

The Adventures of JC & his Trusty Triumph Trophy, Blue ...in Burbank or Bust... A Quest for the Elusive IBAs

Several days ago, I was at a local motorcycle gathering in the Milwaukee area. Just home from an energetic ride-about, I was yearning for some hometown banter. As often happens, I met a fellow enthusiast and we struck up a quintessential discussion on our choice of bikes. He inquired as to my choice of ride, and his reply was an immediate, "My God – don't you ever wash it." I explained that I had just returned yesterday from California. He asked how long the trip was and I told him a week. I could see him ciphering the time/distance as he asked, "How far was that total?" I replied, "About 4,700 miles for a week." He replied, "that's not your bike – that's a friend."

After decades of riding, I've had some friends of the motorbike persuasion, and still have most of them today, including my favorite - my 1976 Triumph Bonneville T140V Cafe Special. Whether we ride our bikes locally or distance, our bikes tend to become attached to us. Often an extension of our personality, the trust developed through their dependability or simply the independence they offer us – our bikes become our friends.

I'm a thirty-five+ year veteran of riding now. Thirty-three years dedicated to the British motorcycle by choice and punctuated by the British Biker Cooperative - my tribe of choice. The BBC is my answer to what has been the best in riding with others of similar perspectives.

I also have a 2000 Triumph Trophy, my second Trophy, in what I consider one of the best colours Triumph offers – Pacific Blue. This is my tourer. A sport tourer fits my distance-riding style the best. I have been very pleased with the Triumph Trophy model and my wife, Mary, and I have had some interesting riding adventures with them from coast-to-coast and even off-continent: in the UK, Wales, the Isle of Man, and New Zealand. They're a great bike with many qualities and very few flaws.

My distance riding provides me a form of meditation. The hum of the engine and the



rush of the wind immerses me in a place – a place that physically connects time and space for me. The distance achieved is an added incentive. Riding tends to be a lone venture, you and your bike - whether riding with companions or not. A connection develops, and a connection to an inanimate object is an intriguing perspective to explore. The best way I have found to explore this relationship is to take a long solo ride - just you and your bike. Hours and hours of riding, mesmerized by the hum of the engine, moving through time and space together, partnering in any challenge the road or environment presents. It allows me the ability to move at my own pace – usually consistently rapid. But I digress ... this is the story of an adventure - an adventure with my Trophy Blue.

Quite honestly, I rarely write. It's not usually my bag. Not

that I can't; it's just that life moves too fast for me. I move from one episode to the next without even considering the documentation of any event for more than a fleeting moment. So why now? Well, this is a story of meditation, discovery, endurance, failure and accomplishment. A story I feel comfortable sharing with fellow enthusiasts.

I have a well-established career as a producer in a mildly active market for that profession. Recently, I was approached to direct a shoot in LA with a long time acquaintance of mine, Jay Leno. We established a friendship over the last twenty years based on our common interest and love for the British motorcycle. Jay is a great guy, and as I'm sure most of you know, an avid collector of anything engine-driven. My shoot with Jay involved a calendar cover shot with one of his more recent acquisitions - a 1901 Fairbanks Morse Engine (FME) stationary "Hit and Miss" engine. Jay found this engine at the site of an abandoned gold mine in the Nevada desert and rebuilt it to running condition.

Upon booking this gig, Jay informed me that Triumph would also be presenting him with a new Triumph Thunderbird that very same day. Must be rough. Having a common interest in Triumphs and actually being the person that facilitated the last Triumph giveaway of a Rocket III to Jay in 2004, my interest was spurred.



Crossing the Rockies

I was just about to book the crew flights the prior week, when I had an epiphany. Why not ride. I had promised to attend the Mods and Rockers event in Chicago with my Bonneville, but then had until Wednesday to arrive in Burbank at Jay's Garage and a two-day return to Wisconsin following the shoot. Although I didn't really have time to prepare Blue adequately, that sounded like a plan so I was on my way to Burbank .

I often document my rides for the sake of the Iron Butt Association. I've racked up quite a few IBAs over the years, all ranging in the 1,000 mile in 24 hours or the 1,500 miles in 36 hours. However, this ride offered some additional possibilities. I was set on not rushing to Burbank, rather smelling the roses as they say, but if I tallied-up an IBA or two on the trip – what the hell. So off I went.

