

WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING IN MYRTLE BEACH

What's Really at Stake is Your Right to Ride!

March 2009 "The world is not perishing for the want of clever or talented or well-meaning men. It is perishing for the want of men of courage and resolution."--Robert J. McCracken

On Saturday, 28 February 2009, I had the privilege and honor to join a courageous and resolute group of true Freedom Fighters on the front lines of the battle for bikers' rights in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The event was billed as the "Myrtle Beach Helmet Freedom Ride", but that was an unfortunate misnomer. Neither helmets nor helmet laws nor anything having to do with motorcycle safety was the real issue. The issue was that on that date the City of Myrtle Beach began enforcement of a series of new motorcycle helmet, noise, parking and other ordinances the openly stated intent of which is NOT that bikers be safe, but that bikers be GONE:

<http://tinyurl.com/dlyztg>

By promoting this event as a protest against lid laws rather than outright discrimination against motorcyclists, I have no doubt that its well-intended organizers hoped to energize their base, i.e. the gray-bearded "Freedom of Choice" old guard of the bikers' rights movement. In so doing, however, they may have sacrificed a much broader base of political support from riders who would have responded had they known that what was really at risk was their

"Right to Ride".

Another costly decision was the inclusion of an alternate "rain date". Rain dates are fine for local poker runs, but including one in a nationwide call-to-action guarantees diminished returns: Few are those who will ride several hundred miles for an event that might be canceled by rain ... while many are those who will use any chance of precipitation as an excuse to stay home.

A third strategic error was issuing a call-to-action with no point-of-contact, online or otherwise. Potential participants had no one to field their questions, and the event's "anonymous organizers" had no place to post or effectively broadcast their last-minute decision to hold the event "come rain or shine":

<http://tinyurl.com/cpakjc>

THAT SAID, let me also declare that I have nothing but respect and admiration for those who promoted and staged what I'd prefer to call the "Myrtle Beach Freedom Ride":

<http://tinyurl.com/c4al6d>

You can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, and what they served up last Saturday will prove to be far more valuable to the bikers' rights movement than any Monday morning quarterbacking. As one of their supporters and a protest participant, here's how it went for me:

Early Friday morning, we loaded up the bike and rode the 650 miles from Miami Beach FL to Georgetown SC, checking in to the Quality Inn around 4:00pm that afternoon. From there, we cruised down to the Rebar to wet our whistles and see what the local buzz was. Only one of the bikers at the bar seemed to know anything about the protest just up the road scheduled for the next day, and he had no plans to be part of it. As he put it, "If the golfers who control the Myrtle Beach City Council don't want my f**kin' money, then they ain't getting' my f**kin' money. Not a dime in '09!" I asked him how taking away revenues they were already willing to forego would compel them to restore our rights, and he replied with a blank stare... Anyway, from there we made the short hop to the Cerro Grande for some enchiladas and fishbowl margaritas, then called it an early night.

Our plan for Saturday was to ride the remaining 30 miles to the Beaver Bar (staging point for the Myrtle Beach Freedom Ride) in Murrells Inlet, then participate in the protest, deal with the consequences, and hopefully head back to Florida by the end of the day. We began that misty morning by loading up with biscuits and gravy from the buffet, and then loading up the bike, donning our raingear, and heading north up the Grand Strand's Ocean Highway. Our first stop along the way was to accept a blue-light invitation from a forgiving and supportive South Carolina trooper who just wanted to remind me that the speed limit was 45mph. After that we pulled over twice more for photos, and in both cases a friendly local stopped to make sure we weren't broke down. The second was Georgetown biker and freedom fighter "Captain Ahab", who we would later park beside and ride behind.

When we arrived at the Beaver Bar around 10:00am, the parking lot had far more empty spaces than smiling faces. I hoped it was because we were two hours early, but I feared it might reflect the result of the "rain date". We helped ourselves to some coffee, took some pictures, shook some hands, told some tales, and purchased our Freedom Ride t-shirts. Then Lorena Anderson, a reporter who has been objectively covering Myrtle Beach's biker bashing for The Sun News, turned up at our table with notepad in hand:

<http://tinyurl.com/bgljt2>

As is not often the case, this reporter quoted me accurately and in context, except for the seatbelt analogy, which was twisted a bit in transcription. That's understandable, given that she may have been distracted by the passerby who saw the interview in process as an opportunity to interject some hackneyed commentary on presidential politics and the failings of our federal government, which accurate or not contributed nothing relevant to our exchange.

