

The roads we thrashed over were little goat tracks through wooded farming areas - not that we had time to admire the scenery much in our headlong rush to keep up with the fliers at the front. The huge so-called 'craft' Ballast Brewery is only a couple of months old, and is so new in fact that they haven't even got around to sign posting it, hence our overshoot and disorganised arrival. Not 'crafty' at all inside, but mostly glass and stainless, it was more hospital waiting room than bar, although the beer selection was extensive and first rate, if a trifle on the high ABV side. 7% being their 'session' beers, and climbing north from there.. hic..??!!

One of our travelling companions turned out to be an old acquaintance of Dick's, and Angel and Jim also turned out to be good company, hence our lengthy stay. Mark, a veterinary tutor had us in stitches with some of his stories, then Jim dragged out the remains of a layshaft bearing for our close perusal and inspection. Only yesterday suffering the same fate as Sonja's, they'd got stuck in and already replaced it at the rally site. And it wasn't Portuguese either, but a proper FAG, albeit a ball not a roller, with the ball retainer cage well and truly disintegrated. Tearing ourselves away from the bar we emerged into the heat for the ride home.

Promising a gentler pace - yeah right; our lead rider soon had us hurtling along more minor tracks back towards civilisation and a public display of Norton's in downtown Lexington. Arriving there simultaneously alongside Emily on her Yamaha 650 engined featherbed, she ripped into the poor security official posted there to direct the bike parking. Never previously having had the pleasure of meeting this plump piece of vulgar humanity (*"Don't f*&\$ with this Hungarian b\$#@%",* being one of her more seemly comments) Dick and I hastily fled to the nearest bar for a much needed revive - after all it must be at least an hour since the last one.. Calling in at Krogers on the way home to resupply, we pulled into camp just in time for Michel's birthday dinner. Delicious spaghetti, salad and cake, after which the evening descended into drinking. Just for a change.

Thursday 20th. Day 11. Buena Vista.

Another scorcher looming, Dick, Don K. and I brekkred just down the road at Kenny's - biscuits, gravy, eggs and bacon for \$4.29, before returning to camp for the duration.

A lot of cleaning and polishing went on as people prepared for the bike show, and while this was going on we did a bit of analysis on the oil burning foibles of Phat Slim - two quarts now in 950 miles. Not smoking visibly or fuming, the missing oil wasn't now present in the primary chain case either, and with not much leaking out, Jim Comstock reckons in this heat we should be using V Twin oil. Even though it's the same 20/50 rating as the Valvalene we've got in there, it's actually a much thicker brew. Time will tell.

Lined up for public judging at the camp entrance, there was the usual plethora of Commando categories to vote for - best 750 Roadster/Interstate, ditto 850 etc etc, but there was a smattering of featherbeds to keep things interesting, and a local gent by the name of Mustafa Ehrani displayed three nice machines, including a 1923 side valve Big Four and side-car. Started up, it just sat there tonking away to itself while he wandered off for a look around.

Chatting to a bystander nearby, Thomas Barrett ('the Third'....), turned out to be married to Rosemary, a Kiwi sheila ex-Christchurch, who was attending the rally seemingly under some sufferance. They're also into classic Porsches and live in DC somewhere so his retirement investment business must be doing alright.

A couple of seller's had stalls, one chap flogging off a totally complete but forlorn Atlas needing complete restoration for only \$750. Steph will be pleased that on this occasion I managed to restrain myself from a wallet emptying exercise..

Post show, the day once again descended into yet more socialising and drinking, interspersed with another feed courtesy of Michel's birthday leftovers...

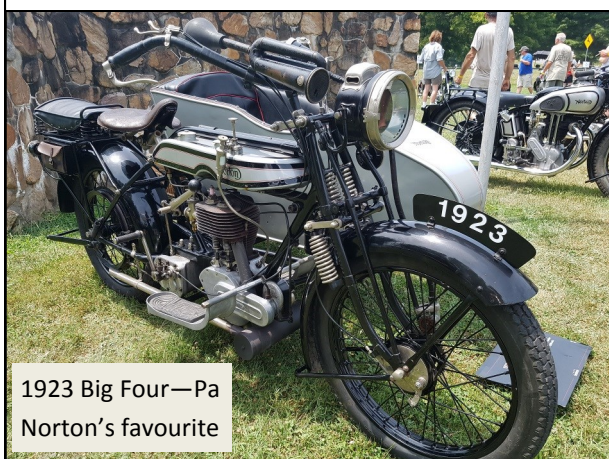


Impressive array of Ballast Point foaming tea taps



Genuine FAG layshaft bearing failure

PC rally
tee shirt



1923 Big Four—Pa
Norton's favourite



Bob's immaculate and freshly built
'Featherlastic' slimline featherbed.

