



# Yankee Chatter



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[www.yankeechapter.org](http://www.yankeechapter.org)

Est. 1973

Antique Motorcycle Club of America

*Yankee Chapter*

**Ride 'em, don't hide 'em!**



Left Side View  
With Crankcase Cover Removed

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# Tarmac Therapy

by Captain Mark Hunnibell

## Across America by Motor-Cycle

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2019, I left New York City with my 1919 Henderson on a cross-country ride in tribute to Captain C.K. Shepherd, who came to America from England, then purchased and rode a fully-loaded 1919 Henderson from New York to San Francisco. In 1922, Shepherd would later author a book about his trip, *Across America by Motor-Cycle*. I had mapped out C.K.'s 1919 route and planned to ride my "Red One" all the way to San Francisco (the "Red One" moniker is a nod to my Henderson's original one-a-kind "fire engine red" color that Yankee John Piece dutifully recreated for me). But my cross-country journey was interrupted a mile and a half south of Burlingame, Kansas, when the flange connecting the crankshaft to the flywheel sheered, ending the Red One's driving days until I could get the crankshaft replaced months later. We trailered the bike into Burlingame and continued "on tour" as far west as the Grand Canyon, taking in the landscape, meeting people, and taking photos along the way.



*Pikes Peak: C.K. wrote about wanting to ride up Pikes Peak, but he didn't attempt it. We toted the Red One to the top in the bed of the support truck on a road that would have been more than a challenge for me if I had even tried to ride it.*

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Eight months later, the Red One is once again operational and eager to be ridden, and it now seems the adventure will continue. More on that later.

Even though *Chatter* editor Greg Ravizza gave his personal perspective of this ride in the Fall 2019 edition of the *Chatter* (pages 11-14), I thought it would be helpful to give fellow Yankee members my own insight on this adventure (I am still a member of the Yankee Chapter and plan to come and speak at the Yankee National Meet in Terryville this year, conditions permitting).

This 1919 Henderson is the first motorcycle I ever owned. My father gave it to me back in 1978 as a basket case in pieces. It would be 40 years before the Red One was once again roadworthy. My brief foray into the motorcycling world began with a yellow Honda Express 50cc “no ped” scooter that I bought new in 1979. That was how I got my “Motorcycle” endorsement on my Driver’s License, but I sold the Honda Express within a year after having a near-fatal accident. Fast forward many years, as the Red One neared its completion and I began serious planning to ride it across the country, friends encouraged me to get some training and buy a “modern” bike to ride for practice to gain experience. Even though I already had a motorcycle license, I took the Ohio Basic Riding Skills (BRS) course and then bought a 1973 Honda CB 350 Four, which is a bit of a collector’s item in its own right. But, with four carburetors, the 350F is also pretty finicky, so I didn’t ride as many miles on it as I wanted. In the end, it is fair to say that the 1,300 miles I rode the Red One last year represent probably five times the total number of miles I had previously ridden a motorcycle in my entire life. I mention all this as a background to explain why my departure from New York City didn’t exactly go according to plan.

Eight years earlier, I recall the evening before the Yankee Chapter Meet opened in 2011. Yankees Darryl Cutter, Rich Correia, and I were enjoying some “refreshments” out at the gate when I mentioned the problems I had in getting my engine running. I had it restored by a supposed expert in Canada, but it would not turn over. Armed with the knowledge that I planned a long trip on the bike, Darryl thought that it would be worth my time and money to have Mark Hill look at it. Mark owned 4<sup>th</sup> Coast Fours in Waddington, New York, and was – even then – emerging as the premiere Henderson shop. In fact, I had met Mark Hill four years earlier at the Rhinebeck meet. He was, in some respects, just starting out. However, 20/20 hindsight allows me to clearly see I should have pulled my engine out of Canada in 2008 and brought it to Mark Hill. However, beginning in 2011 and ending in 2018, Mark worked on my engine. He first assessed it would be about 40 hours of work to get it going. However, he found a cascading series of major problems resulting from defective workmanship. I was determined to restore as much of the original engine as I could, even knowing the time and cost of doing that was much higher than if I would have started with an engine that had not been so fundamentally damaged. By the end of those seven years, Mark, his son Loring, and others in his shop had spent hundreds of hours of TLC to get the Red One all back together again. Mark Hill was so committed to the success of my 2019 tribute ride that he dispatched his son Loring (who had just completed a full miles ride of the 2018 Motorcycle Cannonball as the youngest rider ever) to accompany me on my 2019 ride as long as I needed him, as safety rider and mechanic.

