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***Prologue: My right hand is raised... I swear***

This book is based on a series of accounts and most of it is true. It is intended for Harley-Davidson® riders, people thinking about becoming riders and anyone interested in a Harley fanatic's stories of several road trips including a journey to the greatest annual event in the world of motorcycles. There are also a few side trips mixed in for good measure.

If you haven't "been there" and "done that" I am hoping you will get some vicarious thrills along with an incredible itch to get out there and do it yourself. If you have done it all and are just looking for an account that reflects yours, I hope you will consider the job well done. I hope you will enjoy the sentiment and humor as well.

I have included some tips on preparing for and going on a motorcycle journey. Look for special sections on refueling, group riding etiquette, long-haul packing lists and hand signals during group riding. If you finish with a thirst for more technical detail, consult the recommended reading list in back of this book.

It is a fact that the better prepared you are the more fun you will have. Most experienced riders have found this out the hard way. If you aren't experienced yet you probably will find out the hard way, too.

On the other hand you always want to guard against over preparing. If you try too hard you will take all the spontaneity out of your adventure and you have to have a little of that, right?! It is truly a fine line but we all know how to walk it when the time comes, right? Right!

You will find that we take quite a few twists and turns here so you will want to be alert. For example, just when you think you have absorbed all there is to know about packing for a trip,

you will find yourself reading about a recommended large porcelain object.

In another chapter on tool kits, just when you think you have thought of it all, you will find a “key” element you would never have thought of. Like the man who sells suits says, “I guarantee it.” When you are in the chapter about hand signals you will find advice on how to use the most classic hand signal of all.

Here is the most important point of the story– we had a great time, we had a ton of laughs along the way and we forged lifelong friendships. You will too if you haven’t already. That’s a fact.

Now we are going to many locations including Sturgis, Milwaukee, Calgary, Seattle, Los Angeles, Laughlin, Reno and others. Along the way I have laced this book with facts, opinion, irony and humor, good times and bad. We will be emphasizing the good...

Maybe.

So sit back and relax.

Grab a “pounder” to sip on.

Enjoy this great ride with me.

All mistakes you encounter are mine.

All jokes you particularly enjoy are also mine.

All jokes you don’t enjoy came from someone else.

Finally, if there are any jokes you are ambivalent about...well, who cares?

***Part I. DEFINING THE CARROT AT THE  
END OF THE STICK***

At last, I had my first Harley-Davidson® stashed safely in the garage. It was a violet pearl Heritage Classic and I had picked it up that afternoon. A Classic has a beautiful retro look to it. By retro I mean it has wire spoke wheels, chrome studded leather saddlebags, a large fat gas tank, large diameter front forks and an oversized headlamp surrounded by passing lights and turn signals. It also has high pull back handlebars and a low seat position. The net effect is a modern bike with a look resembling a 1940's or 1950's FL Electra Glide model Harley-Davidson®, the sort Elvis liked to ride.



My first Harley, a Heritage Softail

I walked over to the wall of the garage and pulled down a folding lawn chair. Then I went to the refrigerator we had out there, pulled out a beer, twisted the cap and sat down in the chair three or four feet from the Harley. I slowly sipped the beer and stared. I was there for easily over half an hour. I wasn't embarrassed about the idea at all; in fact, I had the garage door open to let in a little more natural light.

I will bet this very same thing has happened thousands of times in thousands of garages. That is how it is with your first Harley and that is how it will probably be with your last Harley. They are all beautiful masses of chrome, paint and

leather. They are truly objects where form and function come together in a drop-dead gorgeous sort of way. For me, my first Harley was the infamous “carrot” and so it will be for you if it is not already.

So what is the motivation to do something like this? I am referring to riding a Harley-Davidson® motorcycle and taking a 4,000-mile tour within a couple of weeks or just climbing on it and taking a short trip to the store, to the country, or anywhere.

Well for beginners it doesn't hurt to have a fascination with things tacky, with motion, with speed, with sound and a compelling desire to live life large. All those things will get you down the road with a sense of wonder and excitement—truly the best qualities of kids and the enduring qualities of adults who refuse to give up being kids.

Don't give up on being a kid. This is not the last time you will see this suggestion in this book. Just get on with it and enjoy yourself! Last I heard we only get one shot, right?

## **Chapter 1 - It's "The Journey" that Prompts this Madness... Honest!**

It was early in the year, the plan for riding to Sturgis was taking shape and I was getting mega-fired up. For those of you who don't yet know, Sturgis is an annual Harley rally held in Sturgis, South Dakota.