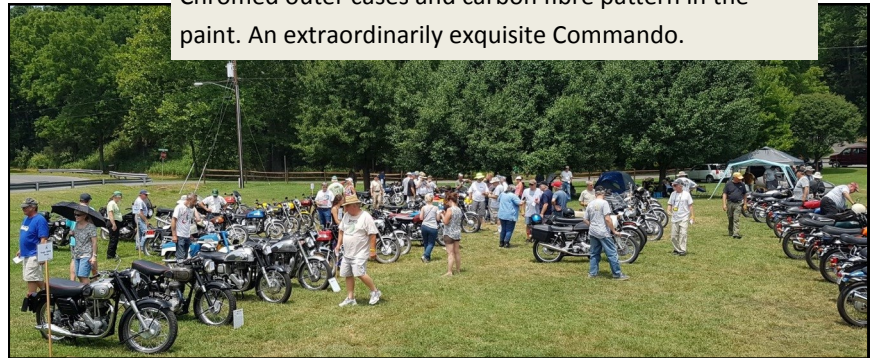
Closely supervised by Brenda, Jim Murray even polished his bike cover—wow, that's dedication for you!!



Chromed outer cases and carbon fibre pattern in the paint. An extraordinarily exquisite Commando.

Friday 21st July. Day 12. Buena Vista and surrounds.

On-site field events were the organised activity today, but Dick wanted to look at a rail museum 40 miles away in Clifton Forge, so gassed up we were away about 9.0 am, with the heat already building nicely. A couple of miles along the Interstate with a completely full tank, Phat Slim suddenly sputtered and farted with what turned out to be vapour lock, which was thankfully and simply cured by turning on the other fuel tap ('pet cock' in US parlance) as we bombed along at the legal 70



mph. Formerly a major town in the Eastern rail network, once again the collapse of the coal industry has badly impacted the place. In fact the rail company owned a lot of the mines and Great Lake ships as well, so has had a few different iterations in its' lifetime. "Chessie" the cat was the company logo and was heavily promoted back in the day. The museum itself was interesting, with quite a feature being the railroad hospital - the industry being so dangerous it was deemed necessary to operate their own medical facilities. There was the usual walk through wagons, caboose (staff quarters car, complete with coal stove), dining car etc, and the massive engine was a revelation - the day by now stinking hot, with the colossal fire box full of coal and fired up it must have been a thoroughly disagreeable workplace. So big, they fed the coal into the engine via a huge auger from the coal bunker.

Tucker time now, and only a short walk to a very nice cafe, where Maria the Brazilian waitress was extremely pleasant, serving up some very tasty sarnies and iced tea - unsweetened, as you have to continually remember to specify. Her chest already festooned with pin badges, Dick donated a NOC rally badge to further enhance her ample frontage.

Saddlebags also stuffed from the nearby Krogers beer section, it was a quick gallop back to camp for some urgent rehydration, and where Michele's rain radar suddenly warned of imminent inbound precipitation. Sure enough, the sunny day rapidly disappeared, and turned into a half hour downpour, so we'd timed our run on the bikes impeccably, unlike poor Walt who got caught up on the Parkway without wets, and had to shelter under a bridge.

Next on the agenda was the group photo up at the top pavilion, which was the usual disorganised shambles, with people milling about like a school of stunned mullet, with much arm waving, bellowed instructions and copious gesticulation, before relocating back down to the bottom pavilion behind the Paxton homestead for the banquet and prize giving.

Fortuitously walking in just at the moment the "grubs up" call was made, and therefore right at the forefront of the feeding frenzy as the scrum formed behind. Spiced beef, succulent pork medallions and pulled pork were accompanied by salad, baked beans and macaroni cheese, with the so-called 'cheese' topping being a particularly impenetrable layer of thick hard yellow plastic.

Some very nice door prizes were drawn, with Dick G winning a new set of pea shooters which he very sportingly passed straight on to Don Kuwik, and Jim Murray a very shiny new back wheel. As an exercise, Jim had also dissected a 'black cap' annular discharge muffler, complete with the designer's (John Favill) signed patent document, which was also drawn by a lucky winner.

After Marie Deebach had given a short presentation on next year's rally in Oregon, and in an orchestrated manoeuvre when Suzi called for expressions of interest in the 2019 rally, Michel leapt to his feet to profusely thank Chris Grimmett and the NOC for agreeing to hold and sponsor an all-expenses paid rally in the Isle of Man. After resuscitating CG from this apparently unexpected news, Michel went on to put the case for a rally in Michigan, which was accepted with unanimous acclamation and wild applause.

