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Motorcycle News | Events | Product Reviews | Exclusive Biker Event Coverage | Test Rides | Biker Travels | Event Photography | Page 3 Babes | Events Listings | and more inside ...

# BOATERZ & BIKERZ HULL OF A TOUR



## THE FREEDOM RIDE

Photos and Story by: Wanda Kenton Smith

Eight years ago, I was a harried business owner of a \$20 million advertising and PR agency, juggling the roles of biz exec with that of wife, soccer mom, parental caregiver, writer/editor, and boating industry activist. My world embodied a frenzied rush of deadlines, with no time for hobbies or personal passions. I was just another highly charged workaholic running through the maze, trying desperately to maintain sanity while pursuing the elusive American dream.

### And then, I took a motorcycle ride.

My creative director and I were in an all-day strategic session for a national boating account based in Saint Augustine, FL, meeting with client Jim Krueger, a great guy who happens to be an avid biker. He used to cruise in for occasional agency meetings, dressed to thrill in his biker gear. I casually mentioned I'd love to take a spin, so he invited me to bring close-toed boots and a pair of jeans to our next meeting. That day had come and I was ready.

Suffice it to say, my first adult motorcycle adventure sparked and ignited every last cell in my entire body! Jim didn't simply take me for a 10-minute loop around the complex as I'd anticipated. He rode from Saint Augustine to Daytona Beach as sunset graced A-1A, the sun a dazzling orange orb suspended on a purple horizon, with turquoise waves lapping the shore. This breathtaking bliss erupted into rumbling thunder as we rolled onto Main Street for my surprise debut at Daytona Bike Week. I was stunned ... clueless... and enraptured by it all!

### It was then and there that I fell hopelessly in love with all things motorcycling.

When I arrived home late that night and rousted my sleeping husband, I was beyond excited to share my experience! He looked at me as though I'd lost my mind, and said as much. Nonplussed, I signed up for a learn-to-ride class at Orlando Harley-Davidson the very next day.

Such was my conversion to motorcycling

and the dawn of a fulfilling new life. Some say I had a midlife crisis. Call it what you may, I believe it was the most wondrous watershed and pivotal turning point of my entire existence! Nearly a hundred thousand spectacular miles have come and gone since that inaugural ride. I'm on my second Harley, a purplicious Screaming Eagle CVO Fat Boy trimmed in silver and red, dripping in chrome, with a custom purple crocodile seat and purple leather fringes. (Did I mention the purple helmet and braids?)

As the national marketing columnist for the boating industry's leading b2b, Soundings Trade Only, since 1998, I have chronicled some of my motorcycling experiences in my articles. I quickly discovered many of my boating industry colleagues share the addiction. And so, in 2013, I launched the first-ever Boaterz n Bikerz of America: Hull of a Tour, a one-of-a-kind, 3,000-mile, 11-day cross-country trip from Florida to California that featured great motorcycling



roads with special boating activities. I enlisted my good pal and bike daddy Jim Krueger to plan the route, while I managed the trip logistics, sponsorships, boating events and publicity. About 22 boating industry executives and friends came along for the ride, which ran from the Florida Panhandle to the Natchez Trace, to the plains of Texas; through the snow and sleet of Taos, New Mexico, to the glitz lights of Vegas; from the Grand Canyon to the sun-drenched Palm Desert and parched Mojave; to the final celebratory splash down in San Diego. Indeed, it was a wildly successful ride and truly, one hull of a tour!

#### **Before it ended, the topic had turned ‘deuce.’**

This past May, 30 boaters and bikers participated in Hull of a Tour<sup>2</sup> The Freedom Ride, an epic 2,000-mile, nine-day adventure from Sarasota, FL to Washington, DC, sponsored by Freedom Boat Club, Hurricane Boats and our industry media sponsor, Soundings Trade Only, where I posted ride excerpts in a daily blog.

