The Drummer, the Private Eye, and Me (Rush Fans Take Note)

The Drummer, the Private Eye, and Me (Rush Fans Take Note)

QUOTE

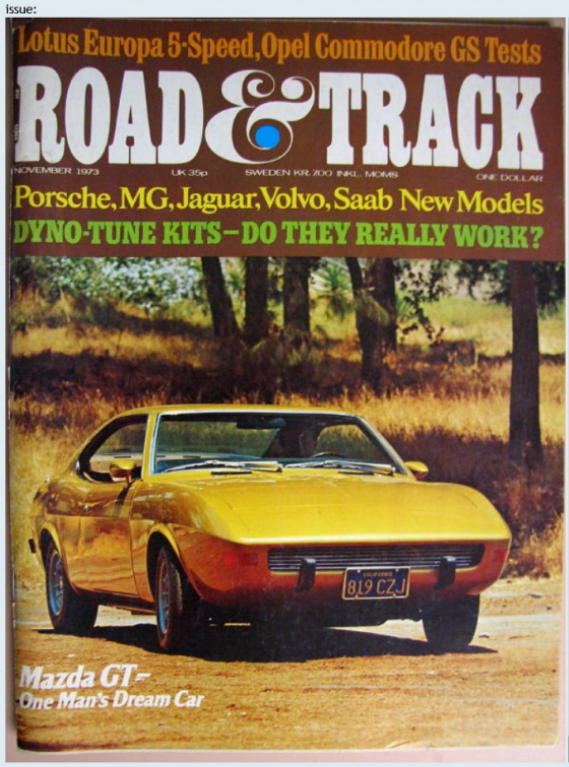
by Rick F. » Wed Jul 11, 2007 11:23 pm

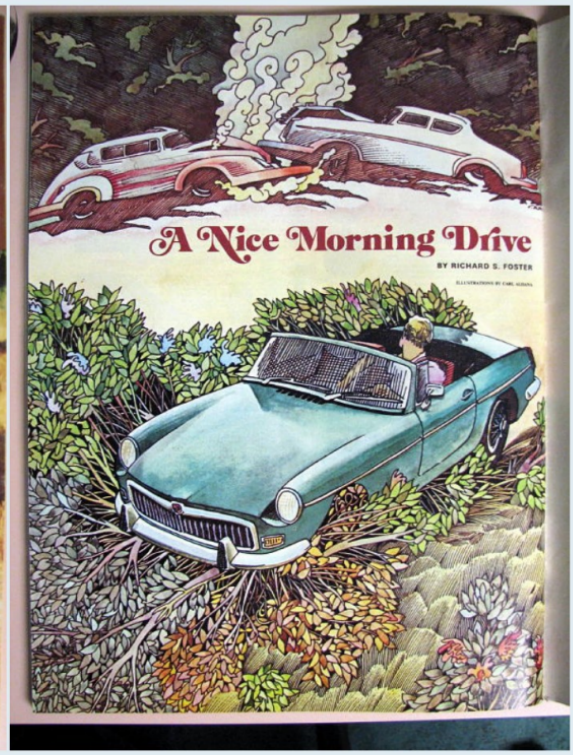
Rick F.
Board Wizard

Posts: 1734
Joined: Sun Jul 31, 2005 5:43 pm
Location: Catonsville, MD

What follows is a true story, involving Neil Peart, Michael Mosbach, and Yr Fthfl Srvnt. As most of you probably know, Neil is the drummer and lyricist for the rock and roll band *Rush*, and many experts consider him to be the best living drummer in the world. Michael is a private investigator from Los Angeles. He is also head of security whenever *Rush* is on tour, since Neil considers him to be the best P.I. in the world. As for me, well, I'm just the luckiest guy in the world. But let's begin at the beginning...