On to the actual prizes, among the MI gang, Suzie got Longest Distance Sheila; Sonja the Bent Valve Award, Dick, Best 750 Roadster and Walt won the slow race on his Commando, before festivities over, it was back to camp to polish off any remaining beer/alcohol. This latter plan being slightly delayed in my case as Phat Slim had decided to get in on the act and unilaterally turn his lights on. Sans key, presumably the main switch is wet, so with the fuse removed he'll have to come up with another plan to cause trouble in future. Another rally successfully concluded, time for our last night glamping under the stars..

Saturday 22nd July, Day 13. Buena ("Boona" in local speak) Vista - Delaware, Ohio.

After a warm night, awoke to a thick humid fog, which soon disappeared leaving everything in its' wake damp and clammy.

Unfortunately Chris Grimmer had been crook on arrival, and had not ridden a bike so far, and was now not going to ride at all on this visit. He didn't flourish any single malt all week, so it was either (a) a very good act to save his shekels, or (b) a genuine illness. We heard later that he'd regressed even more so, après the rally, so must have been afflicted by (b) of some sort.

Packed up all our glamping shit, and fond farewells fare welled, we "hit the slab" just before 8.0 am. No one else was riding directly back to MI, and in view of his sudden onset electrical issues, shoved Phat Slim in Walt's new trailer, and rode up front on a padded crate in his new bus. Containing the same V8 as his last truck, it's an ex- disability transporter, complete with tail lift, but on the side door, so awkward to get a bike in using the lift. Oddly geared, the auto seems to have a mind of its own, screeching itself mercilessly on inclines, which without a very effective power train muffling system is a bit tiresome on the steep hills in Virginia. Once out of the Appalachians though, the flat landscape of Kentucky and Ohio didn't bother it so much. While slightly slower, keeping to the old interstates - 11 and 23, afforded a more interesting view as we tracked the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers, with their industrialised banks. Steel mills, and other heavy coal powered industry doesn't present a very attractive landscape, but is certainly what once made America Great.

Gas for the truck was a revelation - the alcohol variety could be had cheaply at up to 83% ethanol; i.e. only 17% petrol!! Wouldn't want to put that in the bike...

Through Columbus and it's multitudinous craft breweries servicing it's students, after a false start where no one would serve us at a Holiday Inn near Delaware, we lobbied into a comfortable small roadside motel, celebrating our arrival with a few 8.2% Elysian Space Dust IPA's, followed by a terrific feed in the adjacent Italian restaurant. Here, my 'chicken special' more closely resembled a week old road kill chook, being completely flat, albeit smothered in a tasty mushroom sauce. On the other hand, due to the general paucity of greens, the grilled spargle was sublime. All washed down with some reasonable IPA, and shots of Disaronno, the evening blurred out nicely..

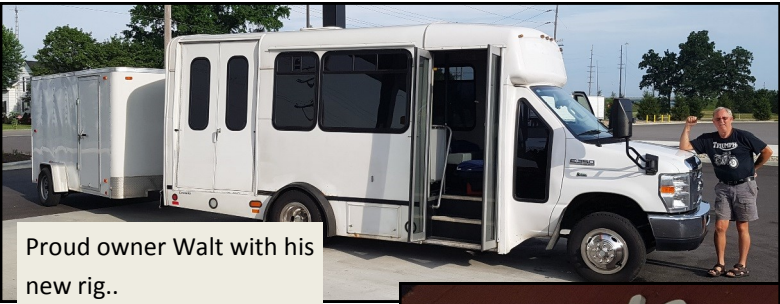
Sunday 23rd, Day 14. Delaware OH - Jackson MI

Another warm one, the last 150 miles was at a leisurely pace, with a Hardy's brekka stop, a bar stop in Tecumseh, and a quick gander through a vast Cabelas sports shop. Rows and rows and rows of guns, pistols, rifles, assault weapons, bows, knives, stuffed animals, apparel and accessories are complemented by boats, atv's etc, and to have a proper look would take all day, so it was back on the bus and on to Jackson, to be greeted by Coops the cat, who was very pleased to see Walt after such a long absence.



Despite Walt's wicked grin, that is definitely NOT his penis the lovely young table wait is manipulating..

A gear reshuffle twixt the bus and covered trailer - purchased recently for the ridiculously cheap sum of only \$2200, then out to Stockbridge to drop Phat Slim off at Suzie's, and catch up for a quick rally debrief. Trying to match or exceed our own recent Kiwi rally mechanical carnage, there were many and varied stories and incidents to share esp. concerning the MI gang. Everything from Mary Jo's heart attack, to Candice and Andy's biker's wedding; to Paul's 'four speed' Harley hire bike; to Phat Slim's feast for oil and his self energising tendencies; Suzie's get - off (an xray today revealed a busted rib); Eric Lundquist's one cylindered SLOC (sudden loss of compression), then a flattie on his trailer when leaving; Jim Murray's electrical issues; Sonja's Portuguese droop, Michele's warped rotors and dented bumper courtesy of his bike trailer, and Wayne's un-diagnosed engine miss. Oh, and his run-in with the law when inadvertently attempting a drive off from the local servo on their way out of Buena Vista. Complete with flashing lights, the two local fuzz escorted the Sayre RV front AND rear on the way back to pay. They gotta earn those donuts some how.



