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HULL OF A TOUR: Whales, eagles and lobsters, oh my!

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LUBEC, Maine — On Monday morning we packed up and rolled out of Caratunk, Maine, at 7:30 a.m. sharp, shrouded in a damp, light mist. We had a long day ahead of us and wanted to get a jump-start.

The riding was the type that motorcyclists dream of. Long, easy stretches, a mix of terrain, plenty of throttle and a variety of new sights to keep the interest alive and the adrenaline pumping.

The first moment of pure awesomeness hit about an hour into the ride as we coasted down into an area known as the Forks Plantation. From a distance we could see what almost appeared to be a ghostly apparition.

The entire valley ahead was topped by a hovering, irregular white formation. As we approached, however, we realized that it was a giant fog bank that had settled in and appeared to be hanging around for a while.

The second hallelujah moment occurred when we caught our first glimpse of dazzling Moosehead Lake in the highlands of Maine. The lake is absolutely stunning in size and color. In addition, it is the largest lake in Maine and the largest mountain lake in the eastern United States.

We sped alongside the shoreline for many miles and were just enthralled by its natural beauty and the boats and yachts that dotted the landscape. When I researched information for this column, I learned some interesting facts: Moosehead Lake covers nearly 118 miles with a maximum depth of 246 feet and its shoreline encompasses 280.8 miles.

Now something else about motorcycling that many people don't know is that most riders are acutely sensitive to changes in the environment. Like when we were approaching Moosehead Lake, before I even saw it, I could feel the temperature drop and I knew instinctively that we were approaching water.

We're also very sensitive to changes in smells — the good, the bad and the ugly. While we were riding through Maine and New Hampshire, for example, the familiar smell of the stately giant pine trees immediately ignited fond memories of Christmas and the occasional burst of some sweet flowering fragrance delighted the senses. I asked about the flowers and was told it was likely wild roses that had tickled my fancy.

Another observation I've made on this ride, especially in Maine. You know bikers prefer the scenic back roads. We'll hit an interstate if we have to or to make up some time, but for our group the tour is all about the things you see and the places you go.

Kindly allow me one small whine session: I've never encountered as many road repairs in my life as I've experienced in Maine! Just about every little town has road construction underway, with lots of road repair crews fixing all sorts of bumps and holes and cracks.

Curious, I asked about it and understand it's all about the winter ice and snow that breaks up the road, requiring ongoing repairs. Job security must be good in New England if you work the road crew.

Although we've encountered some unexpected bumps along the roads and some pesky traffic delays, I have to say that our ride on Monday afternoon was simply fantastic. We literally rode for hours on end on newly paved roads as we headed toward Lubec on the coast.

There were seemingly endless smooth and rolling hills, coupled with sweeping, gentle turns. Our crew naturally fell into a rhythm, as if we'd all been riding together for years. Of course, those panic-inspiring Moose Warning signs (Moose Crossing: High Hit Area Ahead), sprinkled with signs warning of jumping deer, reminded us not to get too relaxed.

As we began our descent into Lubec, once again the temperature began to plummet. The ocean was ahead!

We arrived in Lubec (Loo-beck) late in the afternoon. A sign posted at the entry said it is the easternmost city in the United States, with a bridge to Canada minutes away. Named after a German town by the same name, Lubec has a maritime history, having once been the home of shipyards, boatbuilders and sailmakers. No wonder we all felt right at home here!

We are staying at the Inn on the Wharf, a wonderful bed and breakfast situated directly on a peninsula with a glorious view of the harbor. We were greeted by our friendly hosts and innkeepers, Judy and Viktor, who checked us into our lovely rooms, which had spectacular views of the water. After washing off the road grime we all headed eagerly to the docks for the day's big boating festivities. I had planned a whale-watching charter, sponsored by our friends at Sea Tow.

Captain Milt and his first mate, Denisa, invited us aboard their whale-watching boat, *Tarquin*. Captain Milt has been fishing and chartering for 45 years in this area and his thick New England brogue added character to the outing.

Upon departure, we were dressed in foul-weather gear and jackets, due to the fog that appeared to be sweeping in. Lo and behold, in about 30 minutes, I kid you not — the fog dissipated and the

sun came out in all of her splendor! We knew lady luck was going to show us the money, and we were not disappointed.

The third big hurrah began when we spotted a sea lion swimming and frolicking in the surf, followed by a large bald eagle perched on a nearby island. And then, to our great delight and to shouts of joy — mine likely being the loudest — we were treated to an amazing display of natural grace and wonder as a 30-foot minke whale rose up and revealed herself directly in front of our boat!

We were in full whale-watching mode and shot photos for over an hour. We all were just so impressed by the sheer magnificence of this creature. To top it off, two porpoises joined in the show right off our transom, wrapping up what will surely become magical moments destined for the record books!

But that wasn't the grand finale.

After a long day in the saddle and an unbelievable boating adventure we were ready to kick back, chill, celebrate and break bread together. Don't you agree — food just tastes better when you're gathered with friends after a full day on the water or motorcycling?

We had arranged for a lobster bake at the Inn on the Wharf, and we all enthusiastically sat down to a meal that would make King Neptune proud. We donned our cute lobster bibs and set forth on a lip-licking culinary experience that we'll remember for years.

The feast was simply the bomb! Our plates were filled to the brim with 1.5-pound lobsters, hot drawn butter, corn on the cob, potatoes and homemade rolls. Dessert was to die for: made-from-scratch blueberry (fresh from Maine) pies with flaky, buttery crusts — every bite burst with flavor and melted in your mouth. Happy, happy gluttons, one and all.

Today we're leaving the mountains and the highlands behind and heading up Highway 1 to Bar Harbor, which I've been corrected should be pronounced *Bah Ha-ba*. It's going to be a nice and easy run after a few very long days, with a free afternoon to explore.

Thanks for riding along!

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