## Tarmac Therapy continued



*Raton Pass: The old Raton Pass Road was closed back in the 1950s and the summit near the border is now on private property. The owner graciously escorted us to the top to take in the view at the New Mexico border about which C.K. waxed so poetically.*

In addition to a dedicated safety rider and mechanic, I needed someone to drive my truck and trailer for support. Mark Hill had originally envisioned having one of his employees performing that function, but a short-notice departure of a machinist made it impossible to allow anyone else to go from Mark's shop. My schedule was such that I would be on the road for six weeks, and I thought it would be difficult to find a new support driver to take me all the way, which is why I cast a wide net to try to "stitch together" a series of legs for support. Willie Fernandez, a local businessman and specialized automotive entrepreneur, opened up his schedule to help me as a driver from New York City to Ohio, but he did not think he would be able to go all the way to San Francisco. As Greg Ravizza noted in his Fall 2019 article, Greg joined me in Ohio to assist during the second segment of the trip, where we planned for him to be relieved in Colorado by another Yankee member, Debbie Faucher (Dana Faucher's wife). Just as we arrived for a planned two-day stop in Ohio, Willie made arrangements to stay on the trip for the duration, but Greg was already on the way to Ohio. So Willie drove (and Greg would ride) in the support truck to Colorado. In exchange for his commitment, I agreed to Willie's "demand" that he be allowed to tow the trailer with his own more-capable diesel double-cab pickup truck rather than my smaller truck. By the time we got to Kansas City, it was pretty apparent that Greg's gracious offer to assist was no longer necessary. Besides getting Greg home from there, I also had to "turn off" all the previously-laid plans and accommodations for Debbie Faucher. My very earnest thanks to both Yankees for their generous offers to assist!

As we planned to leave New York City on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019, I had less than 250 miles on the bike. Faced with imminent launch, and having previously driven and even filmed the entire planned route (from 4-wheeled vehicles), I suddenly had concerns about my ability to ride it out of New York City without killing myself. Loring Hill, a highly skilled rider but who had

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never been into New York City in his life, stepped up. After reviewing the planned route and enlisting the help of a handful of local bikers, Loring fired up the Red One at the Triumph Brooklyn motorcycle dealer. He then proceeded to drive the Red One right over the Williamsburg Bridge, then crosstown in the stop-and-go traffic of NYC summer heat, into the Holland Tunnel, and on to our planned stop of New Jersey. I can only imagine the emotions that Loring experienced on that trip (which was only five miles, but must have seemed like ten times that).

Proper discussion of that five mile ride would be an entire article in itself, but I think it is fair to say it might have been a life changing event for Loring! I think I aged a couple years just watching how each second unfolded, most of the time in shock it was all really happening.



La Bajada Hill: The old road down La Bajada Hill is closed now, but was once part of Route 66! The road to the top of the escarpment is no cake walk either. From the edge, we could peer down and see the pueblo below, and even the small cemetery C.K. wrote about.

The next morning I got on the Red One and, with a few pragmatic logistical exceptions, I drove it from New Jersey to Kansas. On my first day of riding, something else dawned on me. It was probably no surprise to Mark or Loring Hill, but I suddenly realized that Loring wasn't along just to be a safety escort and mechanic. Loring was my "Field Instructor" for "Henderson 101," a crash course in riding, surviving, and maintenance; a condensed curriculum of lived experiences that I was now receiving through a firehose. A very large firehose!

Compounding matters, which I suspect Loring quickly realized, he wasn't going to just be the instructor for "Henderson 101," but would also help me catch up on the basic "Motorcycling 101" class that I had never attended. At the end of each day, I was tired. I wanted to help with servicing the bike, but Loring had me on another task. Although I had mapped the entire route out in Google Maps, Loring wanted "turn-by-turn instructions" (like they use on the Cannonball) printed and taped to our gas tanks. At the end of each day, Loring always asked, "How many miles tomorrow?" It was a question to which I often knew the general answer, but I also knew what he was really asking for was the printed turn-by-

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turn instructions for the next day. Thus, upon each arrival, I had to hurry to my room and make new trip sheets. The result was that it took me until Kansas City before I had more than tomorrow's riding converted to turn-by-turn instructions. Sadly, we only did one complete leg after Kansas City, so all that "new map" work ended up being a largely unused exercise.