Proud owner Walt with his new rig..



This is in complete contrast to what the Kiwi cop's pathetically lackadaisical response would be under the same circumstances—here the cops will chase you to the end of the earth if you're a few km's over the speed limit, but if it's civil crime they couldn't care less, and you're either told to come in and report it yourself, or a belated visit the following week is about all you can expect.

Time then to gallop back to Jackson and the Brew Bar with it's precious liquid contents. Shutting at 8, the kitchen was already closed but a mate of Walt's donated us a nice pastrami sarnie, before we headed over to the Chase Sports Bar and another giant Monkey Mouth IPA. Here we were joined for a great session by John and Anne - more old mates of Walt's. Having never sold a vehicle in his life, but kept and stored them all on his rural property, John would make a great subject for one of those tv programmes where they unearth long forgotten motoring treasures. In fact American Pickers are due in Jackson next month, and as he'll be away Anne was threatening to call them around to clean the place out. Back home to pull out the couch, another good day above ground ended blissfully and quietly..

Monday 24th. Day 15. Jackson, MI - Kenosha, WI.

Cooler today, with temps in the seventies, it was brekka out as usual, before loading up Walt's Yammie scooter Bluebell, which he graciously and generously has again lent me, and his son Rob's Harley. Black Betty is a 2003 1500cc Superglide, and has an open drainpipe for an exhaust, and bellows like a randy bull at tugging time. Walt didn't have to indicate when overtaking - the thunderous roar when he hit the throttle was enough warning to clear the entire interstate system for miles around, although in actual real world performance, it didn't outrun Bluebell, which has a surprising turn of speed, the large scooter easily maintaining 80+ mph on the interstates. However, as Bluebell's rider, I was reminded of the question about what does a fat chick and a scooter have in common? Apparently they're both fun to ride, but you don't want to be seen on either. On the other hand Walt was no better off, his question being—what's the difference between a Harley and a Hoover? Apparently it's the position of the dirtbag..

Away on time, we had to turn back a few miles in when 'someone' realised they'd left the ferry reservation papers on the table back home. Of course they weren't needed anyway, but we didn't want to take that risk. Then more trouble further on when our chosen exit off the interstate was blocked, and we had to go 30 miles out of our way to get back to our departure point from the lake-side town of Muskegon. Once there, we even had trouble locating the terminal, the ferry operators seeing fit to only signpost the terminal once, and



Black Betty & Bluebell await the ferry

then only in a partially obscured spot, miles off the main road into town. Not to worry, the ruddy thing was late anyway, due to rough conditions on the lake, and ominously the 'older' check-in chook was busy doling out complimentary Dramamines..



Can't have been too rough just at that moment..



'Walt's Healthy Foods'? Yeah right!!

Sheepishly devouring his 'dunny dinner'



The two Harley riders in front of us were totin' side-arms, which they had to unload and hand in for the duration, while we lined up in the hot sun. Fortunately, unlike the Kiwi Interislander, the air conditioned terminal building was right along-side the queued vehicles, and Walt gleefully reckoned he was in further luck when he found an unopened and abandoned 'Jimmy John's' boxed lunch, full of sarnies, chips and cookies. However, as he'd found it in the men's bathroom (!!!) I politely turned down his offer to share his 'dunny dinner', preferring to wait for a feed of infinitely more trustworthy providence on the boat, albeit one costing somewhat more..

