



Yankee Chatter



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Antique Motorcycle Club of America

Yankee Chapter

Ride them, do not hide them!



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From Yellow Springs to Kansas City, Kansas...

by Greg Ravizza

In the previous edition of the Chatter, I mentioned that I was soon to head out to Columbus, Ohio where I was to join Mark Hunnibell as he progressed on his effort to celebrate the 100th anniversary of CK Shepard's cross country trip on a then new 1919 Henderson Four that started at Coney Island, New York and ended in San Francisco. Mark had discovered Shepard's book documenting the trip, and as he was the owner of 1919 Henderson Four himself, decided to embark on wholesale adventure that included not only the ride, but a companion book annotated from his experience of researching the original route, a website dedicated to his endeavors to make the ride a hundred years later.

This all came about when Dan Margolien sent me a request to contact other members of the AMCA (Mark is member of the AMCA, and was a Yankee member at one time) regarding helping Mark on his adventure. The driver of his support vehicle opted out, due to a potential impact to his business. Having the time available, I consulted with my wife Terry, and she gave her blessing as long as there was no financial impact to us, which there wasn't as Mark would be covering travel and accommodation expenses.

Upon my arrival in Columbus, which was the nearest airport to Mark's home and base of operations in Yellow Springs, Mark picked me up, and so began a quite interesting journey. After a few minutes of introduction, which included a quick question of whether or not I received Mark's last email to me, which had been sent while I was in mid air, probably somewhere over Pennsylvania. At that time, and upon opening the email later, the need for me, and probably Dana's wife, Debbie Faucer's services to drive the support vehicle had essentially evaporated, as Willie, Mark's driver for the first third of the trip from Coney Island to Yellow Springs had agreed to stay on. During that ride to Yellow Springs, I came to realize that I had no real purpose other than to provide company for Willie for the trek from Yellow Springs to Colorado where I would take my flight home from Denver.

Upon my arrival in Yellow Springs, I met Loring Hill, Mark's twenty-one year old mechanic and companion (on his BMW RT). I was also introduced to Mark's Henderson, as Loring was completing his nightly service routine to help insure that the centurion would complete the journey successfully. Loring's father, Mark Hill, who through his 4 Motion Cycles operation helps a number of ACMA members and others prep and maintain their vintage machines to participate in the biannual Cannonball and other vintage contests of long distance rides.

At this time, I also met Willie, who had just recently met Mark (both residing in Yellow Springs) and had volunteered to initially take over for Loring's dad for the first third of the journey. Over the next few days riding in the support truck (and towed trailer) with Willie, we got to know each other a bit, fulfilling my new duties as providing him with companionship along the way.

Over the next few hours, before settling in for the night, I learned of two mechanical incidents encountered prior to arriving in Ohio. Mark had apparently run over a good size screw on the rear tire, resulting in a flat. Luckily, Mark had a spare set of rims and tires, though the rims were unpainted and mounted with knobbies for the excursion up Pike's Peak when in Colorado. Additionally, Mark also had a bit of bad luck hitting a rock, which broke the foot clutch pedal, which was remedied by finding a local welder who put the pedal back together.

After Loring completed the maintenance, he rolled the Henderson into the trailer, along with his BMW and locked it up for the night, ready for the early morning departure.



Loring (left) and Willie (right) in Yellow Springs – note the saddlebags up and out of the way for servicing, and the shiny rear wheel that replaced the painted rim with the flat.

The next morning, Loring and Mark unpacked both bikes, fired up the Henderson, which by the way started mostly with a single kick. Willie and I hopped into the truck and began following them, destined for Indianapolis, Indiana, home of the fabled Indy 500. Mark had planned a stop on the way to meet with some former friends for a photo shoot. Most evenings, Mark had arrangements to meet with radio station hosts and other reporters set up by his publicist to help promote the trip, and the companion books.

After that stop, we proceeded to Indianapolis, where Willie and I helped Loring set up for the nightly maintenance routine before we checked into the hotel. The maintenance routine was fairly thorough – drain the oil, check the oil for any evidence of issues, fill it back up, check the valve tappets (an easy task as these were exposed on the top of the cylinder heads) and adjust, if needed (mostly minor tweaks), clean and degrease the engine, lubricate the tappets, and then proceed to checking all the nuts, bolts and screws on the entire bike to ensure they were tight for the next morning. The bike was then wiped down so that it looked good for the next day's journey as well.