I left on Sunday at 9:35am (documented by a time stamp on my fill-up) in Erin, Wisconsin. I headed due south, realizing that a storm was entering Wisconsin's far southwest corner. My objective was to break through the far east side of the front with a minimum of dampness. My strategy worked.

I hit the leading edge of the rain at the Illinois/Iowa border and pulled-over for a late lunch.

After lunch, I attacked the dreaded Iowa/Nebraska stretch on the run. Just kill me now. It was pretty uneventful, with the exception of an airborne bait pail exiting a trailered boat in downtown

Omaha nearly slamming into my windscreen and a big-ass turtle crossing Interstate 80 in eastern Nebraska.

I also had an introduction to one of Nebraska's finest who was kind enough to provide me with a warning ticket. Great, now I had reason to avoid the Drone of Death known as Nebraska for my return run (or at least for 30 days).

By midnight, I was heading full-bore in to an active lightning and thunder storm just east of Colorado. I'll ride through some questionable weather events, but this looked intense. I pulled over to suit up, but it was inevitable. I stopped at a hotel with 858 miles on the clock for the day. Not bad and an easy 1,000 miles in 24 hours the next morning if I were to rise early and get on the road.

I woke up at 7am after my wake up call was a "no show." Thanks Days Inn! I got on the road and missed my 1,000 in 24 by 14 miles. Oh well, I'm off to my 1,500 in 36 on a beautiful riding day.

I crossed the Rockies at the Great Divide (they never cease to amaze me!) and rode through Grand Junction on the other side.



Riding the Red Rock Canyons along the Colorado River



Arches National Park

I hung a louie in Utah and headed due south on a fascinating back road that followed the Colorado River through the red rock canyons. I then rode through Moab, Utah, and into the Arches National Park and was on my way to the Navajo Nation.

One of my favorite places on Earth is the Valley of the Gods and I rode through the midst of this mystical land as the day began to draw to a close.

I arrived in Mexican Hat, Utah, nearly an hour early with more than the needed 1,500 miles for my 36 hours on the road. I managed to sign my witnesses (even though they barely spoke English) and returned a pressing phone call to our honorable BBC Prez, "Spanner." I couldn't talk long though, I was burning daylight (as another BBC pal "Fly By" would say) and wanted to ride Monument Valley at sunset. What a magical place.

That night I stayed in Kayenta, Arizona. The Navajo are a wonderful people. Be advised, the Navajo Nation tacks on a healthy 18% sales tax. Well warranted I think, for everything they've gone through, but pricey nevertheless.

My good friend and BBC riding companion, Captain Morgan, reminds me of the time he crashed just outside Kayenta with his first Trophy. The Navajo Nation took care of him free-of-charge including towing, lodging, and transportation to a Triumph dealership. He told me that he never

met a more gracious people. As a result, he now rides his new Trusty Triumph Trophy ... Silver ...? (Note: The "Captain" has over 115,000 miles on his *new* "Silver." Not many can brag that!)

I headed out of Kayenta the next morning toward the south rim of the Grand Canyon. A few interesting experiences occurred during that stretch of desert highway.

First, I came upon road kill ... not just any road kill though. Quite curiously in the middle of the road lies a cat – a very large cat! I thought, "Geeez, what's that a lion." I was right. I soon came upon a mountain lion crossing sign. He obviously couldn't read.

Soon thereafter, I noticed reds and blues coming out of the desert heat directly at me ... fast. I moved to the side of the road. Two State squads raced down the middle of the road at about 65 mph. Directly behind came a big-ass truck with a houseboat in tow, about the width of the entire road with two more squads closely behind. Makes you wonder, doesn't it?

Finally, I stopped at a Navajo roadside stand. I like to



Mexican Hat, Utah - 1,500 miles in 36 hours



The Grand Canyon South Rim

buy my beads and trinkets from the source, not the tourist traps. There were several vendors. I browsed and ended up at the last vendor greeting a Navajo woman who had skin that looked older than the desert itself. She made it a point to share the symbolism of all the jewelry she made with me. She recommended an arrowhead to me for the 'protection' it would offer me. I took her up on it and paid her a healthy tip. She seemed speechless, but she made me feel good about what I bought and the only thing better than that is making someone else feel better. I still wear it.

I then rode the south rim of the Grand Canyon. Words cannot describe - so I won't even try.

