the extra carrying capacity in my hard luggage. When I have to take off more layers and fit all that into the bags, it's going to be tight! UPS, here I come.

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Day 8, Wednesday, May 11, 2011: Manistique, MI, to Clarkston, MI

Crossing the Straits of Mackinac bridge this morning in high winds on wet steel grating is the most frightening motorcycle experience of my life, and I fervently hope that it remains so. I waited out the thunderstorms in Manistique and left on very wet roads and in high winds at 10 AM. The 86-mile drive to I-75 and the bridge wasn't pleasant, but wasn't too terrible...just a lot of road spray and wind buffeting on a section of US 2 that tracks along the northern shore of Lake Michigan. When I arrived at the bridge toll booth on I-75, it was extremely windy...white caps and spray everywhere on the water...but not raining. They were escorting trucks across...shepherding them with police cars very slowly at wide intervals. Although I can normally keep the Concours on a steady track a foot or two wide, I could barely keep the bike in my lane.

<http://www.mightymac.org/bridge.htm>



This 5-mile long bridge is the longest suspension span in the western hemisphere. There are two lanes in each direction with a solid concrete divider about 4 feet high separating the north and southbound lanes. The road surface on the non-suspended part of the bridge (the ramps that climb to the 200-foot-high suspended section) is concrete. The outer lanes on the suspension span are concrete, but the inner lanes are steel grating...in this case wet steel grating. The concrete was scary enough, but they had a section blocked for maintenance right at the high point of the bridge. That forced all of the traffic onto the grating. The wind was blowing very strongly from the left, and every time a northbound truck or van went by the wind was suddenly stopped. If you ride, you know what that does to a bike. One second you're leaning far to the left to stay on the road, the next second you're slamming the bike upright to keep from hitting the concrete barrier, and the second after that you have to slam the bike back to the left to keep from running into the road construction zone. I kept reminding myself to quit trying to bend the handlebars, but with limited success. Whew!

After surviving that, I just wanted to keep going and get out of the damn wind, so I continued on I-75 south still being blown all over the lane by gusty winds, but it was a kind of muted experience after the bridge. Then it started to rain and rain hard as I rode through about a 50-mile-wide thunderstorm complete with lightening and high winds. It was almost relaxing at that point. The temperature stayed right at 43 degrees the whole time, and with the rain / wind chill, I had the electrics dialed up pretty high. Thanks to heated clothing and handgrips, I was actually quite comfortable for the nearly 100 miles

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it took to get out of the rain. When I stopped for gas and a sandwich about 180 miles from my starting point in the morning, the rain finally stopped.

I had long since decided to stay on I-75 all the way. No way was I going to ride right along the western shore of Lake Huron in that wind! After I got south of Saginaw Bay, the temperature really started climbing. It reached 79 degrees pretty fast, so to stay comfortable I just lowered the Concours windscreen all the way. Of course, I had long since turned off the electrics. I stopped at a rest stop on the north side of Flint to take off the Aerostich vest and change gloves. I also called my MTN host, Tom Decker, to give him an ETA.

I found Tom's and Lori's place with no problem. The GPS was having a good day today. Tom had told me to pull right into their garage, which I did, making the Concours the 4th bike in their garage. Tom and Lori have a lovely home and have been marvelous hosts. We sipped wine over dinner and talked motorcycles (mostly) for a couple of hours. Tom and Lori both ride. They went to Alaska a year or so ago, Tom on a KLR650 and Lori on a Suzuki Burgman 650.

Stats for the day: left Manistique, MI, at 10 AM EDT; arrived Clarkston, MI, 5:15 PM EDT. Temperature range 43-79 degrees; days ride length 355 miles; total trip moving average (GPS) = 59.2 mph; day's max speed (GPS) = 88.0 mph; total trip gas mileage (Concours) = 43.5 mpg; TOTAL MILES RIDDEN TO DATE = 2463.4.

Day 9, Thursday, May 12, 2011: Clarkston, MI, to Galloway, OH

My spring this year lasted about 18 hours...from Saginaw, Michigan, to Toledo, Ohio, including an overnight stay in Clarkston, Michigan. I'm now in summer in Galloway, Ohio, just west of Columbus. I left Clarkston at about 8:30 AM in nice sunny 68-degree weather. I rode west to pick up US 23 south rather than riding through Detroit in rush hour. The air temperature was rising steadily as I made my way into Ohio. I found some relatively minor roads for the trip south to the Columbus area. By the time I hit I-270 around Columbus, the Concours display said it was 86 degrees. I peeled off layers, changed to vented summer gloves, opened the vents on the Roadcrafter suit, lowered the Concours windscreen, and tried to mentally adjust to the whole idea of warm weather. It was a novel experience after fall and winter in Seattle, and a 2460-mile ride through winter in six states.

At about 2:20 PM I arrived at my aunt's and uncle's very comfortable home in a wooded area off of US 40. I hadn't seen them for 25 years, but it was just like old times. We had a lot of fun catching up. I enjoyed a wonderful dinner of the best BBQ pork ribs I've ever tasted, followed by one of my aunt's homemade lemon meringue pies. Yum!

I was surprised by the amount of commercial truck traffic on some really narrow secondary roads through Ohio farm country. My Uncle Chuck, who founded a company that calibrates big scales, told me that they're on these roads to avoid the truck scales and associated hassle on the major roads. Some of this is Amish country, and there were classic red barns all along the highways. I should have gotten some photos, but I had this image of a farmer's reaction to a godless motorcyclist parking in his driveway...something involving a loaded shotgun.

I followed my plan of not riding on Friday the 13th, but don't call me superstitious...I'm just trying to keep the odds in my favor as much as possible. I had a great time with my aunt and uncle catching up on old times today (the 13th as I type this). I pulled 4 or 5 pounds of things like winter gloves out of my

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load, went to the local UPS warehouse, and sent the stuff home to Seattle. I hope I made the right choices. Live and learn.

On Saturday I have a short ride of a little over 100 miles to meet my sister and her family near Wooster, Ohio. There are a lot of thunderstorms all around here, but somehow, they're missing this immediate area completely. I hope tomorrow is just as dry as it was here today.

Stats for the day: left Clarkston, MI, at 8:32 AM; arrived Galloway, Ohio, 2:22 PM; temperature range 68 - 86 degrees F; 277 miles ridden today; total trip moving average speed (GPS) = 58.6 mph; max speed for the day (GPS) = 99.9 mph; TOTAL TRIP MILES TO DATE = 2739.7 miles.

Saturday, May 14, 2011; Galloway, OH, to Millersburg, OH



Short ride today from Galloway, Ohio, just west of Columbus on The National Road (US 40) to a picturesque B & B called The Barn Inn near Millersburg, Ohio. Loretta and Paul, the proprietors, were very welcoming, even to a dude rolling in on a motorcycle. My sister and her family, Susie, Tom, and Greg Battaglia, met me here.

Thanks to my aunt's and uncle's directions, I was able to avoid main roads completely on yesterday's ride. The closest I got to an Interstate was riding an overpass across I-70. Temperatures stayed in the groove at 70 - 75 degrees the whole way, very pleasant. The last part of the trip re-introduced me to curves, which were few and far between across the midsection of the U.S.

We're deep in the heart of Amish country. Coming back from dinner last night in Tom's van we saw more Amish carriages than cars. It was almost eerily dark because the farmhouses were not lit with electric light...just candles and kerosene lanterns, I presume.

We had an excellent dinner at the Wooster Inn with my niece, Jessica, who is graduating from The College of Wooster tomorrow. There were huge thunderstorms and local flooding here yesterday, a good time to have the bike parked.

Stats for the day: Left Galloway, OH, at 11:20 AM EDT; arrived at Millersburg, OH, at 1:53 PM; 111 miles ridden today; max speed for the day 87.4 mph; average gas mileage to date 43.8 mpg; TOTAL MILES RIDDEN 2851.6 miles.

