

## Bike Week

FOR MANY YEARS, I've not aside a whole week in the first part of March to attend Bike Week. More than a unique celebration of motorcycles, with upwards of half a million riders converging on Daytona Beach, it is also the first race of the AMA motorcycle championship, the Big One. Because Daytona's high banks make for eyeball-flattening high speeds, it's called an exciting venue. But, despite the fact that the races will tell you there isn't anywhere like it, and in fact that they are glad there isn't, and that what works at Daytona may not be the best setup anywhere else—it has become America's two-wheeled holy 501, bestowing bragging rights on winning manufacturers like no other.

Personally, I've always spent the majority of my week at the track, accented photo ops being around my track, shooting pictures in the hot pits, up close in the turns, and observing the attendant classes of mechanics and tire technicians as they attempt to gain an advantage for their riders.

But this year, track officials turned down my request for a photo pass, the same level of credentials we'd often given for a decade or more. I got the news, just weeks before I was to arrive, my room and plane tickets long since paid for. When I questioned their decision and asked what I could possibly do to please them, they were indifferent, saying that I was lucky to get any credentials at all, and even boasted how they'd threatened other publications with the same treatment. Excuse me?

What should I do? See some more of Florida, I decided. And luckily, BMW's Key-O-Matinee, a guy who organizes the company's press events, was also arriving in Daytona on Monday, and said he would be up for a ride to Key West before hosting the Brian Capetone's presentation on Thursday evening. So we borrowed an R1150C and a R1200GS from the BMW press pool and took off Tuesday morning. It was long haul to Key West, about 950 miles road-trip, and Miami, roughly 300 miles away, made a logical place to stop each way. We arranged to have dinner in South Beach with three other guys who were also riding press bikes and just returning from the same trip. South Beach is famous for its hipnight life and unique in my experience of America, very lively and vibrant, and with some of the make-believe pretense of Las Vegas. The influence of Cuban expatriates was strong, and I had the feeling that Havana might be like this if Castro were gone.

Florida's major roads are straight and narrow. Even the interstate was just two lanes in each direction, and most drivers



drove on cruise control, so that a motorhome might take the better part of five minutes to pass a van. And the traffic jams could be epic; miles of traffic at a complete dead stop on occasion. Worse, including it illegal, too. Why the AMA makes a priority of trying to restrict helmet laws, yet opposes trying to convince legislators to make lane-sharing legal is beyond me. Personally, I can't imagine a bigger boost to motorcycle sales than to avoid being stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

Once you're in the Keys, the only road is mostly two-lane, and we were obviously not the only ones to hit on the same idea. In addition to all the cars and motorhomes, thousands of northern bikers were enjoying the good weather to make the trek as well. Average speeds were slow and we didn't reach Key West, the southernmost point of the US, until the late afternoon. But the trade winds made the warm weather pleasant and the cooling palm trees added a definite Caribbean flavor to the experience.

Key West hardly looked like the bohemia enclave of popular legend; more like Ocean City, NJ without the beaches. But Ernest Hemingway's home is a popular local landmark, and he is obviously the area's most famous former inhabitant. Now, anywhere he once had a bite to eat, or even walked past, will usually have his picture on their sign. This play works, apparently, as we had to have dinner at "Papa's" before heading back north ourselves.

If you go, you really should plan to spend the night in Key West so you can enjoy the night life, but we had a schedule to keep, and from Key West to Daytona looked to be a very long ride in such heavy traffic.

Thankfully, returning to Miami after dark proved to be a very good idea, as the congestion was minimal. We only encountered a handful of other motorcyclists. Apparently the ubiquitous short-sleeved T-shirts and tanktops didn't work as evening riding gear. Roy and I would ride back to Daytona together the next day, but split up for the night, he going on to a room at the city Fairmont Hotel at the north end, and I searching for my brother's restored Ducatus hotel in South Beach. It just so happened that Brother Don was in Miami that night on business, so we'd have a chance to check out more of the local scene. We walked to the oceanfront where we had a great dinner and beers on the sidewalk in front of a popular dance club. These places all seemed to have several gorgeous hostesses out front, dressed to impress, always dancing to the pounding jungle rhythms pouring from the back. It was a very wild vibe, a distinct contrast to the Good Old Boy conservatism that pervades inland Florida. In fact, it made me wonder if I wasn't getting old and becoming stuck in a rut of routine expectations, myself.

Wetter yet, Don would have time after his last meeting on Friday to drive up to Daytona for the weekend. Together, we drove to see the hub of the action—Main Street on Friday night. As usual, there were so many radical shoppers parked inches apart on the sides of the street that you could hardly take in their details. And, irritating the traffic jams on I-95, the crowds inched along shoulder to shoulder.

Saturday, the day of the big race, I attempted to get into position to photograph the action in spite of the track officials. But I really didn't like having to sneak around to do what amounted to publicity for DHR.

Next year, we could do a multi-bike comparison for the same time and money. But regardless, when it was over, what happened was the feeling that I wanted to feel in Present and alive as the people I saw in South Beach. It's not enough simply to be there unless you're going to be there completely. And despite all the new scenery this month, it was my time exploring locally on the V-Strom 650 that made me feel most whole. Riding completely involved is a bigger reward than mere attendance at anything, anywhere. And it doesn't cost anything but your full attention. Do it!

*Dave Scoble*

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