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## "This 'Aint Your Daddy's Ski Boat ..."

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The unique component to the **Boaterz n Bikerz of America *Hull of a Tour*** series is that it combines exciting boating and motorcycling adventures. Intended for boating industry folks and their invited friends who all share a love for the outdoor lifestyle, the tour delivers a mix of memorable rides and events designed to please both passions.

As a reminder about past tour events, our riders have ridden like royalty on Beneteau sail and power yachts in San Diego Bay as well as on a brunch cruise aboard a 78' Ocean Alexander in Seattle; cruised at sunset in the harbor in Newport, RI, San Francisco, CA and Lake Grapevine, TX. We've boarded a fleet of Freedom Boat Club boats and watched a command performance of the Blue Angels in Annapolis; taken scenic cruises in Maine and New Hampshire; and dined at marinas in Savannah, GA and Myrtle Beach, SC. We've even taken fun Duck mobile rides in Hyannis and tubed down the chilly Kennebec River. The boating component is always a highlight of the tour and something the riders really enjoy and anticipate.

Since our headquarters this year is in the Smokey Mountains, I reached out to our friends at Malibu Boats to invite them to sponsor the ride. I couldn't have asked for a more supportive boating partner and official tour sponsor. I worked with Eric Bondy, Jane Schlegel and Bryant Thomas and we collaborated to create an awesome event for our crew.

Earlier on Wednesday, we had jump-started the morning in high gear as our riders slayed the infamous Dragon. I covered that spine-tingling adventure in yesterday's blog. However, that was only half of a truly phenomenal day that knocked it clear out of the park for our riders.

We lined up our bikes and left the Harley Davidson store just outside the dragon with the goal to wind our way to Lenoir City, Tenn., where we were scheduled to meet Team Malibu for lunch and an afternoon of boating fun. The route itself was perfect for our state of mind, a welcome shift from the sharpened intensity associated with dragon slaying.

We ambled alongside the Tennessee River on Highway 72 and then shot up to 95 and 321 en route to Calhoun's Restaurant. We rolled over gentle hills, pastures and through quaint towns. When we finally landed at Calhoun's on the waterfront, we were welcomed by a friendly Malibu greeting party and an awesome boat display. As our riders rode past the boat, we shot video, parked our bikes and gathered for a spectacular photo opp.

By this time, our group was beyond ready to celebrate our victory! We had just collectively slayed the dragon, so the exhilaration and excitement were ready to be unleashed! We chilled, relaxed, shared our dragon stories and feasted on an amazing buffet while sitting smack dab on the water.

Finally, the much-anticipated fun began! Jane and Bryant had organized several boats to take our riders out for a cruise on Loudon Lake, which is situated adjacent to the Loudon Dam and is part of the Tennessee River. In addition, one boat was used as part of a feature story we are working on with *Boating Magazine* involving one of our tour riders who is a freelance boating journalist.

The boat I was in, however, was reserved for the thrill-seekers in the bunch who had agreed (with varying degrees of provocation, I must admit) to take surf lessons. Malibu's Central Sales Manager Nate Reid was a great instructor, while engineering intern Chaz Michael drove the boat initially and later did a demo to show the older folks how it's done.

Of the four in the boat who courageously took the plunge into teeth-chattering cold water and stepped up to the board, Jim Archambault set the pace. A biker, pilot, offshore boat owner and avid poker runner, he stood up quickly and surfed like a rock star on his second attempt. And while our three other brave souls all had water sports in their distant past, success would have to come another day as they experienced a tidal wave of spills, chills and plenty of thrills. Bravo to all.

Our team of discerning boaters was pretty impressed by the Malibu boats we experienced. Riders on my boat — the Wakesetter 24 MXZ — were blown away by the simple, single button control that does it all, coupled with the patent pending surf band worn by Chaz *while surfing* that allowed him to change the speaker volume in the boat, adjust the speed and the shape of the wake and even work the lights. A-mazing! The retro pickle fork design in the bow created a massive sun station that we took full advantage of, while the cockpit seating allowed a crowd to gather for all the action. Another big plus: Nate punched up the volume on the speakers and blasted out the iconic, "Smoke on the Water." We loved it.

As the event closed, we thanked our hosts for providing such a marvelous event. Our crew then slipped from swimwear to biker gear for our return ride back to the Iron Horse Motor Cycle Lodge & Resort. Many shared positive comments about the Malibu immersion, but the comment that got the most response was the statement: "This 'aint your daddy's ski boat." As the former editor of WaterSki Magazine, I'd have to agree. Thanks, Malibu, for delivering a world class experience our riders will always remember.

As the afternoon sun began setting, we rode like banshees back to base camp via the spectacular Cherohala Skyway, my personal #1 pick to ride in the entire area, christened as one of the top 10 motorcycle rides in America by the Discovery Channel. We rode it nearly the entire 41 miles from Tellico Plains, Tenn., to Robbinsville, N.C., sweeping through the Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests including its stunning 5,400-foot summit. In my opinion, nothing beats the endless horizons and overlooks, the fresh mountain air, the tantalizing terrain and the overall experience. Nothing.

While Wednesday was no doubt the action-packed pinnacle of our week, there is more to come. On Monday, I'll finish with our Thursday and Friday ride highlights and maybe even share a few favorite tour bloopers. Thanks for riding along; hope to see you on Monday for the grand finale.

**Hull of a Tour 5: *The Dragon's Roar*** is powered by Evinrude/BRP and sponsored by Sea Tow, Malibu Boats, Emerald Coast Marine Group, Boogey Lights, Born to Ride Magazine, Jim Krueger Photography and Kenton Smith Marketing.