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Monday, May 16, 2011: Wooster, OH, to Mt. Lebanon, PA



Sunday and Monday were rainy, cold days in Millersburg and Wooster, Ohio. The temperature dropped from the mid-80s to the mid-forties in the course of about 48 hours. I'm back in winter! Fortunately, I was able to luxuriate in the well protected warmth of my brother-in-law's Grand Caravan for all the trips to Wooster College events. The biggest road hazard for cars and trucks was the large number of Amish buggies on the roads at all hours of the day and night. The biggest road hazard for bikes clearly was the abundant, rain-slicked horse manure that decorated the roadways everywhere. That would truly be an ignominious way to drop a bike. I was extremely careful riding on those roads!

While we were spending some free time at The Barn Inn (a lovely B&B with excellent breakfasts, by the way), I learned a little more about the Amish. Ohio has the largest Amish population of any state in the U.S. There are 375 Amish congregations in Ohio, each of which has its own very nuanced rules about adopting modern ways. The most noticeable variation to me was in the way the Amish carriages were lit at night. At one extreme were the few carriages that had no lighting on the back at all and some very dim (probably kerosene or oil) headlamps. At the other extreme, I saw some carriages with strobe lights and LEDs on the back and what had to be electric headlights.

The baccalaureate and commencement ceremonies at Wooster were very nice, but my favorite event was the commencement concert on Sunday night. The Wooster Symphony Orchestra, The College of Wooster Jazz Ensemble, an incredible professional jazz clarinetist named Paquito D'Rivera, and an amazing harmonica player named Richard Sleigh performed a Nelson Riddle work called "Cross Country Suite". This is an eleven-movement work for clarinet and jazz orchestra composed by Nelson Riddle in 1958 in the tradition of "programmatic works" such as "Pictures at an Exhibition" and "The Four Seasons". It won the 1959 Grammy for "Best New Instrumental Composition", amid positive critical reviews. Because this crossover work was so novel...not clearly jazz, not clearly classical, it didn't sell well and was essentially lost over the years. Jeffrey Lindberg, the Wooster music director and conductor, learned about the piece in 2006 and reconstructed it from the partial score fragments he could find and by transcribing from the original 1958 Dot recording. Sunday's performance was the Ohio premier of "Cross Country Suite". The performance was a true tour de force, and the long, standing ovation was well deserved!

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Because the B&B was about 25 miles from Wooster, I had to pack the Concours and ride to the commencement ceremony on Monday morning through rain and on sloppy roads. Parking was a challenge, and I ended up wearing my full riding attire into the gym, where the weather conditions had forced them to move the ceremony. Nobody seemed to care, although I had to use an extra seat to park all of my gear.

After packing my niece's belongings into two cars, the five of us, driving four vehicles, rolled out of Wooster. My nephew Greg, took a rental car back to Cleveland's airport to catch a flight to Miami for a business engagement. My niece Jessica drove her old Volvo home. Susie and Tom, my sister and her husband, drove their minivan home. We had a late lunch, so I ended up leaving Wooster on the bike at about 4:25 PM. Fortunately, by then, the rain had stopped and the road surfaces were mostly dry, but the temperature was 45 degrees. I had the electrics on all the way to Mt. Lebanon, a nice suburb south of Pittsburgh.

And the winner is...Pennsylvania...for having the worst drivers of any state I've ridden through on this trip. Tailgating, gross speeding, blocking entry ramp merges, passing fast on the right, you name it, they did it. I finally got fed up on I79 and just blasted away from all the idiots until I could get off the (fortunately) nearby exit. To be fair, that's a bad stretch of road, but still...

Stats for the day: left Wooster, OH, at 4:25 PM; arrived Mt. Lebanon, PA, at 6:40 PM; temperature range 39 - 50 degrees F; 140 miles ridden on the Wooster-to-Mt.-Lebanon leg plus some local miles riding between the inn and the college; moving average speed to date (GPS) 56.9 mph; max speed for the day (GPS) 94.3 mph; average gas mileage to date 43.7 mpg; TOTAL MILES RIDDEN TO DATE 3,028.

Friday, May 20, 2011: Mt. Lebanon, PA, to Reston, VA



After a very enjoyable and relaxing stay with my sister and her family in suburban Mt. Lebanon south of Pittsburgh, I departed as planned on Friday morning at 8:15. A week-long rain had finally stopped on Thursday. Although it was a bit foggy Friday morning, the riding conditions were very nice with temperatures hovering around 50 degrees.

Heading south on I-79, I encountered more bad Pennsylvania drivers. Frankly, I'm surprised at this observation about distinct differences in driving styles from state to state, especially those about Pennsylvania since I lived in the Pittsburgh area for 18 years. The topper this time was a woman who had pulled over to the shoulder to have a cell phone conversation, a sensible move, although perhaps

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not on an Interstate highway. Unfortunately, she then pulled out at slow speed onto a 65-mph freeway right in front of me while continuing to talk on her cell phone. I was in the right lane of two lanes going close to 70 with a car slowly passing to my left and with nowhere to swerve. If I hadn't been paying attention and hadn't braked hard, I'd have slammed into the back of her SUV. Fortunately, there was no one following me closely, or I could have been rear-ended. Ah well...I'm safely in Virginia now.

I was looking forward to riding some of the many excellent motorcycle roads in West Virginia not only for the obvious enjoyment of riding but also to put some wear on something other than the center sections of the Dunlop sport touring tires on the Concours. Heading south on US 119 below Morgantown, West Virginia, I started to get that old, pleasant feeling of riding twisty, two-lane blacktop on a fine machine. About halfway to Grafton, where US 119 crosses US 50, it started to rain fairly hard. The road surface was pretty chopped up in many places, and with the addition of rainwater to the mix, traction seemed marginal. The traction control on the Concours actually kicked in briefly as I went uphill under power over a particularly bumpy section of road.

US 50 going east out of Grafton ascends and descends quite a few Appalachian mountain ridges up to 3,000 feet high. This is prime West Virginia motorcycle road, but I felt uneasy riding the section of US 50 between Grafton and the Maryland border. The wet roadway was heavily patched and very bumpy with ripples in the surface around some of the curves. Roughly 70% - 80% of the road surface on that part of the ride was in poor condition. There was fog hovering below and at the tops of the ridges limiting visibility, and there was a surprising number of trucks. All of this contributed to that uneasy feeling, so I dialed it back and rode quite conservatively until I crossed into the southwest corner of the Maryland panhandle.

The sun came out at just about the Maryland border, and the roadway was dry in this beautiful part of Maryland. Cumberland Gap is visible from US 50, and I had a good view of this famous saddle in the ridge line to the south. Shame on me for not stopping to take some pictures! The riding conditions were excellent and the road was in good shape through Maryland and on back into eastern West Virginia. I stopped for lunch in Romney, West Virginia, which felt like a veritable metropolis after all the tiny towns and villages I'd ridden through. A typical West Virginia village has just a few local businesses, often very rundown, at least one abandoned building of dark grey weathered wood, one gas station, and a couple of old houses built of locally quarried stone. Frequently the nicest building in town is the local funeral home, which one could easily mistake for a quaint B&B. Romney, on the other hand, seemed to be booming with lots of well-kept businesses, multiple national-brand gas stations, actual traffic, and even a McDonald's where I had lunch.

