

USA 4 Corners Tour 2012: “Everything was going just fine until it wasn’t.”

Here’s a story of planes, bikes and lonely hotel rooms. You’ll agree that it’s no way to spend a long-distance motorcycle tour. I spent more time in a dealer’s waiting room than I did in the Florida Keys. No good.

So, how did I depart on in the saddle of a BMW and return via United Airlines. Ah, now that’s a story. Not the one I’d like to be telling, but not too dissimilar from the LAST big bike trip I took. OK, as the song goes, how did I get here?

The USA is a big old place with plenty of interesting places to see; full of fun, interesting people to meet. But I was looking to put a lot of miles on hot asphalt...11,000 miles to be exact. I’d meticulously maintained my bike and had serviced it in preparation for this ride. All necessary items had been addressed and I was ready to roll. Or so I thought...

Everything was going so well the first few days. Ted and I put mile after mile behind us as we made our way through the four corners of this great country.

Then, somewhere in South Carolina on a Saturday afternoon, I detected a faint rattle from deep in the BMW’s belly. Hmmm, I thought, that’s funny. I’ll have to look into that later. “Later” came about 30 minutes later when my bike lost power and I rolled into a tiny little gas station in the middle of Gable.

Those friends and family who’d chosen to follow me via the SPOT GPS messenger must’ve been wondering what I was doing in one place for so long, dead in the proverbial water.

Well, here’s a rundown of what I accomplished en route a 2nd USA Four Corners Tour adventure. I’ll tell you right now that I did NOT earn a second certificate of achievement and instead went home in shame, without my BMW. Want the sordid details of a bike ride that could’ve been and almost was? Here ya go:

Day 1: San Diego to Salem, OR

Hours: 17

Miles: 1050

Ted and I departed San Diego at 1 AM sharp. We rolled though the I-5 to the 405 and back to the 5. Not a lot of traffic. We had expected more drunks. Construction slowed us twice. Sunup was at 5:15, we moved quickly. We missed weekday commuting traffic in Sacramento and witnessed some beautiful Shasta views. Grooved pavement pulling at my tires at 4 in the morning isn’t the best feeling, but hey, it was better than being at work...

We reached the Oregon border at about noon. Getting close to Salem and seeing our exit ahead, I ran out of gas 4 miles before our final stop. No worries: I carried a small fuel bottle and was going again in 4 minutes.

Fun Fact: Thousands riders complete an Iron Butt ride each year; over 2,800 riders completed a SaddleSore 1000 in 2011. How many attempt an IBA ride is unknown.

Day 2: Salem to Spokane (via Blaine)

Hours: 13.5

Miles: 750

Mother's day; we were up at 6 AM and ate a big breakfast of eggs, bacon, peaches and pancakes. Now THAT is the way to begin a big ride!

We arrived to our second corner of Blaine by 1 PM. We collected a fuel receipt, phone # at Big Al's Diner and a photo at the post office. Blaine was dead on a Sunday and we were in and out of the town in 25 minutes.

We opted to take Highway 2 east over the Steven's Pass. It was a bit slower than the interstate, with lots of traffic at first, but opened up to snow, nice mountain views and rivers alongside the road. We moved quickly over the pass, through the cute little town of Leavenworth and onto I-90. We arrived to Spokane by 9:15 PM.

Fun Fact: Leavenworth, WA hosts an annual International Accordion Competition. It's a cute little Germanesque town up in the snowy hills on Highway 2.

Day 3: Spokane to Rapid City, SD

Hours: 16.5

Miles: 872

This was a way long day! We opted to get off the 90 East and take the 212 through an Indian reservation to "save an hour." I'm wondering if that was a mistake. We ended up getting to our hotel at 11 PM, after some scary riding through deer-infested back-country roads.

Day 4: Rapid City to Meadville, MO

Hours: 750

Miles: 12.5

It was another long day of mostly slab riding. The 90 East to the 29 South was fairly uneventful but for the horrendous wind; it kept us on our toes – or foot pegs, as it were, for over 100 miles.

Fun Fact: Laura Ingalls Wilder lived in De Smet, South Dakota. I used to love those books as a kid.

Day 5: Meadville to Marietta, GA

Hours: 13

Miles: 775

We passed near to the famous arch, right along the big, muddy Mississippi River. No time to stop, as we glanced at the big old monument to...well, I'm unsure exactly what it memorializes.

