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HULL OF A TOUR: Flying high in Annapolis

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ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Day Six of The Freedom Ride can only be described as ... *awesome*. Honestly, I did my very best to drum up another word, but nothing else sufficed. Also, it's the one word I heard repeated and rolling off the tongues of our riders multiple times throughout the day. I uttered the word myself on many occasions. So there you have it. *It was a simply awesome day.*

After the treacherous downpour we'd experienced the previous afternoon, it was encouraging to wake up to sunny skies. However, when I walked outside to load up the bike in my thin cotton tee, I felt a slight chill roll up my spine. We'd been riding in the 80s for the past several days, so this drop to the low 60s overnight was a welcome surprise. I happened to have my motorcycle vest with me, so I changed to a long-sleeve shirt and zipped up the vest. It was all I needed to ride comfortably.



After treating tour riders to an awesome day, the Freedom Boat Club hosts find themselves surrounded by their newest fan club.

As our tires kissed Williamsburg goodbye, we rode in harmony to the glorious Virginia countryside, anticipating what would lie ahead. We weren't disappointed! We discovered thick, verdant green trees hugging the road and bowing in canopy, stirring in us a sense of awe as we rode beneath the sprawling branches. It was exhilarating to ride the gentle, rolling hills.

Boaters understand this feeling. It's like discovering a new vista right around the bend and feeling that swell of joy upon discovery. Boaters and bikers love this type of magical moment, when the very encounter you've stumbled upon steals your breath away! For several hours we were treated to many of these aha moments.



Lucky boaters watch from the water as the Blue Angels perform in Annapolis for the U.S. Naval Academy graduation.

Unlike boaters and car riders, however, bikers also experience a heightened sense of smell. When you're in a car with the windows up or cruising along a waterway, you miss much of what a biker savors. We

smell wood burning, salt air, the distinct odor of skunk, the lip-smacking tease of barbecue and the dewy fragrance of fresh rain or newly fallen leaves on fertile earth.

As we glided past the thick copse of trees and seemingly endless fields of wheat, we breathed in a natural floral fragrance as bewitching as the most exotic perfume I've ever smelled. Wish I could have bottled that up and taken it with me.

The morning ride gave way to a near-perfect day. The only hitch was returning to the real world and the slap of heavy traffic as we entered (and later departed) Annapolis. As we shifted gears and focused on finding our destination for the day, Freedom Boat Club-Annapolis, we discovered it at Port Annapolis Marina. A member of the marina team directed us to a dedicated area set aside for our bikes, just footsteps from the water.



The two-hour boat ride and the Blue Angels' airshow was a highlight of the Freedom Ride tour.

Greeting us were our hosts for the day, franchise owner Richard "Dick" Cromwell, who owns this club and Freedom Boat Club-Rhode Island. He was joined by general manager Dan Somerville, who did a superb job of organizing our visit.

We also had invited a few well-respected media friends who live in the area to join us. I was so pleased to see our good pals John Wooldridge, editor-at-large of Yachting Magazine and his son, Sean, along with John Page Williams, who was on assignment to cover our arrival for Boating Magazine. Spin Sheet Magazine's Holly Foster had also joined in for the fun.

Brief introductions were made and our group had just a few moments to hit the facilities before boarding the Freedom Boat Club fleet for a very special boating activity. We split up the group and boarded four late-model boats, including a Hurricane deckboat that our rider pal Andy Lindstrom, of Nautic Global Group, was invited to captain. He was sure a happy camper! We throttled slowly out of the marina basin and directly into the bay, where we joined an estimated 1,000-boat party with an amazing display of boat types and brands, from party barges to yachts.

Boaterz n Bikerz of America Hull of a Tour² riders had the unique opportunity to witness a command performance of the Blue Angels from an unbelievable vantage point on the water! As part of the U.S.

Naval Academy Commissioning Week, the Blue Angels performed precision maneuvers directly above the Severn River aboard six sleek and impressive Navy F/A-18 Hornets.

Other aircraft in the two-hour, action-packed show included a large C-130 Hercules dubbed "Fat Albert" and captained by the first woman assigned to the elite aerobatic team, along with an introductory fly-by of the seven unit Breitling Jet Team.



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We were treated to nearly two hours of non-stop, awe-inspiring demonstrations and stunning maneuvers, including the four-jet Diamond formation, the Delta formation and the Fleur De Lis. The flight team performed a special tribute in honor of a fallen Navy midshipman who died during the recent Amtrak derailment, and that was pretty moving.

I mentioned in a previous blog that I'm the daughter of a Navy pilot and my dad loved the Blue Angels. After living for a dozen years in Japan, my dad and our family moved to Milton, Fla., upon his retirement so he could be near the cradle of Navy aviation. As a kid growing up, I attended several performances of the Blue Angels. No matter how many times I see them, however, it always blows my mind. I saw some new maneuvers today that I hadn't seen before that were simply thrilling!

Duffy Stenger, former vice president of sales for Regal Marine, is now enjoying retirement. He and his wife, Karen, joined us for the Freedom Ride this year. We were on the same Freedom Boat Club boat when Duffy remarked, "Man, our motorcycles can't even ride that tight!" Amen, brother. The Hells Angels don't have a thing on the big blue.

After the show, our boats returned to the Freedom Boat Club docks and we all were happily buzzing about what we'd seen. I noted that it was like being encircled by surround sound. Those amazing aircraft and their pilots soar directly overhead, and those of us lucky enough to be positioned on the waterfront definitely had the best view and sound in the theater. Awesome!

We were treated to a terrific cookout of hamburgers and hot dogs at the marina's large pavilion. Somerville fired up the grilling station, and we all helped set up the spread. What is it about food that always tastes so much better when you're boating or riding bikes? Everyone ate their fill and enjoyed the opportunity to just kick back and relax.

After assembling for a few pictures, it was time to hit the road again. We were so appreciative of the out-of-the-box experience provided by our hosts at Freedom Boat Club that we gave them a standing ovation and a heartfelt round of applause prior to departure. The air show and the overall day's ride was the hot topic of conversation at dinner, which tonight was a super-casual pizza affair at the hotel. I have a feeling this will be recognized as one of the highlights of the nine-day tour.

Today is sure to be another day for the history books as we ride to York, Pa., to tour the working Harley-Davidson factory, where soft tails and CVOs (Custom Vehicle Operations models) are built. As a boating factory girl of many years, I'm looking forward to not only the experience, but also the way the Harley folks present it.

We will wrap the day with a trip to Gettysburg, where we're meeting my former history teacher and Civil War expert, Richard Mancini, who will give us a custom tour of the battlefield. He always brings passion to his presentations, so I can't wait to introduce my friends to my favorite history buff. I'm confident it will be yet another awesome adventure!

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