Because radar detectors are illegal in Virginia, I pulled the Adaptiv TPX unit out of its quick-release mount during my lunch stop and stowed it in a case in my tank bag. I crossed the Virginia border a bit after 1:00 PM and rode through some traffic and lots of stoplights in Winchester, Virginia, as I continued east on US 50. This part of Virginia is beautiful country resplendent with rolling green hills, pastures, horses, old mansions with acres of well-groomed lawns, stone fences, and pretty little towns like Upperville and Middleburg bristling with antique shops. There's a wonderful old country inn in Paris, Virginia, called The Ashby Inn. It has a great dining room, where I've dined a couple of times with my friends John and Petra Holt and once with my Boeing colleagues, Jacqueline Knoll and Holly Kehoe. The Red Fox Inn in Middleburg, where Jacqueline and Steve Whitlock and I also once dined and where I've eaten many times, was in operation during the Revolutionary War, and it serves wonderful food in its

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famous old dining rooms. I was sorry to have no excuse and no company with whom to enjoy a meal at one of these lovely old Virginia inns.

I arrived at John and Petra Holt's pretty home in Reston, Virginia, at 3:00 PM on the nose. John, who shares my motorcycling priorities, had a space cleared in his garage for the Concours, so I pulled right in between his BMW K1100RS and his Toyota MR2. (See the above photo.) The Holts always make me feel like a member of their family when I'm at their place, so I quickly unloaded the bike and cleaned up in preparation for a wine tasting event at their house Friday evening. John and I collaborated on setting out hors d'oeuvre and preparing for this very professionally organized wine tasting. Close to twenty people tasted 15 bottles of the theme wine for the evening: any Virginia wine. John tells me that there are now 150 wineries in Virginia and that there is at least one winery in every state in the U.S., excepting Alaska. Dean Wolf, an old Boeing friend and colleague and one of the founders of this wine tasting group, and I had an enjoyable time in the course of the evening catching up on our respective lives.

On the motorcycle front, the Concours has been great throughout this trip, never missing a beat, never having any problem; however, I can't say the same for the accessory top case made by an OEM provider to Kawasaki (Givi?). This expensive case, that I waited six months for, has a very poorly designed latching mechanism. It's difficult to lock and unlock, and it has popped open about four times on this trip so far. Luckily nothing has bounced or blown out, possibly because the lid is hinged in front and tends to be held down by the air moving across the top of the case. I carry my spare gloves and electrically heated vest in this case, among other things, so losing something on the road from this case would be a serious inconvenience in the varying conditions I'm still likely to encounter on this lengthy trip. This morning I ordered an elastic ROK strap from Aerostich to fasten around the top case as a safety strap. It should arrive here at the Holts' place in time for our departure on the Memorial Day Chicken Run next Saturday.

Stats for the day: left Mt. Lebanon, PA, at 8:15 AM; arrived Reston, VA, 3:00 PM; temperature range 50 - 70 degrees; 280 miles ridden for the day; moving average speed for the trip (GPS) 56.1 mph; max speed for the day (GPS) 97.6 mph; TOTAL MILES RIDDEN TO DATE = 3,308 miles; TOTAL TIME RIDING TO DATE = 73 hours 14 minutes.

May 22, 2011 John Holt's Birthday Party



John gets help from Bridget, one of his four grandchildren, blowing out the candle on the birthday blueberry-peach cobbler made by his son Ian. It was a fine party indeed!

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Thursday, May 26, 2011: Fine friends and fine wine

It's been a great week here at Chez Holt in Reston. We've had some truly superb food and wine and the company of good friends. Some high points: last Friday's wine tasting of Virginia wines; John Holt's birthday party with roasted prime rib cooked on his new rotisserie barbecue; wine and cheese with Gary Greathouse and Dean Wolf; 2001 Beaucastel Chateauneuf de Pape; 2007 Lost River Cedarosa; 2009 Rialto Cellars Merlot; 2006 Ridge Zinfandel Nervo Vineyard...and more.

I particularly enjoyed getting to see John's and Petra's children, Robert, Ian and Odessa, and their spouses and children, as well as seeing Gary Greathouse and Dean Wolf. Gary not only made a special visit to join us on Tuesday, but had somehow managed to quickly acquire a half case of Rialto Cellars Merlot based on an email recommendation from me sent while I was in Duluth, a flattering if somewhat risky move. He brought a bottle to the Tuesday wine and cheese supper, and it was, in fact, an excellent wine. It will surely be a shock to go back to whatever cuisine and wine I can find on the highways and byways of America.

John and I went for a 109-mile shakedown cruise yesterday afternoon on some lovely back roads around Middleburg, Virginia. Getting out of the traffic congestion around the Dulles Airport corridor is getting to be problematic, but once we hit the back roads, we had some fine riding. John hasn't slowed down at all as far as I can judge. I couldn't keep up with him on some of the narrower, more technical backroads like the road past Foxcroft School. It's been pretty warm this week in Northern Virginia, and I'd guess we sweated off a couple of pounds each wearing full-face helmets and armored riding gear.

Tomorrow (Friday) will be a laundry and packing day as we prepare to head out Saturday morning for the Memorial Day Chicken Run to Brandywine and Snowshoe, West Virginia. John, Petra and I will drive to their son Robert's house outside Middleburg tomorrow afternoon. Petra will be staying with Robert and Pam and their children, Noah and Olivia, while John is away on the Chicken Run. John will return to Reston from the Chicken Run on Memorial Day as I start back to Seattle.

My next blog post may be somewhat delayed depending on availability of Wi-Fi in the Snowshoe condos. Snowshoe and the surrounding area are in the radio quiet zone that surrounds the National Radio Observatory at Green Bank, West Virginia, so I'm sure I'll have no AT&T 3G service at the condo. The plan is to ride from here to Brandywine, West Virginia, for barbecued chicken at the North Fork Volunteer Fire Department on Saturday morning. From there we'll ride to the top of the mountain (a tad under 5,000 feet) at Snowshoe where Kevin Hawkins will whip up his traditional spaghetti dinner for this rather large group. Sunday we'll ride a loop on some of the many excellent motorcycle roads in the West Virginia Highlands, perhaps going to a restaurant in Watoga State Park for Sunday breakfast. Sunday dinner traditionally is at one of the Snowshoe Resort restaurants, usually The Foxfire Grill. Monday we'll all head home, on courses to the north, east, south and west, the latter being me.

The alternative routes I've considered for the return trip have narrowed to two. Alternative 1: cross West Virginia; pick up the Ohio River Scenic Byway to Cincinnati; proceed west on US 50 to California; then head out to the California and Oregon coasts and on up to Seattle. Alternative 2 (if the weather looks nasty through the middle part of the country): ride north, pick up I-79 to Erie, Pennsylvania, then I-90 to Niagara Falls, cross into Canada, ride around Georgian Bay and Lake Superior to Duluth, then head southwest to Mt. Rushmore, cross Wyoming, pick up US 93 north through Idaho, then US 12 over Lolo

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Pass to Clarkston, Washington; continue across Washington to the Yakima area; then ride WA 410 past Mt. Rainier and on into Seattle. Variations are too numerous to mention, but these are the general ideas.

I'll post again as soon as I have some network access from West Virginia or wherever.

My thanks to John and Petra and their families and friends for making my stay in Northern Virginia a wonderful experience.

Saturday and Sunday, May 28-29, 2011: Reston, VA, to Snowshoe, WV and Pocahontas County



Truly I'd forgotten how great it is to ride the hills, mountains, and unending curves on good West Virginia roads with a group of expert riders. Wow! The tires on the Concours finally are scrubbed just about to the edges after thousands of miles of mostly straight-ahead cruising. The high point for me on Saturday was riding West Virginia 66 from Route 28 south of Green Bank to the bottom of the mountain at Snowshoe. I finally really got comfortable riding some very technical, narrow, twisty roads with the revs up into some of the Concours' real power band.