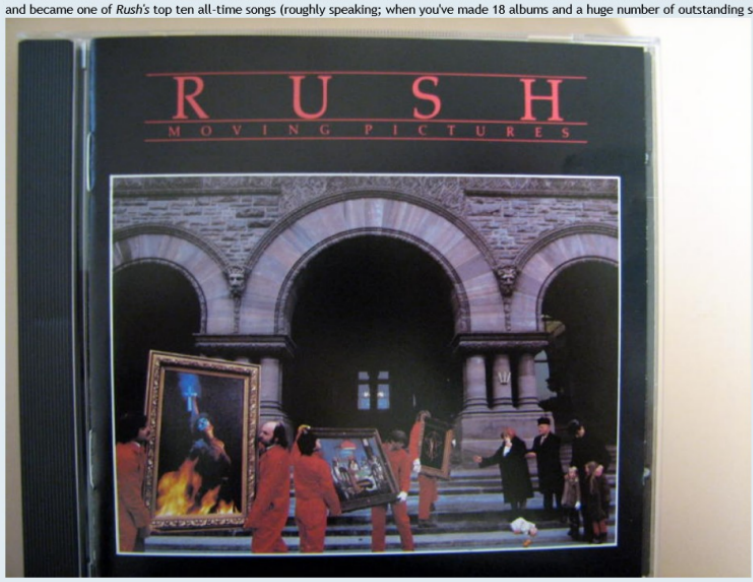
Back in 1972, I was studying for my graduate school comprehensive exams. Suddenly, an idea for a fiction short story occurred to me, and I promptly started writing. The story, titled "A Nice Morning Drive," was set in the distant future (1982!) and involved Modern Safety Vehicles (MSV's) that could damage older, pre-safety-bumper cars without incurring any harm themselves. With a mixture of hope and presumption, I sent it off to *Road & Track* magazine--and they decided to publish it! (They even paid me $200, which was a lot of money back then, especially to a broke graduate student.) The article appeared in the November 1973 issue:



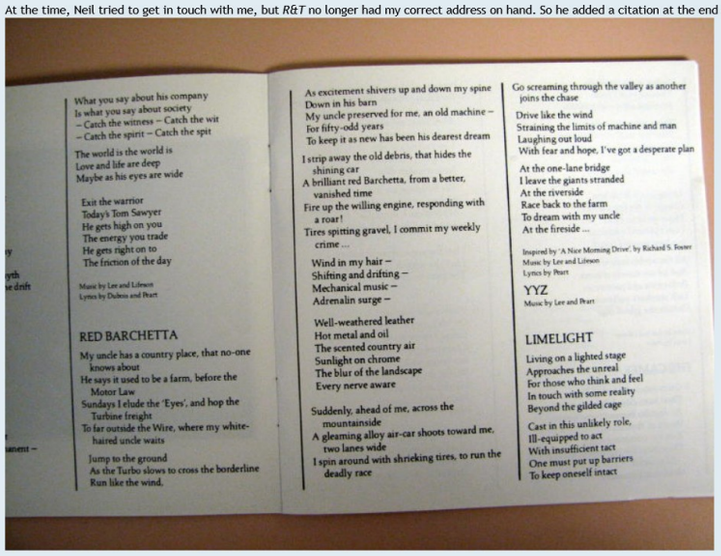


The full story is available at http://rsftripreporter.net/xComcast/R-n-T_article.pdf.

Neil Peart, who had joined *Rush* a couple of years earlier and who has been a sports car enthusiast all his life, read the story. Flash forward to 1980, and he decided to write a song for the band featuring a science fiction story line inspired by the *R&T* article. He substituted his all-time favorite car, a Ferrari 166MM, for the MGB from "A Nice Morning Drive" (although he had previously owned an MGB himself). He also portrayed a more extreme, futuristic setting involving a man-and-machine confrontation with The Man and a totalitarian world that had outlawed cars altogether. "Red Barchetta" first appeared on the *Moving Pictures* album and became one of *Rush's* top ten all-time songs (roughly speaking; when you've made 18 albums and a huge number of outstanding songs, picking the top ten would be an exercise in frustration and disagreement!)