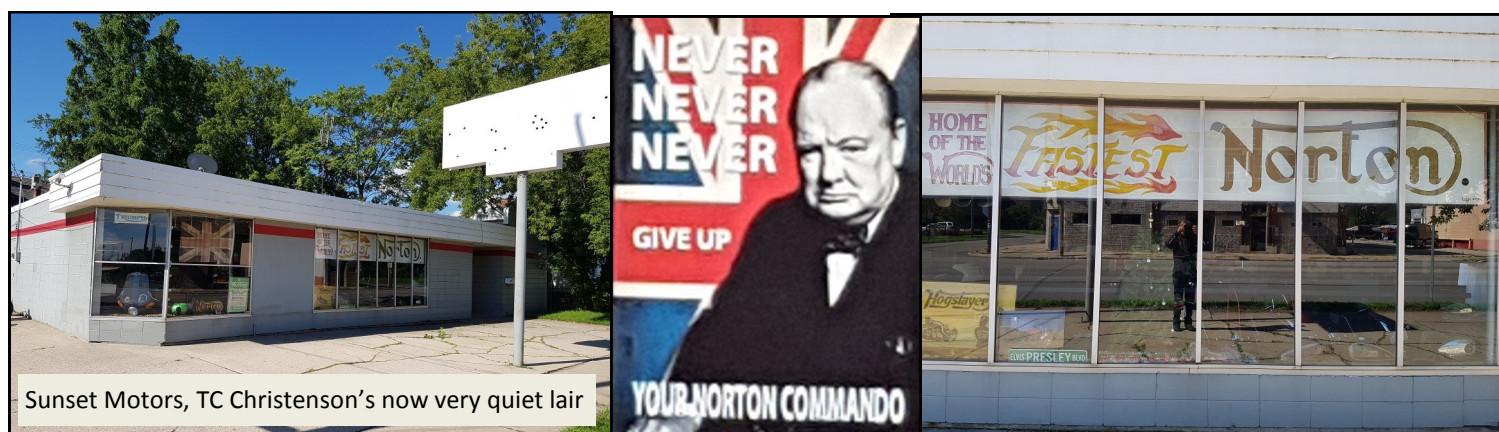
The 75 mile trip itself was indeed quite rough, as the quick cat lurched and banged from side to side at a reduced 35 mph ("due to the lake conditions and the dead weight they were carrying" they announced to much hilarity), but fortunately our Founders IPA didn't counteract the sea sick tabs, and we made Milwaukee, tummy intactus, and saving over 200 miles on the slab.

Turning South away from Oshkosh, we aimed for Kenosha on the lake shore, home of TC Christensen, constructor of the legendary 'Hogslayer', a multi Norton engined Harley killing drag bike from the 70's, and an old mate of Walt's.

Once there, accom. proved a bit problematic, as we rode around the very attractive downtown harbour/marina, but finding nothing, eventually had to do what males find difficult - stop and ask. Directed to one a couple of miles up the road, we pulled in to an old fashioned joint right on dusk. Having to be buzzed in by the utterly incomprehensible old motelier, an hilarious exchange ensued, as first he shouted at us to close the door and keep the bugs out, then said he didn't have any spare rooms even though there were only about two cars in the carpark. Eventually after a lot of high pitched Yankee-speak which even Walt struggled to understand, we were signed up manually for a room, while another customer was forced to wait outside among the bugs. Asking for the wifi password elicited another bewildering tirade, before we grabbed the key and fled for the nearest bar to fortify ourselves for the grand entrance to our room. A couple of pretty average Milwaukee IPA's and some complimentary fat-free (yeah right) fried bacon later, we rode back and cautiously pushed open our door. Aside from a really bad case of motel odour, the room didn't look in bad shape to our IPA eyes, so our \$65 investment wasn't in vain after all.



Picturesque Kenosha Harbour, L. Michigan



Sunset Motors, TC Christenson's now very quiet lair

Tuesday 25th July. Day 16. Kenosha-Oshkosh.

Must have been the IPA eyes last night fooling us into believing that our motel room was kosher. On closer inspection in the daylight, it proved to be a bit ragged round the edges; actually not just the edges but everywhere else as well, and our incomprehensible mate in the office only reluctantly returned the \$5 cash key bond when pressed. Never mind it did the job, and was soon forgotten as we forged forth for a coffee on the picturesque harbour front in downtown Kenosha.

Over several days Walt had tried to contact TC Christensen with no success, and when we located his shop just up the road from our café on 51st Street, it became evident why. The street signs are down, and the place is but a shadow of its former self, as the man himself at 70+ is obviously in semi-retirement. The three engined Hogslayer III and a couple of nice Commandos are still in the window, along with a lot of other treasures, and the faded sign on the door says that the shop is still open every day 2.30-5.30, but with only the answer phone to greet us, we had no option but to head off up the coastal route to Milwaukee and beyond.

A sea rather than a lake, the vastness of any of the Great Lakes can best be appreciated by riding/driving alongside them, for mile after mile after mile.. A surprising number of pretty average, even run down (last night's lake front motel was an example) properties, interspersed with some really high end expensive mansions. Keeping to the minor roads where possible, we even trickled right through the centre of Milwaukee, which it must be said looks a lot more prosperous than the centre of downtown Detroit. And such a shame - we had no time to visit the Harley museum.

Eventually we had to jump on the interstate to get into the town of Oshkosh, passing a very busy looking EAA airfield on the way. Finding the uni easily enough and our pre booked dorm accom in one of several tower blocks, our room contained neither a.c. nor an ensuite, so was only like a very slightly up market version of our camping expedition in Virginia. My immediate response to this Privation, was that to save a long walk at night, we could just pee out our 7th floor window, but Walt hastily and sternly cautioned against such behaviour, the locals apparently not being in favour..