I rode due south to catch Highway 40 west through the Arizona desert. The desert was angry that day at 106 degrees. I had such a heat rush blowing into my helmet I had to close my shield for relief. I also had to hold my knees out from the sides of the bike to avoid the intense heat of the engine. Highway 40 took me even further south toward Lake Havasu City, Arizona. Lake Havasu's claim to fame was the purchase of

the London Bridge (just before it was predicted to fall down I guess) and they reconstructed it in their desert town to draw tourists. They won, I took the exit. Nothing like a photo of your British bike next to the London Bridge (in the middle of a US desert).

On the advice of a local

old-time Triumph enthusiast (who didn't realize they were still making Triumphs), I headed back north to Nevada to retire for the evening in Laughlin. I was told it was "Just like Vegas used to be." It was. After entering California through a mandatory gated stop (yes!) and a quick introduction to an officer, I backtracked north to Nevada on a two-lane desert road that resembled a 1940s movie's drive to Vegas. Sand blew across the road which was bordered by countless billboards. I was always expecting to see a cop preying on speeders from behind one of them. I arrived in Laughlin fairly late and got a \$25 king room I could've pulled my bike in and a \$12 dollar steak dinner the size of my face.

The next morning I be-tailed it (my Father's term, not mine - though I guess it is now) for LA and my final destination of Burbank. The bike had not faltered throughout this entire aggressive ride, but I noticed during my confirmation calls in Barstow to crew and location that my rear tire was in very bad shape. I had been monitoring it knowing that I would need a new skin along the



London Bridge - in the USA

way. That would be in LA for sure.

I rolled into my Burbank hotel, met with crew and hit the pool (with some bikini-clad ladies). Very Hollywood.

The next morning we met at Jay's garage. The famed Triumph tuner, Mickey Cohen, was delivering Jay's Thunderbird for the later presentation and greeted me as I pulled in with Blue sporting it's Wisconsin plates. Jay arrived soon after and enthusiastically proceeded to fire up the FME engine. I thought of reminding him it was a photo shoot and not a video shoot and that it wasn't necessary to fire it up, but what the hell - I wanted to see it run!

We started lighting the location, and Jay shifted his energies to pulling all his Triumphs from his collection. They ranged from a 1953 Thunderbird through the years to the new 2010 Thunderbird. He recruited my help and was bound and determined to take his 1964 Bonneville out for a (45-minute) ride.

Jay brought his video crew from NBC over to shoot a tutorial video of all his Triumphs for his *Jay Leno's Garage* website after Jim Callahan from Triumph arrived. Triumph didn't plan any specific acknowledgements.

We shot the FME calendar photo and the Triumph web video shoot took place. Jay really liked the new Thunderbird, commenting on how smooth it rode, but pulled me aside at one point to praise his 1964 Bonneville as one of his favorite motorcycles to ride.

Jay asked me to stick around after the crew and Triumph left to see his new toy, a jet engine car they built there at his garage. His crew was about to return with it from racing at a local airport with a Learjet. Nice. The crew arrived to announce that the jet car won, but still razzed Jay because he wouldn't put-out to commission a F-15 to race it.

The next day I rode down to South Bay Triumph to visit my friend Matt Capri, famed speed



A Jay's favorite, his 1964 Triumph Bonneville

tuner for the Bonneville Salt Flats land speed races and other races as well. My plan was to get rear brakes, a tire and an oil change.

I also was strategically planning my next IBA of 2,000 miles in 48 hours on the ride home. From Burbank to home was 2,048 miles and a bit close to call considering I might be off some miles in my calculations. I thought a running start from South Bay on the far southwest side of LA at the coast would give me a bit of an extra cushion in the mileage.

The service was expertly executed by Jeff the Service Manager (a fellow IBA member), as Matt and I talked over lunch about Norton's new invasion into the US market.

I left at 2:20 pm knowing full well that I would lose precious time circumventing LA's Friday afternoon rush hour traffic for the first leg of my journey. There was one saving grace though. Lane-splitting. I don't know how you all feel about this, but it scares the hell out of me whether in a car on the receiving end or on a bike splitting. However, I have become much more comfortable with it since touring across the pond and

riding through LA on occasion. And besides, lane-splitting in this case was my only option. As I entered the expressway system on the 110, the traffic stalled nearly immediately. That was the start of a one-hour and forty-minute 80 mile white-knuckle lane-splitting ride through LA proper. The only saving grace was a Harley that I let get out in front of me (probably the first time ever, ha, ha ...) to wedge open the traffic for me down the center line for about 30 of the 80 miles. (I finally had to pass him too.)

