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HULL OF A TOUR: Bikes among the giants

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EUREKA to ROHNERT PARK, Calif. — A heavy layer of dense fog blanketed Eureka when we awoke Wednesday morning. Its wetness clung stubbornly to our windshields and seats, creating a notable chill in the air.

It was a teeth-chattering 55 degrees when we cranked it up and rolled out of the hotel parking lot — the coldest ride we've had to date. Thank goodness our first stop was just a few short minutes away.

Some girls have addictions to jewelry or clothes, others maybe shoes or chocolate. Me? A Harley-Davidson dealership is my crack house. I'm not picky — any HD dealership will do. I always yearn for a fix of the latest gear or motor clothes. Don't you know I really get high when I find something there in purple!

Like others with this same sickness, I was happy to see I wasn't alone. Based on the purchases, several others in our entourage obviously suffer from the same retail disorder!

With



trademark T-shirts stuffed into the saddlebags, we cleared out of the lot and hit the road. The fog and chill followed our every move, hovering right over us like a dark cloud, for miles. However, we weren't going to let a little cool Northern California fog dampen our parade, no sireeee! Come rain, shine or fog, we were riding the world-famous Avenue of the Giants today!

This spectacular drive along Highway 101 offers the most stunning display of giant redwood trees throughout the 500-mile footprint

known as the redwood belt. There are 31 navigable miles here where vehicles can ride and roam throughout Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

The most wonderful thing happened to us as we neared our destination. About 10 minutes from entry, the skies simply, miraculously parted! The fog fell behind in our wake, and we were blessed by a blast of warm sunshine, coupled with bright blue skies! Did I happen to mention we were ecstatic?

I've got to give every bit of credit to my good pal Jim Krueger, who did so much work researching the best roads and stops for our tour. He had plotted out the roads we would ride upon entering the redwood forest of Humboldt Redwoods State Park, which featured some great curves, sweeps and a few very amazing stops.

As we turned off the main drag and saw the sign for the Avenue of the Giants, my heart began to race. As we entered, it felt as if we had been whisked into a heavenly place unlike anything I'd ever encountered. The giant trees stood tall and as proud as slumbering sentinels, commanding respect from all who pass.

Jim escorted us down many well-chosen roads with rich verdant green arches bowing in seeming welcome. He took us through the California Federation of Women's Clubs Grove off the beaten path to a setting of sheer wonder. We stopped and parked our bikes on a slight incline, then wandered in awe throughout the area.



Pacific Coast Rush bikers rode and explored the Avenue of the Giants and found a perfect spot for a redwood forest shot in Humboldt Redwoods State Park. Photo by Jim Krueger

When our time there was spent, we gathered the crew for some fun pictures, including a double-decker shot surrounding a massive tree trunk that had fallen to its side. We also grabbed a great shot of the bikes stretched along the road beneath the towering trees, then paid \$4 apiece to drive our bikes through a massive tree trunk.

In trying to express how it felt to ride in the presence of these glorious, aged kings, I found it impossible to put my feelings into words. However, I was thrilled to discover this insightful quote from author John Steinbeck, who so eloquently and succinctly communicated what I could not.

"The redwoods, once seen, leave a mark or create a vision that stays with you always. No one has ever successfully painted or photographed a redwood tree. The feeling they produce is not transferable. From them comes silence and awe. It's not only their unbelievable stature, nor the color which seems to shift and vary under your eyes, no, they are not like any trees we know, they are ambassadors from another time."



The tour riders' bikes were a beautiful sight spread out under the giant redwoods. Photo by Jim Krueger

Amen. And amen!



Rider Duffy Stenger, shown at Humboldt Redwoods State Park, is on his second Hull of a Tour.

We had a long afternoon ahead to get to Rohnert Park, our destination for the night. We had a quick bite at a great little dive, Deb's Great American Hamburgers, then opted for the fastest route via the 101 South.

Because we earlier rode in foggy conditions with a dank chill in the air, I remember begging for the return of sunshine. Be careful what you ask for — the temps quickly skyrocketed to 111 degrees, and the dry heat was downright brutal. Rider friend John Wisse, of Ohio Parks & Recreation, characterized it best: "We're cooked, like chickens on a rotisserie grill!"

We did bake in the hot California sun for three long hours. At our first stop, the manager took pity on my flushed face and invited me to stand inside the soda freezer for a few minutes, which I gladly did.

I also chugged down a 16-ounce bottle of water and some Gatorade. But I learned a big secret today. Krueger ceremoniously dumped a huge jug of ice water on my head and down my back in order to cool my core. It worked!

We fought some gridlock coming into the city, but made it safely without incident. Looking forward to a great few days in Monterey, Carmel and San Simeon, along with Big Sur!



Tour bikers ride in formation along a California highway. Photo by Jim Krueger

I've been blogging every day this week, and will conclude next Monday. You're welcome to join us right here for a virtual ride-along! If you missed a day and want to catch up, check out the archives at Soundings Trade Only and type in Hull of a Tour.

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Wanda Kenton Smith is the event producer and publicist of Boaterz n Bikerz of America: Hull of a Tour. This year's Pacific Coast Rush is presented by title sponsor Freedom Boat Club, platinum sponsor Regal Boats, retail sponsor Alexander Marine USA and