After shedding our bike gear we caught the \$3 shuttle out to the airfield where Aussie Paul Tyrrell was waiting for us at the gate, ready to take us on an orientation wander. With over 10,000 planes in attendance, the place is so vast they hire out golf carts to get around, and although not getting one ourselves, the demographics of the 500,000 attendees is very similar to the classic bike/vintage scene, being very obviously mostly 60+. As usual the non-participatory millennials are nowhere to be seen, welded to their myopic social media devices somewhere else, Twattering, Face Planting, Snap Shitting and Insta-crapping other latte and avo-smash adherents ad nauseum, but not meaningfully joining in with society at large.

We were just in time for the WWII bomber display, as several Mitchell's (B25) and the world's only two surviving B29 Super Constellations thundered past. Taking 15 years to restore, during the war they used to knock them out virtually on an hourly basis. All this and more related by Paul, who as a font of knowledge was invaluable to an aeronautical numpty like myself.

A B1 nuclear bomber on static display alongside an A10 Flying Pig gattling gunship etc etc, all great stuff to an air force-less Kiwi, and in fact there are hundreds of Kiwis here - the names in the visitors book in the International Visitor tent being full of 'em.

There were several thirst quenching stations dotted about - no Australasian wowser anti-grog crap here, and serving good beer too - Alyseum IPA hitting the spot nicely.

Paul took us down the lines of some of the home built craft (with so many planes present, there are literally acres of them), including a couple of interesting little jets, and several Thorpes, of which he has one back in Oz. There's a big difference between kit planes and plan built jobs, and our education just never stopped.

Fortunately all this intellectual exertion was interrupted by a fly past by the F35, which after a lot of teething issues is only just entering service now as the newest US fighter jet. A noisy brute of a thing, the naval version has jump jet capability like the Poms Harrier of yore. Bro. Tim will certainly not be pleased when the Aussies get theirs and start beating him up at home on noisy manoeuvres from the adjacent RAAF base.

Shuttled back to digs, we attacked the \$15 'all you can eat' buffet in the dining hall, where among all the plastic cheese covered offerings there were plenty of healthy choices - plus grog of course, but sadly not for the all-in price...

The evening ended early for Paul and his fellow Aussie mates Kerry and Dirk, as they'd had their car rear-ended out from under them leaving Chicago on the Interstate. Lucky to only be suffering headaches and minor whiplash, the following careless driver had punted into them at 70 mph when they were nearly stationary, with the result they were now on car hire number two. Suffering no such privations, Walt and I crossed the street to the temporary bar set up for the occasion, and slipped down a couple more thirst quenchers in the very busy bar, before heading dormwards..

Wednesday 26th July. Oshkosh WI, and the EAA (Experimental Aircraft Assn) Air Show.

Up early, well by 8.0am anyway, we brekarred semi -healthily in the communal dining room, and caught one of the frequent shuttles out to the airport, where everything is so well organised, we were straight in with no queues. Immediately accosted by a volunteer giving away daily newspapers, who when asked what's today's feature replied "*Oh it's different every day*". Really? Fancy that.. Black clouds foretold of an imminent downpour in the humid conditions, so we scurried for some vendor's tents in the 'Fly Market'. In the first one we were assailed by tables containing rows and rows and rows of aircraft nuts and bolts, fittings fixtures grommets and god knows what else - all bagged and priced it must have taken weeks to organise. Some of the other vendor's were hocking off second hand parts and memorabilia, including damaged bits presumably recovered from wrecks - bent props and such, and others, nice tools, and we spent hours working our way through just the Fly Market alone, let alone the rest of the vast site. The shower long since gone, we staggered onwards, keeping an eye out for the continual aerial displays which change all the time, before resting up in the International Visitors tent with Paul and Dirk.

Loins girded, we next went through the four huge exhibition halls, again full of vendors hocking off mostly higher end aviation stuff, esp. avionics, but also nice tools and the odd stand selling gutter leaf guard (really aviation oriented that one) etc.

A bit knackered from all this shuffling about, we headed for the bar and opening time at 5.0pm for a few much needed Hopalicious re-vivers. The noises from the aerial display at this point puzzled us until Paul explained that it was a retro looking piston engined bi-plane, but it also has a jet engine so can climb and dive at will, yet still do low speed acrobatics courtesy of the IC engine. Very impressive.

Walt and I hung round for the night display, feasting on some good old fashioned DFS from the bar - battered lumps of old chook and chips - even the green beans had been battered and deep fried FFS, although surely the jambalaya must have been vaguely healthy??