John Holt and I left his house in Reston, Virginia, at 7:20 Saturday morning in near perfect weather conditions, stopped for a quick breakfast at McDonald's in Marshall, Virginia, and rode on I-66 and I-81 to our usual meeting place at the Edinburg Shell station. After fueling the bikes, we relaxed for a bit until Forrest Walls, Jeff Hughes, Neil Ayers and Denise joined us. The rest of the ride to Brandywine, West Virginia, was on the usual secondary roads until we reached US 33 west. The ride up the mountain to the Virginia-West Virginia line is always fun. It was made more interesting this time by a character in a big pickup truck who sped up to 90 mph or so to avoid being passed by motorcycles. Jeff, John H., and Neil passed him without much trouble and disappeared up the mountain, not to be seen again until the chicken sale in Brandywine. I laid back and enjoyed the ride up and down the mountain at a pretty good clip behind the pickup.

We enjoyed the barbecued chicken for an early lunch and headed on west on US 33 to Route 28 south at Judy Gap. The roads and scenery in this part of West Virginia are gorgeous. Some of the views across valleys from ridge to ridge encompass miles and miles of quietly beautiful countryside. Germany Valley has a particularly beautiful overlook. Route 28 south is a rolling, curvy road that climbs fairly high past Spruce Knob, the highest point in West Virginia, and then drops down into the valley at Barstow. It's always striking to see the big 100-meter dish at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory hove into

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view just west of Route 28 as you ride south into Green Bank. Route 66 heads west from 28 past the Cass Scenic Railway and on to the bottom of the mountain at Snowshoe. That was a great ride. No way I could keep up with Jeff and John on Route 66, but Neil didn't catch up with me until the gas and grocery stop before the ride up the mountain to Snowshoe. I'm not saying he couldn't have, mind you, just that he didn't :-)

As our Chicken Run friends from North Carolina, Virginia, and Pennsylvania started rolling into the Whistlepunk condo parking lot, I was duly impressed by the serious sport touring bikes and excellent riders arriving for this 33rd Memorial Day Chicken Run. The total was 14 bikes, two with passengers riding pillion, for a total of 16 Chicken Runners on this trip. After some showers and beers, we enjoyed an excellent spaghetti dinner prepared by Kevin Hawkins, with contributions from others.

On Sunday, the group split into two sets of riders for our traditional loop on some of the great roads in the Pocahontas County area, and I was one of 12 bikes that headed down to Marlinton for breakfast and then rode some lovely, rolling, twisty roads up to the Highlands Scenic Highway (WV 150) for another C-R tradition, a photo stop at a scenic overlook where the enclosed picture was taken. Neil had Denise taking video on Route 150 as he blasted past some of us fast enough to generate a shock wave. John Holt and I swapped bikes for the 30-mile ride from Valley Head on US 219 to Webster Springs. I think John enjoyed riding the Concours even though the seat was custom made for me and didn't fit him at all. I rode his BMW K1100RS very conservatively on some nasty road surfaces on Route 15. After lunch at the Custard Stand just outside Webster Springs, Dolph and I decided to head back to Snowshoe while the rest of the group continued a longer loop for several more hours. Dolph and I enjoyed the ride at a relatively relaxed pace, both of us realizing that we were dehydrated and tired.

We all walked to dinner at Snowshoe Village. Five of us had an excellent meal at Foxfire Grill and enjoyed the view from about 5,000 feet at the top of the mountain as the sun dropped behind the ridges to the west. Snowshoe is unique in my experience. Imagine a something like the Upper Village at Whistler transplanted to the top of a mountain in a very sparsely populated National Forest and you'll kind of get the idea. You can't see any signs of civilization to speak of as you gaze at the views to the horizon in all directions.

Based on weather and the need to replace the tires on the Kawasaki sometime this week, I've decided to head west tomorrow through West Virginia, cross the Ohio River in Huntington, and follow the Ohio toward Cincinnati. On Tuesday I'll start working the logistics of replacing tires on the Concours and probably getting an oil and filter change.

Stats for the Chicken Run: 244 miles ridden from Reston, VA, to Snowshoe, WV on Saturday; 173 miles ridden around Pocahontas County on Sunday; 3830 miles ridden on the trip so far; about 4200 miles on the Dunlop Road Smart tires I had put on the bike before I left; 7298 miles on the Concours since I bought it in June, 2010.

Monday, May 30, 2011: Snowshoe, WV to Lawrenceburg, IN

Memorial Day was a parting of the ways as the Chicken Run riders left the top of the mountain at Snowshoe at about 7:30 AM and headed home to Virginia, Pennsylvania, northern and southern West Virginia, North Carolina, and in my case, Washington State. Everyone reached their destinations safely amid rising temperatures, traffic, and lots of police enforcement. This was the beginning of my return trip to the Pacific Northwest, and it turned out to be a long, hot day's ride.

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The ride from Snowshoe south on US 219, then west on 39, 55 and 20 was as nice a motorcycle experience as one could ask for: cool temperatures, a little light fog, almost no traffic, and countless curves on decently maintained mountain roads. As I started south on 219, I saw Jeff Hughes taking some photos beside the road. I beeped and he waved, then I truly was on my own.

At the western end of my ride on West Virginia's enticing mountain roads, I connected with US 19 north for 20 miles or so and then took Interstates south and west to the West Virginia border at Huntington. I shed some layers as temperatures rose steadily from the 50-degree mark at the bottom of the mountain at Snowshoe to the mid-80s by the time I reached the Ohio River at Huntington.

My goal for the day was to ride the Ohio River Scenic Byway (US 52 in this part of the Byway) to somewhere around Cincinnati. By the time I finished a quick lunch at McDonald's in Ironton, Ohio, just off the highway the air temperature was hovering close to the 90-degree mark. US 52 was a disappointing ride on marginal roadways through several ugly little towns. Occasionally there were some nice two-lane sections close to the Ohio River where the temperature moderated a bit. For the last 150 miles of the ride the Connie's air temperature readout was pinned right at 90 degrees.

Having no particular destination in mind, I pressed on around Cincinnati on I-275 in a good bit of fast-moving traffic crossing the Ohio into Kentucky and then again into Indiana. I filled the Connie's gas tank in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, and found a nearby Holiday Inn Express on the GPS. Unfortunately, the GPS didn't correctly resolve the address and led me on a long circle back onto I-275 into Ohio and then back into Indiana. I wasted about 15 miles until I found the hotel the old-fashioned way by asking for directions.

It was a relief to get off the bike, lose the helmet and Aerostich riding suit, and get out of that heat. I was tired and dehydrated and couldn't believe it when I calculated the day's mileage at 430 miles. It took me a couple of hours to rehydrate, shave, shower and feel more or less human again. I got a restaurant recommendation from the hotel desk manager and took a short taxi ride to a place perched right on the Indiana bank of the recently flooded Ohio River. They had tables outside, but I stayed inside in the air-conditioned dining room and had a reasonably good dinner.

Stats for the day: left Snowshoe, WV at 7:30 AM EDT; arrived Lawrenceburg, IN, at 4:14 PM EDT; temperature range 50 - 90 degrees F; 430 miles ridden today; average gas mileage for the trip so far = 44.0 mpg; average moving speed on the trip so far = 54.9 mph; total moving time on the trip so far = 76 hours 33 minutes; 4,259 TOTAL MILES RIDDEN ON THE TRIP.

Tuesday, May 31, 2011: Lawrenceburg, IN, to Effingham, IL

While at Snowshoe I asked Kevin Hawkins to take a look at the rear tire on the Connie. The center of the tire was wearing down toward the wear bars after 4,200 miles of heavily loaded high-speed, mostly straight-ahead riding. Kevin estimated that the Dunlop Roadsmart rear tire had maybe another 1,500 miles of tread life left, enough for three or four days of riding, but definitely not enough to get me home. I had a new set of Dunlops installed on the Connie just before I started about 350 miles of shakedown rides prior to departing Seattle and was hoping they would last for the entire 6,000-7,000-mile trip. With a full load of luggage, the Connie's tremendous power, and a lot of highway riding, that just wasn't to be.