We crossed into Georgia twice today as the highway twisted and turned. I was informed that the State was glad that “Georgia was on my mind,” twice!

Shout outs to our wonderful hosts for the evening, Jerry and Kathy – two motorcycle enthusiasts.

FUN FACT; The St. Louis Arch, also known as the Gateway to the West, was built on the west bank of the Mississippi between February 1963 and October 1965. It stands 630 feet high and overlooks miles of Missouri and Illinois landscape.

Day 6: Marietta to Ruskin, FL

Hours: 8

Miles: 500

Ted and I split up right after we crossed into Florida. He headed southeast to stay with his nephew in West Palm Beach and I headed southwest to see my mother-in-law near Tampa. This was an easy day of riding.

Day 7: Ruskin to Key West to West Palm Beach, FL

Hours: 13

Miles: 635

Fun Fact: The origin of Key West has nothing to do with a “key” or “west.” Instead, it was first called Cayo Hueso (Bone Cay) by the Spanish explorers who described the dried wood on the beach as white bones. Cayo Hueso became Key West.

Shout outs: A nod to the service manager at the Chevron station on Truman Street in Key West who identified us as USA 4 Corners riders and slapped us on the back in support.

Day 8: West Palm Beach to Gable, SC (Florence)

Hours: 9

Miles: 560

Troubles, troubles; We departed West Palm Beach at 5:30 in the dark making great time up the Turnpike (\$4.10 for 50+ miles of easy, low-traffic riding).

The I-95 was really moving as we moved north thru Florida and Georgia and into South Carolina. We stopped in Santee, SC for a lunch at Cracker Barrel where I called my old riding partner and good friend Dave who lives in Virginia. Since Ted and I were scheduled to stop in Skippers, VA (just north of the VA-NC border) for the night, Dave was going to stop by and have coffee with me.

Just 20 miles or so after leaving Santee, my bike began losing power. I was able to get off the road and exited to a gas station in Gable where my bike just died. It appeared to be a clutch or transmission issue as the motor still ran.

I asked Ted to continue without me as there really was nothing we could do that evening. We prayed together and off he rode en route to VA and then Massachusetts then off to the final corner of Madawaska.

AMA roadside service brought me to Florence, about 15 miles north, where my bike tipped over in the trailer and broke my windshield. Could it get any worse?

I contacted some local CMA folks and was happy to see LeRoy from Florence Victory Riders arrived with a trailer. He brought me to his house where I cleaned up and started making calls. It was Saturday afternoon – I doubted I'd get my bike serviced anytime soon! Still, the CMA network was working overtime and told me to relax while they researched the issue.

There are two BMW dealers in SC...both hours away. The other closest dealers were in North Carolina: Charlotte and Raleigh. Oh, what to do... The good thing was that I was in a safe, comfortable place being hosted by some fine Christian friends while I waited to see what the future held.

Days 9-11: Florence, SC

Hours: N/A

Miles: Zero

Days 12-14: Charlotte, NC

Hours: 8 (in a BMW dealer's waiting room)

Miles: Zero

Here's the whole ugly saga in painstaking detail: The dealer ordered parts on May 22, and, the next day, after 6 hours of labor, informed me that they were stumped as to the issue and would have to order more parts and spend even more time "figgering out what the heck is wrong" with my bike. Hmmm, that's not what I expected to hear from a BMW dealer.

I briefly considered buying another bike (a beautiful blue BMW R1200GT) and finishing the ride. However, with all of that drama going on, I decided to cut my losses, hire a shipper to deliver my bike to my mechanic in San Diego and hop a flight back home.

So off I went to the airport on May 24, a defeated and very disappointed rider. That ended my USA 4 corners Tour, as well as my vacation days.

Shout outs to good friends Bob and Sherri who put me up and showed me the town for two days while the BMW dealer tinkered with my bike.

Subject: USA Four Corners 2012 Ride UPDATE

OK, all, I am home in San Diego after missing the finish by "that much!"

Ted and I did really well in moving quickly through the first three corners. We were in South Carolina, about 1200 miles from the final corner in Madawaska, Maine when my

BMW had clutch issues.

The dealer in Charlotte, NC wasn't able to quickly fix it completely so I headed home instead. I arrived last night and am sorting out the details now.

Good news: Ted completed the 4 Corners Tour a few days ago and will be listed on the official site shortly (<http://www.usa4corners.org/>).

More to follow, but I wanted to let you know that I made it back OK.

Thanks for your support!

John