Out of Hopalicious, we were forced onto Sam Adams, eschewing the ever and omni-present Miller Lite in it's distinctive tall thin can with it's screw lid. The next display was a fly past and mock bombing by over a dozen Mitchell bombers commemorating the Doolittle raid on Japan in 1942. Launched from carriers, they had to fly on to China afterwards, and there was quite a high attrition rate, although one of the original raiders is still alive at 105, and they wheeled the old boy out to much applause.

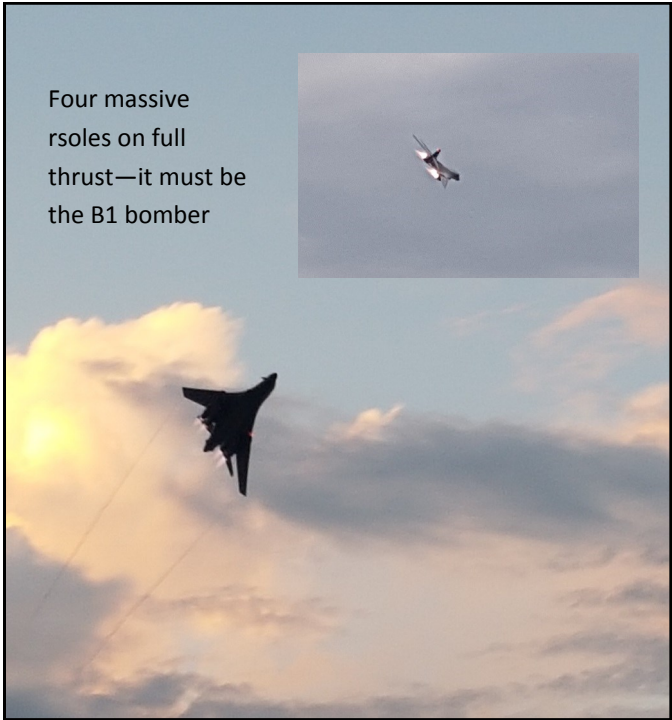


The gattling gun in the snout of the A10 Warthog



Lead by the F35 and flanked by two Mustangs, with the A10 at the rear

The piece de resistance for the evening was a fly past by a B1 bomber. At very low level, bloody huge, bloody noisy and bloody impressive, the four huge jets on full afterburner pounded us into the pavement. A few spits of rain persuaded us to head for the shuttle, which was a good call as we were barely on board when a torrential downpour swept in for the short trip back to town. Fine again by the time we got off, Kelly's Bar didn't seem very attractive tonight, so fell into bed nice and early instead.



Thurs 27th. Day 18. Oshkosh.

Another great breakfast buffet to start the day, followed by the usual bus out to the airfield, then swapping to the museum shuttle. Full of experimental planes, mostly home built, and quite a few replicas, we wiled away a good few hours listening to snippets of lectures about some of the more extraordinary episodes in US aviation history before heading back to the airfield for the aerial displays, and a wander about. Checking out the vintage plane line up, of which there are several acres, confirmed our view that the very first Cessna 172 doesn't look a whole lot different to the very latest version. A bit like Morgan cars, you can definitely trace the lineage. Incidentally, since returning home it transpires that Trevor Hall from Te Awamutu was also at Oshkosh and while over there purchased a vintage tail dragging Cessna of some persuasion, which he is getting shipped back to NZ. The RAF had their latest toy on display - an Airbus A400 Atlas transporter; 50% bigger than a Herc, but still sporting props for it's turbo fan engines. Something to do with military short take off and landing requirements or something.



Tiny build-your-own jet kit. One of dozens of kit planes on offer

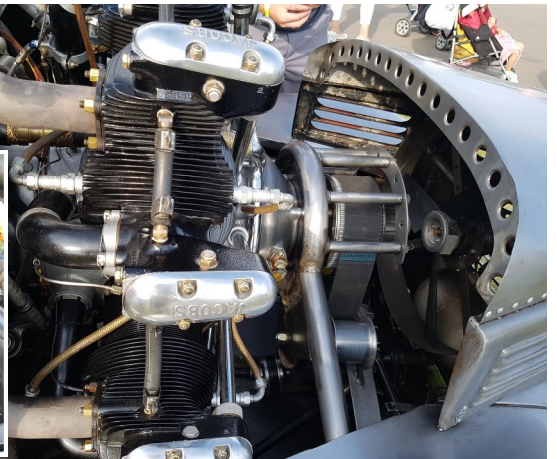
NOW IS THE TIME!
Sub **sonex**
THE PERSONAL HYPER REALITY CHECK
GET YOUR JET!
NOW MORE AFFORDABLE
GET STARTED FOR
\$42,000
QUICK BUILD KIT

