



BLACK WIDOW'S POKER RUN

Tearing up the delta roads

Run benefits Shriner's kids

by Felicia Morgan

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., OCT. 2— Eight years ago a bunch of guys were hanging out at their clubhouse when the topic of how to keep the lightbulbs burning came up. After a bit of brainstorming, the idea of a poker run was thrown on the table, so they put one together and everyone had a great time. The bills were paid and they even had money left over. Once the decision was made to donate the surplus cash to the Shriner's Hospital, a yearly ritual was born.

Nowadays, those of us in the know make it a point to put life on hold for the first Saturday of every October to indulge ourselves in Sacramento's best-kept secret of a poker run. We all start out at that same clubhouse on Del Paso Boulevard for sign-ins and the mood is instantly set, first thing in the morning, by the display of tricycles, scooters, bikes, and assorted wheeled gadgets. The whole place brings to mind a big boy's toy box, and that's just the way they like it. Although the Black Widows are an actual AMA chartered club, they don't spend a lot of time taking themselves too seriously. Consider that the name itself was taken tongue-in-cheek from the hapless, bad-boy biker gang that menaced Clint Eastwood in the movie "Every Which Way But Loose" where an orangutan was the hero, and you get my drift here. The day is all about fun, and it just so happens that kids end up with the benefits.

The next stop is for biscuits 'n' gravy 'n' Bloody Marys at the Mecca, a place nestled in a residential neighborhood near the river in West Sacramento. The parking lot is packed with folks milling around catching up with old friends and new, buying raffle tickets, and getting their first card.

The cards are chosen by a roulette kinda gig with bicycle handlebars... the wheel is spun, you slam on the brakes, and viola! Your card is chosen. (Although the contraption cracks me up as is, I really think a set of apehangers

would do nicely here, guys!) Next stop is the Goose Club, just before the turn up to the banks of the Sacramento River, where we don't stay long as the next leg is the part of the ride that's magically transforming. The scent of the river, sweet grass, and fig trees conjure up childhood memories of lazy days spent sitting barefooted, fishing for catfish. The pack spaces out enough that it seems we're each alone as we glide along the bends of the delta river through orchards and vineyards and old farmsteads, heading for the third stop at the Ryde Hotel. The Ryde has such great potential, once having been a speakeasy and done in period decor, but the 2-bartenders-to-over-200-thirsty-riders quotient makes it a drag most aren't willing to put up with. I overheard several say they'd just wait out the next 15 miles to Foster's for



bartender, it is the one bummer in the day, and isn't really necessary.

The pack next heads for the Steamboat Slough, where we board a cable ferry and are towed across the muddy delta waters. We barely have time to touch land and feel the wind in our faces before we again cross water, this time compliments of Caltrans aboard the Real McCoy ferry at the Cache Slough. There's some sort of childish abandon that comes with riding your bike, along with some 20-odd fellow Huck Finns, onto little more than a

Barton steel-topped skiff and being shuttled across the swirling currents of the muddy delta sloughs. The less than five minutes it takes to cross the river is just enough to snap a couple of photos before the entire craft begins to shudder from the roar of engines being rapped out in anticipation of touching dry ground and racing off to Rio Vista for the next card and cold drink, and the experience of Foster's. This place is an adventure unto itself.

Tree huggers and vegetarians would do well to avoid this establishment as I'm certain the collection of animal heads and various other body parts included in their decor would most certainly send them into cardiac arrest. There's plenty to feast the eyes



the chance to grab a beer. Although the route has been varied three times over the last eight years, and everyone really likes this route, I just can't imagine the Ryde being a part of future runs. Between the slow service and the surly

on here, and the photos and stories will keep you busy. The dartboard set up in the parking lot determined your card and the appearance of the local fuzz made you feel welcome (once we stopped holding our breath) as he revved his engine and chirped a tire out in front of the bar. With a collective sigh we figured it best to mount up for the final stop while things were still on the upswing, and headed back up the river's edge towards the old Chinese community of Locke.

Al the Wop's is the actual heart of Locke, as far as the riding community is concerned. Brothers Steven and Lorenzo Giannetti have made bikers feel welcome for the past 11 years, having once even allowed a bike inside the bar, I've been told. For this occasion they drug the barbecue out into the street and grilled up chicken and steaks for the 260 ticket holders while Sacramento legend Sonny Pasioles and the South Side All-Stars blasted great blues and rock down the narrow streets of the aging town. The Black Widows have tried to keep this run small specifically so the event could stay at Al's and in Locke, which can only accommodate 320, the official number of last year's turnout. Though attendance was down this year, attributed to the closeness in time to Street Vibrations and a competing run in nearby Yuba City, the amount of money to be donated to the Shriners is expected to be about the same as last year, a whopping \$10,000.

The sad news here is that there is a possibility that this hugely fun, successful fundraiser is headed for extinction. The complete recipe for a great party is brought together for one whole day of wild abandon. There's riding, and drinking, and dancing in the streets! There were 40 sponsors, 48 prizes, the aforementioned 260 riders, and it all takes a tremendous amount of work. Officers Dan West (secretary), Tom O'Neil (treasurer), and Steve Rodriguez (president) have been discussing the possibility of passing the torch to the Shriners, or even discontinuing it altogether. The Shriners have a broader volunteer base from which to draw, but the officers themselves are the heart of this event and the powers that be are wise enough to know it wouldn't be the same without them. The real losers here would be the kids. I can't imagine a more noble cause than raising money for children in hospitals. Everyone who makes this run would mourn its loss. As Steve was leaving the dusty streets of Locke, he shared that, "With friends, all things are possible." So friends... will we let it fall by the wayside, or will this little run survive? You can contact Tom O'Neil at 916.992.0650 or write the Black Widows at P.O. Box 1000, Elverta, CA 95626. ♦