#### **Our theme, “The Freedom Ride,” served up more than a catchy title.**

Our boating events were hosted by multiple Freedom Boat Clubs. The kick-off breakfast was staged at the downtown Marina Jack docks in Sarasota, FL, where local TV documented our departure. In Saint Augustine, we rode aboard club boats to the city docks and toured Flagler College, lunching in the private president’s dining room, followed that night by a sponsored dinner on the waterfront in Savannah at Bahia Bleu Marina, with a late night toast at the famous Riverwalk. En route to the Outer Banks, we feasted on scrumptious barbecue chicken at Harbour Gate Marina in North Myrtle Beach. However, the boating pinnacle had to be the cookout and boat ride in Annapolis. We anchored in the bay and watched a command performance of the Blue Angels as they buzzed directly overhead while performing for the U.S. Naval Academy’s annual commissioning ceremony. Sweet! Our freedom theme also encompassed a tour of the U.S.S. Yorktown in Charleston, SC, along with two relaxing ferry rides

from Ocracoke to Cape Hatteras, NC. We stopped at Kill Devil Hills to view the national monument honoring Orville and Wilbur Wright and the Kitty Hawk. We toured the Harley-Davidson Factory in York, PA and later that afternoon, visited the historic Gettysburg Battlefield, dining at the historic Dobbins Tavern. We rode the glorious Shenandoah Skyway to Charlottesville, VA en route to Thomas Jefferson’s beloved Monticello, winding like a colorful ribbon along the curvy elevation. Nothing more exhilarating than finding “the pocket” and grooving through those thrilling twists and turns!

Finally, we ambled through the lush Virginia countryside before reaching the nation’s capital for an unforgettable Memorial Day weekend. We were here to ride in Rolling Thunder, the 900,000-motorcycle behemoth that runs from the Pentagon to the Viet Nam Memorial Wall. It is the largest peaceful demonstration in the nation with its focus on the MIA and POW issue, while recognizing veterans and military.

Our hardy band joined the local Harley-Davidson dealership for an escorted ride to



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the Pentagon where we parked in one of four lots set aside for this event. We hung out nearly five hours to ride the 25-minute route, but it was well worth the wait. We exchanged stories with bikers from all over the country who had come for this event and purpose.

The positive camaraderie and good feelings roared to life when it was finally our turn to rev it up! It was impressive just how well organized the operation was as we hit the streets to the national mall. Hundreds of thousands of spectators of all ages ringed the roadway, waving flags, saluting, shouting cheers and supporting the troops in a unified show of patriotism like I've never witnessed. As we rode past the lone marine standing in still salute, I could no longer contain the tears. The image was so powerful! As the proud daughter of a 27-year career Navy officer, I can't even begin to describe the palpable sense of patriotism I felt and experienced riding in this company. We decided to stop the next morning on Memorial Day at Arlington National Cemetery. We rose early and were among

the first to arrive, hopping a trolley to visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It was sobering, quiet and dignified. A few moments later, I stood alone atop a grassy hill, viewing in awe the countless grids of gleaming white tombstones fanned below. Again, I was swamped by an overwhelming sense of gratefulness.

That afternoon, our Florida crew rode one last stretch together to Lorton, VA and boarded the Amtrak AutoTrain for our 17-hour trek south to Sanford, FL. As I sat in my sleeper car that afternoon and into evening, composing my final trade blog, I saw the world outside my window pass by, eventually shifting from daylight into darkness.

The memories of The Freedom Ride are forever part of my life tapestry, woven together with stitches of friendship, laughter and discovery. At the heart of it all, however, as with every ride lies the love of adventure, the call of the open road, and the ever-alluring growl of the throttle. They say the third time's the charm, right? So it should come as no surprise that

Jim and I are already plotting the next big adventure. This time, we're California dreaming, right on up the fabled Pacific Coast Highway.

In essence, motorcycling has grounded me. Riding has spirited me far from the former humdrum and grind of daily survival to a happy, well-balanced life that is bursting at the seams with joy and exuberance! No matter the destiny—from exotic ports of call to desolate local backroads, from amber-hued plains to majestic mountain vistas—my soul yearns for freedom and the blessed escape that only my two wheels can deliver.

#### BIO:

Wanda Kenton Smith is president of Kenton Smith Marketing, chief marketing officer of Freedom Boat Club and president of Marine Marketers of America. A degreed journalist and marketing columnist for Soundings Trade Only, she's also former editor of several national boating publications. While work is an integral part of her DNA, she's the first to admit she lives to ride.  
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