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On Tuesday Kawasaki dealers would be opening by 9 or 10 AM, so I started some research on the web on Monday night and continued it on Tuesday morning. I found a promising-looking, large dealership in Terre Haute called Thompson's Motorsports and tried to call the service manager from the road. I didn't get through and so decided just to get back on the road and head for Terre Haute. The ride was almost all on two-lane blacktop, and Route 46 was a particularly nice road that wound through an Indiana state park. I rode through Bloomington, Indiana, past the University of Indiana stadium thinking of "Breaking Away" and "The Little 500".

I walked into Thompson's Motorsports in Terre Haute at about 1:30 PM EDT, and the young service manager seemed confident that they could mount new tires, change the oil, and check over the bike right away. I was just finishing lunch at a nearby Subway when the service manager called my cell phone to tell me they were mistaken about their tire inventory and had no complete set of sport touring tires to fit the Connie. That was disappointing, but understandable. What I didn't appreciate was having both the service manager and later a parts guy at Thompson's try to sell me a set of Pilot Road 3s that included the wrong size rear tire, a 180/55ZR17 instead of a 190/50ZR17, knowing that I had thousands of miles potentially hazardous riding ahead of me. While they no doubt could have mounted the tire, it was simply not a safe solution. They should know better.

I called 5 or 6 Kawasaki dealers in eastern Indiana and central Illinois. None had sport touring tires in stock. Evidently, they sell more sport and cruising tires around here. Some of the parts departments were not helpful at all ("We don't stock no sport tourin' tires."), but I found a small dealership called R & R Powersports in Effingham, Illinois, that was willing to work the problem for me. They're on Central Daylight Time in Effingham, so I was catching them an hour earlier than the Indiana dealers, giving them more time to get an order in. I talked with both Gary, the owner, and Randy the service manager. Gary checked with his distributors and called me back as promised to tell me that while there were no Michelin Pilot Road 3s available, he could get Dunlop or Metzler sport touring tires for me by Wednesday afternoon. I asked him to order a set of Metzler Roadtec Z8 Interact sport touring tires for me and gave him my credit card info.

I hopped on I-70 west for the short ride from Terre Haute to Effingham, Illinois, wearing the evaporative vest and neck cloth. It was only 86 degrees, and I was quite comfortable for the 1-hour-20-minute ride. I arrived at the Holiday Inn Express just off I-70 Exit 166 at 2:20 PM CDT (gained an hour). I called Gary at R & R Supersport after checking in to verify the tire order he had placed and to get directions to the dealership. As in all of my interactions with the people at R & R, Gary was friendly, helpful, and competent. The correct Metzler Z8s for the Connie were on order, the directions to the dealership were clear, and Gary offered to drive me back to the hotel on Wednesday so I wouldn't have to hang around the dealership all day. I'd somehow lucked into a gem of a motorcycle dealership, where people actually knew what they were doing and went out of their way to help a customer.

I had no incidents of any kind today. Although they were using instant-on Ka band radar all around Bloomington, Indiana, I was holding carefully to the in-town posted speeds, as I always do. The radar detector was flashing like crazy, a small bit of entertainment on the road.

Stats for the day: left Lawrenceburg, IN, at 8:40 PM EDT; arrived Effingham, IL, at 2:50 PM CDT; temp range 73 - 86 degrees F; 238 miles ridden today; total trip average gas mileage 44.2 mpg; total trip average moving speed 54.6 mph; total trip moving time 81 hours 12 minutes; 4,477 TOTAL MILES RIDDEN TO DATE.

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Wednesday and Thursday, June 1-2, 2011: Effingham, Illinois

R & R Powersports in Effingham turned to be a real find, and thanks to some pointers from Gary Rogers, the owner of R & R, I found Effingham to be a great place for a three-night stopover.

I had called R & R on Tuesday asking for tires and an oil change on Wednesday, and they delivered as promised. By Wednesday afternoon the Metzlers had arrived, and Randy had the tires mounted, the wheels spin-balanced, and the wheels back on the bike. He could have finished an oil change, too, as I had originally requested, but I threw them a curve when I took the bike in on Wednesday morning. It suddenly had dawned on me that the Connie was due for a full 7,500-mile service. Randy said he could do the service on Thursday, so I said to just keep it another day and finish everything. Not bad since I called them Tuesday afternoon out of the blue and they were scheduled up with work until Friday and had to get tires in 24 hours.

I'm writing this on Friday afternoon from Bethany, Missouri, after riding 378 miles on the new tires and the fully serviced bike. The tires feel great -- very responsive -- and the bike is running and shifting more smoothly than it did before the service. Of course, as always with new tires, I rode the first couple hundred miles very carefully. Randy did a great job, carefully documented everything, and even cleaned up the bike. I'd put R & R Powersports on my "highly recommended" list of motorcycle dealerships if I had one. Perhaps the C-R group should consolidate inputs and put a list like that on the website.

Effingham turned out to be a very nice stopover. The Holiday Inn Express was quite nice. There were at least a dozen restaurants within short walking distance from the hotel, as well as a huge Walmart, a nice strip mall, a bank, gas stations, etc. I even found a haircut place in the mall, and got a much-needed trim on Wednesday. The population of this very clean, neat town of 12,000 people is temporarily doubled on a daily basis due to all the hotel guests and restaurant customers. The location is ideal since it's at the intersection of I-70 and I-57 and has several other roads passing through.

I feel very confident that the Connie will continue to perform perfectly for the rest of this trip. It's a good feeling...one major item not to be concerned about.

Friday, June 3, 2011: Effingham, IL, to Bethany, MO

Avoiding Interstates and other major highways has become the name of the game on this return trip, but using the Zumo Interstate-avoidance option results in some interesting routing on occasion. I rode 100% state and local roads today, the longest being Route 104 in Illinois and Route 6 in Missouri. Except for the areas around three good-sized towns, these roads were virtually deserted. The road surfaces were generally good, although there were no technically challenging sections at all.

Route 104 crosses the surprisingly large Illinois River west of Jacksonville. I crossed the mighty Mississippi into Missouri just west of Quincy, Illinois...quite a sight even in this part of the river upstream of major tributaries: the Missouri, the Ohio, and the Illinois.

I encountered no rain today although I thought it was looking like thunderstorm conditions late in the afternoon. Temperatures ranged from the mid-60s to mid-70s in the morning, very pleasant. The afternoon temperatures were upper 80s to lower 90s, not quite so enjoyable. I stopped for lunch in Kirksville, Missouri, the home of Harry S. Truman University. Proceeding west on Missouri Route 6 after lunch grew to be quite hot and tedious.

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Although I'd worked at staying hydrated, I started to feel hot and nauseous by midafternoon. Routes 6 and 13 were both under repair, which compounded the difficulty of concentrating. I stopped in Trenton, Missouri, to chug down more water, and used half a liter to soak the evap vest and bandana. That helped. Then I hit 10 miles of freshly oiled road with loose gravel, no centerline, no shoulders. I almost started chuckling when I saw the deer crossing and Amish carriage warning signs, wondering what the hell I could do on that road surface if a deer popped out. So, I'm thinking this is one of those multiple-things-going-wrong scenarios that results in accidents. I was riding very carefully and the road was almost arrow-straight...so far, so good. Nothing could make this worse. Then I saw some storm clouds to the west and imagined what the freshly oiled road surface would be like if it started raining. Yikes! Luckily, no rain materialized.

By the time I got to the Comfort Inn in Bethany, I was really beat, the worst I've felt physically in 4900 miles of riding. I did something I never do -- ordered a small pizza to be delivered instead of cleaning up and walking to dinner. I also did a quick load of laundry since a lot of my riding stuff was sweat-soaked.

I'm planning a relatively short ride tomorrow -- just to Grand Island, Nebraska -about 275 miles. The only issue may be getting across the Missouri with the widespread flooding in the Missouri basin. I guess I'll find out tomorrow.