Shortly thereafter, our anonymous organizers turned on their microphone to give all of us "common adventurers" our route and rules of engagement. Then shortly after noon, I strapped

my lid to my luggage rack, and we saddled up to take our place in formation and head for the Myrtle Beach city limits ... to make a statement ... to take our stand:

<http://tinyurl.com/alvvne>

There were 20 or so bikes in front of us, but we lost the leaders at the first red light. Minutes later, we saw the new city limits "Helmet Required" sign ahead on our right, and caught our first glimpse of the blue-light gauntlet we'd be riding into beyond it. Many supporters were scattered along the roadside, braving the rain and cold to cheer us on, and I just couldn't keep myself from revving up and giving them a couple of "thank you" blasts from my straight drag pipes. And as if on cue, a fresh set of blue lights appeared in my mirrors. Two bikes behind us pulled over and lured the cruiser, so the rest of us closed ranks and kept going. I pulled up to the left of

"Fast Fred" and gave him a shout to see if he knew the rest of the route. But once again blue lights came up behind us. Fred and the biker behind him pulled over and took the cruiser with them, so I opened it up a bit to join the remaining few riders still advancing ahead of us. Continuing north alone for this ! short stretch, I met another squad car coming south. I watched him slow to make a U as I passed him, and figured sure that this was the LEO who had my number. Instead though, out of nowhere a guardian angel driving an H-D emblazoned Dodge Ram pickup zoomed up and blocked the cruiser, refusing to let him pull in behind me. (I owe ya one!)

At the next light, I caught up with a concerned crotch-rocketeer, two lidless kids on a hardtail chopper, another member of the old guard, and a guy riding the same model CB360 that I rode as a kid in the '70s. The sportbiker flipped open his brain bucket to congratulate me on making it to the center of town without a helmet. His praise was premature, though, as seconds before the light changed a police pickup and city cruiser rolled in from a side street to block the intersection and take out the lot of us (excusing, of course, the lidded sportbiker)...

Having made our stand and said our say, the worsening weather prompted me to reverse course and head back home to the Sunshine State. And as we headed south on 17, I saw my guardian angel's pickup in a strip center parking lot with more than one cruiser keeping it company. Yes, he or she may have crossed a line. But then again, so did the City of Myrtle Beach!

And why did they do it? Here's the official explanation from Myrtle Beach

Mayor John Rhodes:

<http://tinyurl.com/acf9os>

But others hint this is merely whitewash to cover racial undertones, and that in order for the city leaders to silence the NAACP while they axed the predominantly black Atlantic Beach Memorial Day Bikefest, they chose to sacrifice the predominantly white Harley-Davidson Dealers Association Spring Rally along with it. Consider this forum posting, for example...

<http://tinyurl.com/byf3co>

...or this quote from another:

"The Harley [read WHITE] riders who were in town early in the week weren't a problem though the loud pipes were a bit much at times. The problem was with rude sport bike [read BLACK] riders who arrived later in the week. They completely shut down Ocean Blvd with their lane splitting, swarming tactics. When the traffic light turned green, cars couldn't move and were forced to sit thru light after light. Too bad if you had young children in the car. You got to hear some of the crudest foulest language shouted from one bike to another along with viewing string bikini clad girls perched on the pillion pad directly in front of you with their asses jacked up."

I guess seeing sites like these must offend certain people's tender sensibilities:

<http://tinyurl.com/bjbvn3>

<http://tinyurl.com/d9gpzh>

Well not mine, Brother! I do concede, though, that pulling up behind bootie like that might certainly be a distraction for even the safest of drivers...

But I digress. To get back on point, I restate my contention that what's happening in Myrtle Beach is no more about helmets than what happened in Delray Beach was about noise. The issue in both cases was and is discrimination against bikers. Black bikers, white bikers, sport bikers or cruiser riders, it makes no difference. If they come for one of us and win, they will come for us all in the end. Remember what happened in Hitler's Germany:

When the Nazis came for the communists,

I remained silent;

I was not a communist.

When they locked up the social democrats,

I remained silent;

I was not a social democrat.

When they came for the trade unionists,

I did not speak out;

I was not a trade unionist.

When they came for the Jews,

I remained silent;

I was not a Jew.

When they came for me,

there was no one left to speak out.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/3dqoso>

MYRTLE BEACH IS TELLING AMERICAN MOTORCYCLISTS THERE IS A PART OF AMERICA WHERE

THEY ARE NO LONGER WELCOME TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO RIDE. The organizers of the Myrtle Beach Freedom Ride are doing something about that... The Freedom Fighters who rode through the rain in protest last Saturday are doing something about that...

WHAT ARE ***YOU*** GOING TO DO ABOUT THAT?

Speaking strictly for myself and no other individuals or organizations,

Bruce Arnold