Both the world's only flying B29's were present

ed to a pop - up bar just outside the grounds. Staffed by the bustiest scantily clad chicky babes this side of a strip club, the day's shock and awe continued. Dang, America IS Great Again already!! A tasty feed of pulled pork (no Nigel - not THAT !!) complemented the salad lunch for a healthy-ish day's food intake, washed down with some (plenty!!) of Buzzard 7.2% IPA, the bar staff soon took on the appearance of the most gloriously divine creatures on the planet. Unlike The Cougars - the extraordinary band which then started up. A couple of blokes on drums and keyboard, fronted by three tatty old tarts with tired tits tumbling out of timeworn old tops, torn tights and FMQ's - but shit, did they rock!! Terrific music, Joplin etc etc with barely a pause, they had the crowd of mainly old farts cheering and stamping. A bloody great party with funnel-shot drinking (the youngies only on that one) with the only downside being the compulsory tip acquisition technique the staff employed—back in NZ we call it short changing, or theft. We only tore ourselves away when we realised that if we weren't careful we'd miss the last shuttle. That was Walt and I - the Aussies having had piked off back to digs hours ago..



1939 Plymouth truck, complete with Jacobs radial aero engine & rear booster rocket



Friday 28th July. Day 19. Oshkosh—Clare, MI

Brekka with the Aussies in the dining hall, then after the usual tearful farewell, away in beautiful sunny conditions for the 100 mile ride to Manitowoc and the ferry terminal to re-cross L. Michigan. Along the way we swapped bikes and I got to ride The Tractor. Loud as hell, with an awkward riding position with the air cleaner dug into your right leg, the rider looks and feels like a bandy-legged hooker after a busy night, and with the wind pressure my spread eagled feet were hard to keep on the front pegs where the gear lever is. Undoubtedly quite powerful in a straight line, but with a heavy gear change and the wind whistling up my legs, not my cup of tea at all at all, and was v happy to hand it back. Thanks Walt, but no thanks mate!!

Meantime, the ferry signage at Manitowoc was much more user friendly than Muskegon, and we were soon dockside waiting the arrival of the iconic SS Badger. Built by the railroads in 1953 to take rail freight, the coal fired steamer was converted in 1992 to take passengers and vehicles, so is neither beast nor fowl, not being particularly passenger friendly, it does have a superb grating system to park and tie the bikes on. As long as you don't drop anything down through the grating to the deck below. Meantime a team of very energetic youngsters scurry back and forth driving all the vehicles off and on, save the trucks and bikes. The other passengers deemed too incompetent to do it themselves, they have to leave a window down with the keys on the seat, and wait on the dock for their vehicle to be dropped off. A great system on a wet day, and in the litigious US despite the disclaimers and waivers passengers sign, can imagine the legal ramifications if there was any damage to someone's precious Ferrari et al.

Yet more surprises await upstairs, as upon enquiry, we were personally escorted to one of three bars serving perfectly acceptable IPA's, although the food purchase process turned out to be a joke. With no signage or indication of the order of doing things, you have to pass the till twice - once to get your grub, then double back to pay. Never mind, the mass confusion engendered helped pass the time, as the elderly tub crawled it's way across the 90 miles to the other side of the lake, arriving four hours later. A reasonably rough crossing by my non - sailor standards, it was still a beautiful day, just quite windy. More confusion on arrival, as the announcements about egress for the reversing vessel were all very nautically "port and starboard", so a huge scrum of bewildered land lubbers all just took things into their own hands and dived down the nearest internal gangway. Dived being an advisory term only, as having a head start, a bus load of elderly and quite infirm pensioners successfully blocked all the stairwells while they doggedly shuffled off ahead of everyone else.

Away from the dock about 8.0pm, our plan was to ride East for roughly an hour before holing up in a motel somewhere, but like all good plans there was a flaw. This one was called 'carnival week', with all the towns having fairs and with the accom sold out. Eventually phoning ahead, Walt found Doherty's, a hotel he was familiar with in Clare, and which had plenty of spare rooms, and we made landfall there just on dusk about 10 o'clock. A huge old place, but nicely refurbished, the pub had everything we needed as we were joined for dinner by CanAm Spider-riding Jerry, also off the boat. He gave us a good laugh by calling us "Wall Mark", morphing into "Walmartians" after a couple of beers.

A good feed and Huma Lupa Licious IPA wasn't enhanced much by the snaky young table wait, who obviously had better things to do elsewhere, and once again confirmed my dislike of the American tipping system, where no matter how bad the service, the public are conditioned into tipping anyway.

Mid night nigh nighs, but awoken sometime later by an unwelcome text containing news of the Chiefs defeat at the hands of those pesky Crusaders in the semis of the Super Rugby competition.

Walt—can we swap back PLEASE mate.. I'll even buy the first dozen beers..