Stats for the day: left Effingham, IL, at 7:25 AM CDT; arrived Bethany, MO, at 4:25 PM CDT; 378 miles ridden today; temperature range 66 - 93 degrees F; total trip average gas mileage 44.3 mpg (it's been going up steadily in all this flat land); total trip moving average speed 54.3 mph; total trip moving time 88 hours, 30 minutes; 4,882 TOTAL MILES RIDDEN TO DATE.

Saturday, June 4, 2011: Bethany, MO to Grand Island, NE

I planned a short ride today in hope of avoiding the worst of the afternoon heat and not getting as wiped out as I did yesterday while still making some forward progress. Today's predicted high temperature in Missouri and Kansas was 93, but the highest readout I saw on the Connie's display panel was 86 for a brief time around Lincoln, Nebraska. The rest of the ride was in air temperatures ranging from the upper 70s to the low 80s. Although I had the evap vest packed in ice today, I never needed it. Yesterday it sure would have felt good, though!

Today was notable for several reasons. First, I started this ride exactly one month ago on May 4th from Lake Forest Park, Washington, bundled up with all the electrics on in 30-degree temperatures over Stevens Pass. Second, I just crossed the 5,000-mile mark on this trip. Third, I figure I'm roughly halfway home from my starting point in Snowshoe, West Virginia -- at least I'm close, depending on the rest of the route, which is as yet largely unplanned. This is also the first time in my life that I've ever been in Nebraska.

I took US 136 west from Bethany, Missouri, all the way into eastern Nebraska. There are a great many relatively small hills in this part of the country, and the roads tend to just pop straight over them with no turns at all. The only impact to riding is that sight lines virtually disappear near the tops of these small hills. There was one detour onto some county roads to the north of US 136 into Amish farm country. The slightly rough roads provided enough traction, but the road just vanished as I approached each of the steep little grades on this part of the ride. It was a relief NOT to see an Amish carriage or a dead animal or whatever every time I crested a hill.

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Crossing the Missouri River on a one-lane bridge (due to repair work) proved to be no problem. Clearly the river was high and some nearby fields were inundated, but the roads were elevated enough to be well above the high-water mark (so far anyway). This was not the case around Devils Lake, North Dakota, on my ride east; US 2 west of Devils Lake had been underwater shortly before I rode through and some of the lanes were blocked off due to the uncleared mud from the flooding.

I decided to ride mostly superslab in Nebraska in the interest of avoiding the afternoon heat, and arrived in Grand Island in the early afternoon. Tomorrow I plan to ride northwest to Chadron, Nebraska.

Monday and Tuesday, I plan to stay in Rapid City, South Dakota, and visit some of the sights in the area, including Mt. Rushmore, the Chief Crazy Horse Monument, Badlands National Park, Wounded Knee, and possibly Devil's Tower. I've already made reservations at Best Western hotels in both places.

I've been noticing consistently higher gas mileage on the Concours for the last two days. At first, I thought it was all the flat land I was riding through, but I rode up and down plenty of hills today, and the mileage just keeps going up. Randy's tune-up at R & R Powersports has to be a factor, and perhaps the Connie's engine is finally well broken in. It'll be interesting to see if this trend continues through the mountains.

Stats for the day: left Bethany, MO, at 8:20 AM CDT; arrived Grand Island, NE, at 1:45 PM CDT; 287 miles ridden today; temperature range 75 - 86 degrees F; average gas mileage for the trip to date = 44.6 mpg; overall average moving speed for the trip = 54.7 mph; overall average speed for the trip (stopped and moving) = 42.6 mph; total time moving = 93 hours, 6 minutes; 5,169 MILES RIDDEN TO DATE.

Sunday, June 5, 2011: Grand Island, NE, to Chadron, NE



I'm in Chadron, Nebraska, (pronounced SHAD-ron, from the name of a French fur trader) after the best ride I've enjoyed since leaving the West Virginia Highlands. You can perhaps sense from the photo that this is a motorcycle-friendly place. In fact, it's not all that far from Sturgis. The desk manager suggested that I pull the Connie up a sidewalk and into an enclosed courtyard so it would be protected and visible from my room. A couple on a Harley just rumbled into the courtyard to join my bug-splattered Kawasaki. Very nice, indeed.

The tire pressures were a bit low this morning, at 40.5 psi each, most likely because they were filled at a much higher ambient temperature than this morning's 61 degrees in Grand Island. After checking fluids, etc., I pulled across the street to a gas and sip and filled each tire to exactly 42 psi on my digital tire

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gauge. Interestingly, since R & R put the Metzlers on the bike, the Connie's tire pressure read out shows exactly the same pressure as my hand-held gauge. Even more interestingly, after hours of high-speed running, the Metzlers only heat up enough to take the pressures up to 43 front and 43 rear. The Dunlop Roadsmart tires consistently heated up to 44 front and 45 rear no matter what the air temp was. Perhaps this heating caused more rapid wear on the rear tire. I'm really impressed with Metzler Roadtec tires. They track better and turn quicker than other tires I've ridden on, including Dunlops, Michelins, and Bridgestones. The gas mileage on the Connie just keeps getting higher, and I'm wondering if part of this is due to the new tires. The entire trip average is now up to 44.9 mpg, and I calculated the mileage on my last tank of gas today at an even 50 mpg.

Two-hundred-seventy-five miles of today's ride were on Nebraska Route 2, and it was a fine ride with hardly a cloud in the sky, almost no traffic, and air temperatures from 61 to 75 degrees for almost the entire ride. Yesterday's LOW temperature as I started out from Bethany, Missouri, was 75 degrees! Almost all of NE 2 was in great condition, perhaps because much of it is a Nebraska Scenic Byway. As soon as I headed northwest out of Grand Island, I felt that I was getting back into the west. Even though the countryside was green with trees and recently planted corn, the vistas started to open up, and I started seeing some fine-looking saddle horses in well-kept corrals.

Like North Dakota, Nebraska is a transitional state that rises from the midwestern farmlands of the east to the high, grass-covered plains of the west. I could tell that the road was gaining height and started checking the GPS at about 2,000 feet above sea level. My last altitude check, just north of Alliance, NE, showed that the road was at a bit over 4300 feet. The trees started to thin out and finally disappeared as the altitude increased, and the cultivated fields of corn were replaced by open grassland dotted with grazing herds of Black Angus. As I looked at the high countryside, I suddenly realized I was seeing mile after mile of grass-covered sand dunes. I could almost have imagined that I was riding along the Oregon Dunes with the Pacific Ocean just over the next rise. This went on for easily a hundred miles. Then I saw the Nebraska Scenic Byways "Sandhills Journey" sign. I haven't researched this yet, but this must have been an inland sea in some geologic epoch.

Riding beside, and crossing, so many rivers this week, I saw quite a few large power plants, including some coal-fired plants with massive conveyer belts carrying coal to the boilers from long trains of coal cars. Well today I saw how the coal gets to these plants. NE 2 runs parallel to a train track for hundreds of miles. Coal train after coal train went by heading southeast as I rode northwest. I lost count of the trains, but I did three checks on the lengths of these long trains. From the two diesel-electric engines in front to the single diesel-electric engine at the back of each train were 1.3 MILES of loaded coal cars! Fossil fuels indeed!

There was minor "incident" today as I pulled into a small town on NE 2. The speed limits invariably drop from the open-road 65 mph limit in stages to as low as 25 mph in the middle of a town. I always carefully comply with the posted limits in these towns. I had slowed to 50 mph approaching this little hamlet and had my headlight modulators pulsing the high beams on the Connie. Some idiot in a pickup truck pulling a large horse trailer stopped, looked straight at me, and then pulled out right in front of me. I was covering the front brake as usual and had no trouble slowing to a near stop, but I couldn't believe it. I've NEVER had anyone pull out in front of me when the modulators are on. This guy was either blind or deliberately tried to run me over. Ah well, it wasn't really that close a call, but it sure

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made me angry. I confess that I yelled an appropriate expletive at him as he pulled into a nearby gas station. Unless he was deaf as well blind, he probably heard me.

