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## HULL OF A TOUR: Crew sees history at Harley-Davidson and Gettysburg

Posted on May 22nd, 2015 Written by [Wanda Kenton Smith](#)



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GETTYSBURG, Pa. — If I started this blog by telling you we had thoroughly enjoyed a day of touring, you'd likely assume I was referring to the motorcycling kind, right?

It would be a natural assumption.

However, you'd be wrong.

We did have a short morning jaunt from Annapolis to the slumbering hills of Pennsylvania on Thursday, but we weren't planning to spend a lot of time in the saddle. When we organized the tour, we wanted one day to focus on our own professional education and edification, on topics that we found intriguing.



The Freedom Ride tour stopped in York, Pa., on Thursday to visit the Harley-Davidson plant.

Through the years, Jim Krueger and I have had responsibility for manufacturing tours in the marine industry. As passionate boaters and bikers, we thought it would be great to learn more about the motorcycle manufacturing and assembly process. With Harley-Davidson's vehicle operations situated in York, Pa., we thought its public tour would be fun and entertaining for our group. In addition to the educational aspect, we also wanted to see how the Harley team conducts its tours. We had great expectations!

At the York plant, the motor company assembles the Softail, Trike, CVO and Touring models, as well as manufacturing select parts, including fenders, fuel tanks and frames. When you bring in a group larger than 10, pre-registration is required, so I had lined up a tour for 10:30 a.m.

First, let me share the cool stuff.

We started out in a large movie theater and viewed two first-rate videos. The first provided a fast-paced, powerful overview of Harley-Davidson's history, peppered with inspiring imagery that reinforced the premier positioning of this iconic American brand. The second movie offered a brief overview of what we would view during our York tour.

Following the show we were given instructions, and then each of us was given safety glasses, along with an earphone and a handheld monitor in order to hear the tour guide. We were then escorted single-file to the manufacturing and assembly floor.



The Civil War battlefield site at Gettysburg, Pa., was also a Thursday stop.

The plant itself was pretty dam amazing. Throughout the facility, the floors were absolutely spotless. There were red, green and yellow overhead lights that regulated traffic flow and movement on the production floor, along with automated conveyor belts that transported bikes from the frame stage through final assembly. Several robotic components were in motion, and we were able to watch live videos demonstrating some of those processes.

There were many high-tech applications, such as the ability at the end of the line to sit on the bike and take it through the gears during roll testing without ever leaving the spot. Designated viewing areas were roped off along the route for quick videos or to view a specific assembly or manufacturing activity.

Although I thoroughly loved learning about the manufacturing of these sleek machines and witnessing how fenders are pressed and fuel tanks are leak-tested, among countless other things, I have to admit I was less than impressed by the attitude of the Harley-Davidson team. In all of my previous experiences I've found the Harley-Davidson organization to be outstanding. However, our group was prodded like cattle and gruffly barked at to "keep up," "move faster" and "get with it." Really?

An international visitor inquired about translation options and the tour guide replied, "We're Americans. We speak English here." Really?

One of our riders owns a Ducati. When we checked in, we were each given a colored card with a tour time and a second postcard with some survey questions. Hey, I'm a marketer and I get that totally ... but when our Ducati guy went to enter the theater and hadn't filled out his card because, frankly, he wasn't interested in getting on Harley-Davidson's database, you would have thought he had committed a major crime! He was abruptly yanked out of line and told to complete the survey before he could proceed. The attitude was downright snarky. Really?

When we finished the tour, we all agreed it was a fabulous facility. In the same breath, however, we all independently noted the over-the-top rudeness quotient. From the guy who checked us in, to the tour guide, to the safety assistant who rolled his eyeballs and seemed totally disinterested in us and the

whole process — well, it was shocking and disappointing. I had expected to feel the love!



Tour riders are shown at the Eternal Light Peace Memorial in Gettysburg.

I have always believed that manufacturing tours provide a rare and perfect opportunity to connect with your customers and prospects and forge a stronger, more loyal relationship. I believe people who come to a factory to see how your products are built are among your most highly qualified prospects. Tours provide the ultimate opportunity to showcase your brand and to distinguish yourself. How those visitors feel when they leave your place has a direct bearing on future sales.

Although I'll likely always be a Harley-Davidson enthusiast and promoter, you might just say that the brand lost a little of its luster for me and my fellow riders on Thursday.

Following the tour, we jumped on our bikes and headed to Gettysburg, Pa. With our theme being The Freedom Ride, we sought experiences for our group that would resonate and reflect accordingly. I had a very special treat in store!

At the visitor center, I spotted an individual waiting there who had significantly influenced my life. My high school history teacher, Richard Mancini, is one of those rare, gifted educators who breathed life and excitement into American history. Perhaps equally important, Richard was a role model who, through his example, taught me many leadership principles at an early age that positively impacted my life and

career.



I hadn't seen Richard for more than 30 years, but thanks to social media I had reconnected with him some time ago. I learned that upon his retirement in academia and a stellar career in administration, he had pursued his dream and relocated to Gettysburg, where he could focus attention on his passion. When we chose Gettysburg as a stop, I tracked him down and asked if he would be willing to give my group a personal tour of the battlefield. I was thrilled when he said yes!

We spent nearly six hours with Richard, including a traditional dinner at the historic Dobbin House, which was excellent. The afternoon flew by! He captivated us from the get-go. His love of history is palpable; his knowledge and expertise is impressive; and his enthusiasm is contagious!

After viewing a brief film at the visitor center, we were awe-struck by the spectacular Cyclorama. This amazing circular masterpiece, which is 42 feet high and 377 feet around, underwent a major restoration and was moved to its present location in 2008. Painted by French artist Paul Philippoteaux, it visually communicates in stunning detail Pickett's Charge during the Battle of Gettysburg. It was a smart recommendation to see the flick and experience the Cyclorama before shifting to the battlefield.

I could devote a half-dozen blogs trying to communicate the wealth of information imparted today, and even then I couldn't begin to even scratch the surface. However, if you ever have the opportunity to visit Gettysburg, do it! After learning more than I'd ever known about this bloodbath and formidable three-day battle, I found myself choking back tears on many occasions.

As we walked the grounds where thousands of Union and Confederate soldiers fell, I knew we were standing on holy ground.

Freedom.

It's why we ride.

It's why we boat.

It's what we celebrate.

But in our pursuit of these privileged pleasures and passions, let us never forget to pay homage and give thanks for all those who sacrificed their lives to make these freedoms possible.

I'll be back next Tuesday for our grand tour finale as we wrap up with Washington, D.C.'s Rolling Thunder. Have a safe and happy Memorial Day!

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