From San Bernardino on, I was on my way at a normal pace. I passed through Vegas and headed for the Highway 15/70 interchange. My fuel was low, but I opted to wait until the interchange to fill up to manage my stops better. As I approached the interchange at about midnight, to my surprise there wasn't a gas station in sight. We had been climbing in altitude and my fuel gauge was approaching reserve. Soon I came across a sign for the next service exit in 44 miles just as I had to switch my tank to reserve. Reserve on my Trophy is about 40 miles (never wanting to test

this estimate). Then, we began a 6 degree degrade to the desert floor. What the hell – I shut Blue down and did some silent-running in the dark and deserted highway through the isolated landscape of Utah. Very stealthy! As I eventually coasted to around 30 mph, I fired up Blue and we were off in dire search of fuel. To my disappointment, the 44 mile service was closed. I had never seen my fuel gauge so nearly pinned at empty. Finally, I realized that if the next far-and-few-between exit did not have gas - I was sleeping on the side of the road. I took that next exit with no indication of services. I pulled to the foot of the exit and noticed a gas station way down the road with its lights off. I had nothing to lose. I headed for the station. When I pulled in, I noticed the pumps seemed on. Yes! I filled my six-gallon tank to 5.922. I suited-up, since the temperature had dived, and was on my way.

I pulled into Green River, Utah, at about 2 am, filled again and noticed that there were uncharacteristically (for Utah) eight hotels at that exit. Time to retire. No such luck. Eight “No Vacancy” signs changed that plan. Oh, that’s right – a river in the middle of the desert. That *would* be an attraction. So who’s tired anyway? I headed for Grand Junction.

I arrived in Grand Junction at about 5:30 am. I had been chasing a storm close behind. The roads were wet. So I took a few minutes to relax in the trucker’s lounge at the truck stop and watched the Weather Channel.



The storm was heading northeast just leaving the Rockies. I stepped outside and saw the sun was just starting to rise over the Rockies. Reason enough. I was off to traverse the mountains surrounded by beautiful light – riding through the low slung white clouds that were the residue of the storm.

By the time I hit Denver, I had my second wind. Ahead lies the infamous Nebraska (where I had to seriously watch my speed due to my earlier altercation) and Iowa.

At 1,500 miles on my tripometer for this return ride, I noticed I was safely under my 24 hours. That’s another IBA for 1,500 miles in 24 hours. I pulled over and signed my witnesses. It wouldn’t be until much later that I realized that I miscalculated the miles. My tripometer was off and my time was not even an issue

since I had just entered CST. I wasn’t focusing on the arithmetic (a childhood problem as well) and actually accomplished my goal of 1,500/24 later, but had signed the witnesses too early. Damn! Another IBA lost. Oh well, I handily had my 2,000 in 48 close at hand.

With time to spare I decided to ease the pace and to actually sleep that night (whether I felt like it or not). Oh wait, there’s the exit for Marne, IA – that’s Baxter Triumph. It’s Saturday night, but just six miles off the slab – worth a visit or even to just drop off some BBC Rally promotional materials. Baxter is the only game in town and as I arrived to the closed shop I noticed Randy Baxter was out cutting the town’s grass. He stopped by and we had a quick chat.

I pulled into a motel near Des Moines, Iowa at midnight still not tired, but I felt it to be necessary to rest.

The next morning I headed northeast for home. Even with a relaxed pace, I arrived in Janesville, safely over 2,000 miles in the 48 hour time requirement. This was my first 2,000 in 48. I didn’t find it overly difficult, but I admit that I was driven (and the riding through the night helped).

It was a good week of meditative relaxation at 4,700 miles. Blue handled it without a hitch. Modern motorcycles are amazing. I remember distance riding in the 1970s with limited gear options and frequent mechanical challenges.

We’re living at a great time in motorcycling history!

A few nights later, I joined a vintage ride sponsored by a local shop, Mike’s Motorsports. The owner Mike, having heard of my exploits, congratulated me on the 4,700-mile ride. A fellow rider over-hearing the comment said, “Wow, you’ve rode 4,700 miles this year?” Mike replied, “No, last week.”

Check out Jay’s review of the new 2010 Triumph Thunderbird from our day at his Garage at: http://www.jaylenosgarage.com/video/video_player.shtml?vid=1138960

Jim “JC” Cutting
BRITISH BIKER COOPERATIVE

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