Many years earlier I had taken a couple road trips for a thousand miles or so. Once through the Blue Ridge Mountains from Richmond Virginia to points south and back and later up through the Rockies from Colorado Springs, Colorado to Butte, Montana.

I have to confess neither trip was on a Harley. Both trips were on a Honda CB 500T, a small touring bike (please don't tell anyone you know this). Consequently I believe I missed something I wouldn't understand until many years later. However, I don't want to diminish the significance of those two trips. They were very cathartic experiences marking the end of a two-year stint in a very tough, conservative graduate program.

But now, we had a mighty big one planned. In April, Al “El Coyote” Munguia and I had agreed we would ride our Harley-Davidsons® to Sturgis and back. Al is a good friend and fellow member of the Sacramento Harley Owners Group, otherwise known as “HOG.”

The Sacramento Harley Owners Group is a large club of a couple hundred young, great looking fanatic bikers who love to ride, eat, buy gas and shop for T-shirts. Okay, okay. Most of us are actually middle aged or older. A rapidly growing number are women who ride Harleys very well.

HOG was started in 1983 by a diabolical and clever marketing person from the Harley-Davidson® Company. It was a spin that may well have gone like this:

*“Let’s form a club and charge high enough annual dues to make money after giving members a patch, pin, map and quarterly journal. Club members will then form local chapters and charge annual dues to support themselves. The local HOG chapters will be affiliated with their nearest Harley-Davidson® dealer and that is where they will do most of their shopping. They will also organize chapter runs where they will ride to surrounding Harley-Davidson® dealers and shop for T-shirts and other much-needed stuff like chrome and oil. Everybody will have fun and we will make a ton of dough.”*

This plan has worked so well there are currently over 1,000,000 members. The Harley-Davidson® Company stockholders aren’t terribly unhappy either.

Now, seriously, it has been my experience that HOG members are by and large damn good folks. After all, I ‘are’ one of ‘em, aren’t I?! Also they all sponsor a charity and participate in

many charitable events. This folks, is America and HOG is a very big part of it!

One more thing, I may have learned some basic riding habits on dirt bikes but my Harley Owner's Group taught me how to ride the highway safely while in the company of others. Group riding is not a slam-dunk by any means and I am grateful for what they have taught me. HOG also sets up a great gathering of kindred spirits.

Al and I are pretty typical specimens of today's Harley-Davidson® riders. We are ruggedly handsome, well muscled with six-pack abs and damn smart. I'm kidding. We also have gorgeous, patient wives. I am not kidding. We are both in our 50s... Al is way into his fifties and I am just getting started. Well, maybe it's a little closer than that...we won't say how much closer. We both have a fair amount of gray hair. Al has an awful lot and I have just a little.

Based on a truly scientific and objective poll I am just now making up you will find the gray hair part is true for 80-90% of all Harley Owners Group members. We will leave it to you to speculate on what percentage of them also have potbellies.

Al and I are also former dirt bike riders, another very common feature of a Harley rider. In fact here is some insight about the evolution of most bikers: You ride in the dirt when you are young, having tons of fun careening all over the place and falling down all the time.

Then when you get tired of picking your bike up after falling down you quit riding for a while. This happens sort of when you are in your 30s and 40s, busy raising kids and earning a living. When you start again— **if** you start again and if you are lucky enough to have the resources— you buy a Harley.

There are folks who are fortunate enough to begin riding directly on a Harley. One group includes corporate chief financial officers who are responsible for quarterly earnings reports (see “Enron”). Another more significant group includes most contract construction workers; especially those who hang drywall (see “Young people getting rich before their time”). These guys seem to collectively fall into a category known as, “Money to burn.” There are other characteristics of Harley riders, like a fascination for all things tacky, but the propensity for careening and falling down at a young age is the most common.

I had been to Sturgis, South Dakota many times as a spectator. My wife Julieann’s family lives nearby in Rapid City, South Dakota and over the years we visited many times while the Sturgis Rally was going on. It is held during the first full week of August every year. I knew what an event it was and I knew how beautiful the Black Hills were. In fact I was fortunate enough to have been there with access to a Harley the previous two years in a row! (See “The Road to Other Places” for a little more detail on this.)

I was becoming addicted. But I had not yet made the trip to Sturgis and back on my Hog. It was something I had to do just once.

Al had never been to Sturgis though he knew of the Sturgis Rally reputation and knew about the ride there and back. He was ready to knock down some big miles on his Hog also. So it was a great, great journey we were about to undertake. We were going to log right around 4,000 miles on our trip.