I continued to be a bit vexed as to why I was still there, as accommodations and meals on the road had to add to Mark's overall expenses. From my perspective, I intended to stay on as long as I could, hopefully making it to Colorado a few days of later to fly home.

The next day we headed to our next destination, Hannibal, Missouri, well known for one of America's preeminent authors, Mark Twain. Along the way, the hundred year old bike lost its exhaust baffle plate mechanism (an option apparently used to keep the bike quiet running through town). We pulled into a parking lot where Loring immediately went to work to close the two inch by four inch hole in the exhaust by cutting up an aluminum can and securing it with hose clamps and header wrap (and more hose clamps). Problem solved (for the immediate at least), we headed out down the road. After an hour or two, Willie and I observed Mark pulling over again, as the fix exhausted itself (ok – corny pun time!) by actually melting the aluminum can and the header wrap and partially melting Mark's right boot. Loring again went to work after first visiting a local auto parts store for a more robust piece of stainless steel to hopefully secure a longer lasting fix.

Upon our arrival in Hannibal after a quick photo shoot across the Big Muddy, it was clear that even the use of stainless steel had mostly succumbed to the intense exhaust heat. At that point, Loring decided to install the original cover plate, which had to be, by its original use, up to the task. Once installed, it was no longer an issue.



Mark Hunnibell on his 1919 Henderson Four on the east bank of the Mississippi River

The next day, our destination was Kansas City, Missouri. While we had gone a few miles down dirt roads the previous day, as documented by CK on his journey a hundred years ago. After a scant few miles, we proceeded to trek through mostly two lane rural roads that took us through very small towns and farms, which at first were paved. After a while, the route turned to dirt roads, which threw plumes of dust that informed the farm and field inhabitants for miles around that we were coming, and have gone. Remember that we have a old bike with a total loss oil system and exposed valve tappets, combined with nothing more than an unfiltered carburetor sucking in tiny grains of dust. After about ten miles or so, Willie and I wondered if Mark had really intended to keep going, given the potential damage to the vaunted Henderson Four. As each mile proceeded, we began to

wonder what Loring was thinking about this particular challenge to the ancient bike's motor. Finally, after roughly forty miles or so, Mark turned off and began heading down a main tarred road where we were to gas up. As we pulled into a local post office parking lot (closed, as it was Sunday) we could see Loring shaking his head as he pulled to a stop on his BMW. I thought Mark was in for a tongue lashing, at a minimum. Both bikes, the pickup and trailer were covered in dust – both inside the truck bed (covered) and trailer, as we opened both up for gas and oil. As Loring looked over the dusty bike, his original grimace was beginning to turn into a bit of a smile. Willie and I were both puzzled, but as he began rolling the bike under the shade of a tree to begin cleaning the bike, he pulled out his phone and dialed up, we learned later, his dad. Listening in a bit, we realized that he wanted to let his dad know what had just happened, and how well the bike held up in such adverse conditions. After completing the call, he began to boast that any other hundred year old bike would have died somewhere along the way, probably ruined for the remainder of the trip. With a sigh of relief, we collectively cleaned up the bike as best we could, and then loaded both bikes into the trailer, bound for Kansas City.



The only part of the bike that didn't have a layer of dust was the seat!

As we rolled into Kansas City to check into the hotel, Willie and Loring took the truck and trailer to find a car wash and parking for the rig. The next day, my adventure was concluded when Mark asked me if I'd consider heading home from there. I agreed, and we changed my flight from Denver, and I arrived home midday on Monday.

Curious as to how the bike fared, I called Loring to find out, and he informed me that the oil from Sunday was clean, and the bike was running fine!

Mark's adventure on two wheels ended the next day when the crankshaft broke south of Burlingame, Kansas. Mark, Loring and Willie continued on until Saturday, July 27th, when the decision to head home was made.

For the very interesting back story and more information, see Mark's website at:
acrossamericabymotorcycle.com