

## Arkansas Moto Guzzi Rally

I left my home in Austin at 5:45 AM on Friday, June 17 and rode over to Eureka Springs, Arkansas to a Moto Guzzi rally, getting there at approximately 4:30 PM. I turned in 640 miles for the longest distance competition, but most likely rode more than that as I took a 'detour' in my original planned route. I didn't take a heavy scenic route, as I was unfamiliar with NW Arkansas and the location of the KOA campground and wanted to make sure I got there before dark. I'm still not facile with setting up my pup tent and didn't want to do it in the dark! No traffic problems to speak of, just dealing with late AM Dallas rush hour, and some rain as I approached Denton, and on I went through OK toward MacAlester. On the way, I went through Durant, OK and resisted the urge to take a picture of my bike at the town sign. I actually believe that I am a distant relative of the town's founder, based on family history and lore, though I don't know much about that little Oklahoma burg, and that's beside the point anyway.

By the time I reached MacAlester, I had made pretty good time and gave in to my urge to venture off the straight shot roads and headed east out of town and found some nice twisty US highways through eastern OK and into Arkansas. I went through Warren Spahn's hometown, but nothing very exciting about that area, but it was my first time riding in OK and I was struck by how hilly and scenic it was. Came very close to the Tellamina Scenic Drive, but felt like I couldn't take the time to go that way. I did stop in AR to put on my rain suit, and didn't think enough to wait until I got under an overpass to do it, thus getting wetter than I would have if I had simply kept riding. Chalk it up to a rookie mistake as I have only 21,000 miles experience at this point.

If you ever go through tiny little Y City, AR, have lunch if you can at the BBQ joint next to the Citgo on the main highway. Can't remember the last time I had fresh cut French fries, and the pulled pork BBQ was exquisite (so to speak). I was a bit worried about the health effects when I heard the waitress say they had been without water for nearly a week, but I didn't seem to suffer any. Speaking of gassing up, I did notice a sharp looking ball cap for sale at the Citgo station, but resisted buying it, though I was intrigued by the 'Git R Done' message it carried. I guess it was expressing an Arkansas motivational theme, much like the sappy posters we might see in some corporate America corridors imploring you to soar with eagles and such.

The Guzzi rally was almost a non-event with only 75 bikes there. I was hoping to see some Ambassadors and El Dorados, but they were scarce as hen's teeth. There were two Ducatis and a handful of Beemers as well as Guzzis. I find that MG riders are so lonesome, that they welcome most any other rider, regardless of the brand of two-wheeler! There were several California bikes of

various ages, many of which were equipped with hitches, and their riders had pulled small campers or trailers behind them. I did talk to the owner of an MG convert, which is the torque converter automatic in the Guzzi line of several years ago. I learned that you just roll on the throttle and wait for it to kick in. The fellow rode it to Sturgis last year and suffered none of the clutchitis that most other bikers had in that mob. While that's a plus, he told me you don't get engine braking, so you have to get on the brakes earlier than with a standard transmission bike. I won the longest solo rider with my 640 miles (that wouldn't have worked at a BMW rally, I bet!) and 82-year-old JN Smyth and his wife rode nearly 150 miles to claim the 'oldest' certificate.

While looking at JN's California, he warned me to be careful in back of it as it might kick me. He explained that 'it pulls like a mule and it might kick like one as well!' The Smyth's were from OK, but I heard some interesting remarks from other attendees as well. One fellow, Lee from Jackson, Tennessee remarked that 'a Moto Guzzi just eats up the miles like a hog eatin' slop from the trough. Neither one can get enough!' I had never thought of my bike in that manner, but I really couldn't argue his point. Many Guzzi riders, I'm finding, are rather simple folks, kind of like the bikes.

I did discover at about 10:30 Friday evening that I had forgotten a towel. So I dried off from my shower using the automotive waxing towel (oversized wash cloth) that I had for bug removal purposes. Thank goodness the bugs weren't very thick on the way up! I did make a stop at Wal-Mart the next day for a camp towel. Pete Evans had given me his trip prep list last year, but I hadn't used it in packing for this trip. 'Prep list? I don't need no steenking prep list', I thought. The towel incident did motivate me to put my own list together when I got back and I will refer to it next time.

I shared a campsite with Karl Werth who is somewhat of a legend in the tiny MG world. He has a Moto Guzzi T3 with 462,000 miles on it. He had the jugs and pistons replaced at around 200K, as it was using some oil. He upgraded to the nikasil lined cylinders, but other than new wiring, hasn't done anything else to the bike. This 90-degree V twin motor was designed for police duty and while most don't make this type of mileage, they are known for durability and reliability. I had no trouble with my bike and I am enjoying more and more the Guzzi character and soul. I only wish it had a bigger gas tank (air box in the later Cali's cut into the tank size) and I'm going to have to spring for a custom seat. Those are the two common complaints from riders of the newer Cali's.

For anyone who hasn't ridden northern Arkansas, you really ought to consider it. The Ozarks are beautiful and plenty of twisty roads to be found. State Highway 23 into Eureka Springs was very enjoyable on the way up, particularly going through the state forest, which included

several miles over some nice sized ridges. A couple of rally attendees encouraged me to try SR 7 on the way back to TX, but I decided to make time and mostly re-trace my original path home. Given the heat, that turned out to be the best, as my flip face modular helmet didn't allow me to use my camel back hydration unit, but that's another story. I did parallel US 71 south while riding on I - 540 down to I - 40. US 71, I'm told, is also some excellent riding, but I'll save that for another trip.

~ Chuck Durant

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