Tomorrow I'm going to ride through Badlands National Park and make my way to Rapid City where I plan to stay for two nights and see some of the many interesting sights in southwest South Dakota. The weather tomorrow will be hot, but it looks like things will be cooling off as I head west for Wyoming, Idaho, and Washington.

Stats for the day: left Grand Island, NE, at 7:40 AM CDT; arrived Chadron, NE, at 1:00 PM MDT (the time zone changed in the middle of the state, further proof that I'm truly in the west); 331 miles ridden today; temperature range 61 - 81 degrees F; overall trip average gas mileage 44.9 mpg; overall trip average moving speed 55.2 mph; overall trip moving time 98 hours 11 minutes; EXACTLY 5,500 MILES RIDDEN TO DATE.

Monday, June 6, 2011: Chadron, Nebraska, to Rapid City, South Dakota



It was another beautiful day today, dry and sunny with a light breeze. I left the courtyard at the Chadron Best Western at 7:40 feeling a little bad about my bug-encrusted Kawasaki because the Harley people parked behind the Connie washed their bike this morning. Appearances really do seem to matter to H-D riders. I thought about giving the Connie a quick wash, but it'll just get covered with bugs again in a day or two, and I wanted to get on the road.

I had no detailed plan in mind, which is good because several possible routes north were blocked or under repair. I tried to find the Wounded Knee Massacre Historical Site, but could see no signs or roads near Batesland, SD, where it's shown on the map. Since I couldn't find the historical site, I headed back east through Batesland and started north on the tribal road to the town of Wounded Knee planning to pick up SD 33 north to Badlands National Park. About 6 or 8 miles up that road I ran into road construction and a "no thru traffic" sign, so I turned around. I ended up riding through Batesland on US 18 three times this morning! I headed east because US 18 west of Pine Ridge was under construction with warning signs about long stretches of gravel. I turned north on SD 73 and then west on SD 44.

SD 44 is a nice road, not many turns, but good pavement, good sight lines, and endless views...also very little traffic. I wasn't sure exactly what to expect based on the term "badlands", but it sure was obvious when the badlands came into view. Everything around was green and then suddenly the northwest horizon was filled with stark, white, choppy hills and cliffs. (See the enclosed photo taken from SD 44.) It
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didn't look like anything was growing on them -- unmistakably BAD LANDS. I rode next to, and then through, some of the national park, but didn't do the full tour loop on unpaved roads.

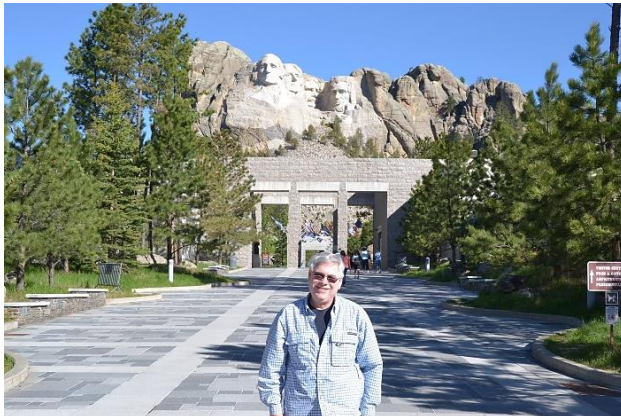
The temperature climbed to 86 degrees and popped to 88 briefly. That's about my discomfort point riding with the Roadcrafter suit on. I had the evap vest soaked and bagged in the top box and almost stopped to put it on, but the temperature actually dropped slightly as I got west of the badlands, and the air was dry enough to keep me comfortable. I decided to head on to Rapid City before it got any hotter.

I ended up staying at the Holiday Inn Express in Rapid City and scheduled a Gray Line bus tour of Mt. Rushmore, the Crazy Horse Memorial, etc., for tomorrow. The tour lasts all day, and this will most likely be my last non-riding day of the trip.

I carefully recorded miles ridden and fuel consumed for the two fueling stops I made today. The Connie's average gas mileage for the day was 50.53 mpg even with some fast riding and fast passing, not bad for a bike with the kind of performance this one has. The GPS lost track of moving time sometime today when I exceeded 100 hours on the road.

Stats for the day: left Chadron, NE, at 7:40 AM MDT; arrived Rapid City, SD, at 1:30 PM MDT; temperature range 64 - 88 degrees F; 312 miles ridden today; average gas mileage for the trip to date = 45.2 mpg; average moving speed for the trip to date = 55.5 mph; 5,812 TOTAL MILES RIDDEN TO DATE.

Tuesday, June 7, 2011: South Dakota Black Hills sightseeing tour



I didn't ride a single mile today. Instead I went on a really excellent all-day Gray Lines bus tour through some of the major sights in the Black Hills: Mt. Rushmore, the 1880 Black Hills Railroad, the Crazy Horse Memorial, 16A through Custer State Park, and Iron Mountain Road. This was a medium sized tour bus with an expert driver, but I couldn't believe he drove 17 miles on 16A and Iron Mountain Road. There was just barely clearance for him to get the bus through the small rock-cut tunnels on Iron Mountain Road. From my seat I could have sworn the back wheels were hung over the edge of the drop (no shoulder on that road!). Some of that road looks like a coiled snake. I've never seen a pig tail bridge before. It's a roadway over a bridge that crosses over itself. They're used in places where the terrain is too steep for typical mountain switchbacks. I saw a fair number of cars and motorcycles, but they had one helluva time passing. Our driver pulled over whenever there was room to let cars and bikes get by.

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The weather was perfect, although a nice high-pressure system in these parts stirs up a lot of wind. Mount Rushmore was great to see. The Crazy Horse Memorial is even more impressive. It's easily ten times the size of the Mt. Rushmore Memorial, but it's going to be a long time before it's finished. Work was started 60 years ago, and I wouldn't be surprised if it took another 60 years to finish it. Unlike Rushmore, which is just the fronts of four faces, each about 60 feet tall, the Crazy Horse Memorial will be a full three-dimensional statue about 550 feet high. Very impressive! No federal money is involved. I was lucky enough to see an explosive blast and get pictures today. They use explosives to remove rock down to about three inches from the finished surface.

I don't think I'll have time to ride 16A and Iron Mountain Road tomorrow, much as I'd like to. I plan to take Route 16 west out of South Dakota, I-90 to Buffalo, Wyoming, and then ride Route 16 over Powder River Pass at 9,666 feet above sea level. I'll play it by ear depending on weather and road conditions, but my target will be to reach Riverton, Wyoming, tomorrow afternoon and probably Idaho City or thereabouts on Thursday.

Wednesday June 8, 2011: Rapid City, South Dakota, to Bozeman, Montana



This photo of the Crazy Horse Memorial is from yesterday's sightseeing tour. The model is what they're working from. The actual memorial is one mile away.

Leaving Rapid City this morning, I needed both the electric vest and grip heaters dialed up a bit. It was cloudy, but dry, and 46 degrees when I rolled out of the Holiday Inn Express parking lot. As I rode south through the Black Hills the temperature dropped to 41, but the sun came out, a promising sign. There was some good riding on Route 16 heading west for Wyoming, especially approaching the South Dakota - Wyoming border. In fact, it reminded me a lot of the West Virginia Highlands.