Generally, over the 1,300 miles, I received increasingly positive feedback on my riding (though it takes a special person to receive input like, *"it was not as bad as yesterday,"* as positive feedback). The glaring exception occurred in Missouri where my planned – but not pre-briefed – route was over a series of gravel roads, a total of 21 miles of gravel! When I scouted this route in 2018 (in a car) these roads were in good condition, dirt over gravel base. But when we got there in July 2019, it seems they had just "re-graveled" the roads with about two inches of  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch round and crushed rock. Although I had ridden a mile on a dirt road earlier, the riding here was much more difficult, but I never went down. Even Loring, who was shadowing me on his BMW 1100, found sections challenging. Greg Ravizza was in the support truck watching the horror of it all, and his article provides a good review of what he saw.

But Greg wasn't there when we got to the first stop after riding the "gravel pits" and Loring ushered me (a nice term for what seemed like being dragged by my ear) out behind the trailer (woodshed) and let me have it. He was *really pissed off*. He didn't like surprises and told me that, if we ended up with any more unbriefed off-road travel like that, he was going home. Since I knew the next "off-road" sections would not be until southwest Colorado and that I had better "off-road equipped" safety riders joining me for those segments, I quietly tended to my bruised ego and figured that I would have time to work this out. But, yeah, Loring was pissed. I didn't see him make the phone call to his father that Greg reported, but by the end of that day or the next, he had calmed down and characterized it as "a happy accident." He said to me, *"I have never seen or heard of anyone driving a hundred-year-old Henderson that many miles off road. The fact you're here to talk about it is a testament to the work we did on your bike."* I sensed recovery; my ear was healing. There was genuine pride in his voice. I replied, *"And I am sure that success was not the least bit the result of the 62-year-old novice hanging on for dear life most of the way. And besides, C.K. Shepherd did his ride 95% off road!"* Lucky for me, Loring didn't snap back with what I knew to be an essential truth: C.K. was 30 years younger, needed to have the engine completely rebuilt three times, and his bike was *still* a wreck when he got to San Francisco. In this case, successful outcome was due to solid preparation, plain and simple.

A day or so afterwards, I recall a conversation with Loring and Willie during dinner where I felt that I had accurately summarized the state of affairs, which was that I felt Loring was quick to anger when he perceived an apparent nonchalance by me over the events. I told him, *"Loring, I think I've finally figured out how to put this in perspective. With all your personal sweat, tears, and time invested into getting this bike back together, you have an emotional attachment to this motorcycle. She's like your daughter and you get very worried and upset when you see some knucklehead like me putting her in risky situations. I get that."* I think he must have agreed because, at least in part because, from then on, it was all good. There would be no further meetings behind the woodshed and my ear would eventually heal without scarring.

## Tarmac Therapy *continued*

As I said, after reaching Burlingame, Kansas, the crankshaft ended its relationship with the transmission and the ride was over. We continued “on tour” including toting the Red One to the top of Pikes Peak, the top the old Raton Pass Road, La Bajada Hill, the Petrified Forest, Flagstaff, and the Grand Canyon, where we were met by C.K.’s only son with his wife.

Since then, Mark Hill tore the engine down and, except for the crankshaft, he was pleased to see no other major internal injuries. I had Mark install a brand-new state-of-the-art fully counterbalanced crankshaft and have been waiting for the winter to be over before getting the Red One back on the road. My web site has a video of Loring doing a few donuts in the snow on the Red One after the engine was rebuilt.



*Grand Canyon: C.K.’s son, Charles Shaw, met me at the Grand Canyon and we all stayed at the El Tovar hotel that C.K. described as “all but toppling over the edge.” We parked the Red One out front and turned many heads with the last public appearance.*

If you have not been to the web site, there is a huge amount of information about this “little project” and you can also sign up for updates. I have produced an audiobook of C.K.’s original 1922 book, as well as a fully-annotated centennial paperback edition of the 1922 classic with almost a thousand new notes, photos, and figures. The links are all on the web site.

If national and local emergency rules will allow, I am now planning to restart the journey in September this year, as a “ride and tour” where I will ride the Red One in and around most of the key places from Burlingame, Kansas, to San Francisco. Back in 2018, I applied to ride in the 2020 Motorcycle Cannonball but have not been approved, so my plans follow the “Get Busy Living” model that informs me I cannot wait for others. I also hope that the national emergency will allow me to bring the Red One to the Yankee meet at Terryville this year and will be happy to see you all again. Maybe she’ll even feel up to a little “Mystery Ride.”

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