Unfortunately, there was thickening overcast to the west and temperatures stayed in the 40s. The overcast was lower than the larger hills and way lower than the mountains further west. As planned, I jumped on I-90 west toward Buffalo, Wyoming. I kept thinking about the route, the weather, road construction, and getting home, and made what turned out to be a fortuitous decision to stay on I-90 and head for home the fastest way possible. I rode through three rain storms, one quite light, one average, and the last very heavy. This last one was where I-90 crosses the Absaroka Range east of Bozeman. The temperature dropped to 37 degrees, the rain got very intense, it was foggy, and the road spray from the semis made visibility almost impossible. I was relieved to reach Bozeman, get gas, and

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find a warm hotel room and very glad not to be riding in these conditions on 9,000-10,000-foot passes in Wyoming!

Wyoming and Montana both have some beautiful scenery, with a sense of immense space out to the horizon that I've experienced in just a few places. Someday I hope to come back and enjoy the roads (perhaps with Dave) in nicer weather when I'm feeling fresher than I am now after 6300 miles on the road.

The shortest route home from here is 675 miles, which means that this trip will pass the 7000-mile mark. I'm not particularly fatigued, but my feeling is that this has been a great trip with enough riding. My left thumb is either sprained or just strained from all the time on the bike, which makes shifting a six-speed gear box painful, another good reason to stay on the superslab.

Stats for the day: left Rapid City, SD, at 7:30 AM MDT; arrived Bozeman, MT, at 4:50 PM MDT; 539 miles ridden today; temperature range 37 - 55 degrees F; total trip average gas mileage remains at 45.2 mpg; 6,351 MILES RIDDEN TO DATE.

Thursday, June 9, 2011: Bozeman, Montana, to Cheney, Washington



This photo of a pig-tail bridge is from the Tuesday Gray Lines tour in the Black Hills. The tour bus has just passed through the tunnel and over the bridge, and is about to pass under the bridge.

The last two days of riding have been all about the weather. God bless Aerostich motorcycle clothing, Held gloves. Gore-Tex, heated vests, and heated grips...and Kawasaki for making a great bike that never missed a beat in 7000 miles. Without them I'd still be stuck somewhere around Billings, Montana. Yesterday's rain, fog, and 37-degree temperature were downright pleasant compared to the three hours of rain, snow, and temperatures from 28 - 32 degrees on I-90 this morning between Bozeman and Missoula. I shudder to contemplate what the pass conditions were today in the 9,000-10,000-foot passes in Wyoming.

It was 41 degrees and wet when I started from Bozeman. It went downhill from there as I went uphill into the Bitterroots. The rain got heavy and the temperature dropped into the 30s right away. As I-90 climbed and the temperature dropped to 32, I dialed the heat to maximum on the grips and the Kanetsu

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vest, which I don't recall ever doing before. It was barely enough to allow me to continue riding. My fingers and toes were tingling because I was wearing uninsulated Held rain gloves, having sent my winter gloves home from Columbus in May, and foolishly, only one pair of heavy winter socks. I had actually considered sending my heated vest to Aerostich for a zipper replacement when I was in Virginia. I'm sure glad I didn't! In fact, I may never ride without it again!

The rain turned into snow as I-90 rose to 5600 feet, and the snow continued as I crossed over a 6300-foot + pass east of Butte. The temperature dropped to 28 degrees and stayed there through Butte along with the snow. I knew the forecast was for mixed rain and snow, but I didn't realize how high this part of Montana is and how high I-90 gets. Bozeman is at 4800 feet, and Butte is almost at 5800 feet. I slowed way down to truck speed with the temperature that far below freezing, and so did everyone else on the road. I figured the Connie's traction control warning light would be my first indication that the road surface was freezing. That would have gotten interesting! Fortunately, it just stayed wet and sloppy.

It finally dropped low enough for the snow to turn into rain and for the temperature to slowly climb to a balmy 41 degrees. Cold rain continued for three hours until I got just west of Missoula. There were some benefits, though: no bugs, no dehydration, and a free bike and gear wash. My boots, for example, got totally rain-blasted today and are no longer bug-splattered.

I stopped for gas east of Coeur d'Alene and rode on through Coeur d'Alene and Spokane in a fair amount of traffic and road construction. I gained an hour with the time change to PDT and considered pressing on to central Washington, but decided 420 miles in those conditions was enough for the day. I'm at a very nice Holiday Inn Express in Cheney, Washington, doing some laundry and about to shave and shower. I skipped lunch and am looking forward to an early dinner.

Tomorrow's ride, my last of this trip, will be only about 300 miles. There's rain in the forecast, but no snow, with lows in the mid-40s in the passes. It's been a really great trip, but I'm looking forward to being home with my family.

I'll plan to write a summary of some of the highlights and lessons learned this weekend and will try to get that and some photos to Kevin in case he wants to put them on the C-R website.

My thanks to my extended family (Lyons, Handford, and Battaglia), the Holts, the Chicken-Run riders, R & R Powersports in Effingham, Illinois, and some friendly strangers for their help and support along the way on this 7000-mile journey.

Stats for the day: Left Bozeman, MT, at 7:50 AM MDT; arrived Cheney, WA, (west of Spokane) at 1:30 PM PDT; 420 miles ridden today; temperature range 28 - 61 degrees F; total trip moving average speed = 57.0 mph; total trip average speed (stopped and moving) = 45.0 mph; total trip average gas mileage = 45.0 mpg; 6,771 MILES RIDDEN TO DATE.

Friday, June 10, 2011: Cheney, Washington to Lake Forest Park, Washington (Home)

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It was a beautiful sight when the Cascades popped up on the horizon while I was still riding among the green, rolling wheat fields near Ephrata, Washington. Then WA Route 28 dropped me down among the Columbia River bluffs, and I knew I was almost home. I took this shot, which doesn't do justice to these gorgeous mountains, from Wenatchee, Washington. These peaks (and there are many more not visible in this shot) were totally snow covered when I left in early May.

It was good to be back in Washington on roads that I know. The weather was sunny and cool much of the way today, but Mother Nature got in a couple more shots with some rain showers, one near Ephrata, and one just as I got down into the foothills west of Stevens Pass. There's still plenty of snow above 4,000 feet, and the temperature in the pass dropped to 45 degrees, but I was in that for only a short while.

After stopping in Leavenworth for some coffee, I enjoyed some spirited riding as US 2 climbed into the Cascades. I had to pass a lot of slow-moving traffic, but once I got clear it was great. I almost passed a Washington State Patrol SUV on the four-lane section just below Stevens Pass, but I recognized the SUV for what it was in time to slow down. I'd dialed it back anyway by then, so I just rolled off the throttle a bit and no problem. He was doing a U-turn to join a fellow officer who had some poor customer in a car pulled over.

Sometimes the ride west of Stevens Pass in the lowlands on US 2 can be trafficky and tedious, but it wasn't bad today. My timing was good. Most all the traffic was headed away from the city toward the mountains early on a Friday afternoon.

Something I meant to comment on yesterday is that the gas mileage on the Concours drops noticeably when it's cold. It's impossible to control all the variables, but this seems to be a consistent effect of cold weather riding on the Connie. I can think of three possible reasons: 1) cold, dense air causes the ECU to deliver more fuel to maintain a proper fuel-air mixture; 2) with the engine running cooler, increased oil viscosity increases friction loss; 3) having the electric vest and heated grips on increases load on the

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alternator and the engine. I know that many of the Chicken-Runners have much more expertise in this area than I do, and I'd be interested in your thoughts.

It's great to be home. I'm unpacking, working through a huge pile of mail, and a bunch of email. I'll do a summary of the trip this weekend, but the bottom line is that I completed a ride of 7,072 miles with no "incidents" of any kind. The Concours performed beautifully. It was a wonderful trip.

Stats for the day: left Cheney, WA, at 7:25 AM PDT; arrived Lake Forest Park, WA, at 2:00 PM PDT; 301 miles ridden today; temperature range 45 - 66 degrees F; total trip moving average speed 56.9 mph; total trip average speed (stopped and moving) 45.1 mph; total trip average gas mileage 45.1 mpg; 7,072 MILES RIDDEN IN TOTAL.