At the time, Neil tried to get in touch with me, but *R&T* no longer had my correct address on hand. So he added a citation at the end of the song's lyrics in the liner notes, as follows:



What you say about his company
Is what you say about society
– Catch the witness – Catch the wit
– Catch the spirit – Catch the spit

The world is the world is
Love and life are deep
Maybe as his eyes are wide

Exit the warrior
Today's Tom Sawyer
He gets high on you
The energy you trade
He gets right on to
The friction of the day

Music by Lee and Lifeson
Lyrics by Dubois and Peart

RED BARCHETTA

My uncle has a country place, that no-one knows about
He says it used to be a farm, before the Motor Law
Sundays I elude the 'Eyes', and hop the Turbine freight
To far outside the Wire, where my white-haired uncle waits

Jump to the ground
As the Turbo slows to cross the borderline
Run like the wind.

As excitement shivers up and down my spine
Down in his barn
My uncle preserved for me, an old machine –
For fifty-odd years
To keep it as new has been his dearest dream

I strip away the old debris, that hides the shining car
A brilliant red Barchetta, from a better, vanished time
Fire up the willing engine, responding with a roar!
Tires spitting gravel, I commit my weekly crime ...

Wind in my hair –
Shifting and drifting –
Mechanical music –
Adrenalin surge –

Well-weathered leather
Hot metal and oil
The scented country air
Sunlight on chrome
The blur of the landscape
Every nerve aware

Suddenly, ahead of me, across the mountainside
A gleaming alloy air-car shoots toward me, two lanes wide
I spin around with shrieking tires, to run the deadly race

Go screaming through the valley as another joins the chase

Drive like the wind
Straining the limits of machine and man
Laughing out loud
With fear and hope. I've got a desperate plan

At the one-lane bridge
I leave the giants stranded
At the riverside
Race back to the farm
To dream with my uncle
At the fireside ...

Inspired by 'A Nice Morning Drive', by Richard S. Foster
Music by Lee and Lifeson
Lyrics by Peart

YYZ

Music by Lee and Peart

LIMELIGHT

Living on a lighted stage
Approaches the unreal
For those who think and feel
In touch with some reality
Beyond the gilded cage

Cast in this unlikely role,
Ill-equipped to act
With insufficient tact
One must put up barriers
To keep oneself intact

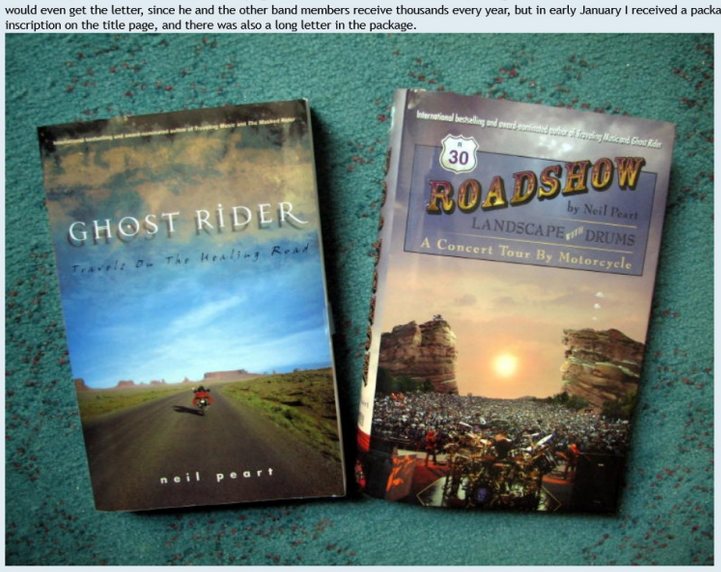
Flash forward again, to 1996. We had just gotten Internet access in my office, and one of the guys entered my name into a search engine just for fun. It promptly took him to a *Rush* fan site, where there was an online copy of my story. We figured out the connection between "A Nice Morning Drive" and "Red Barchetta" and marveled at how many years we had failed to discover it. (I had heard the song on the radio, but I hadn't focused on its lyrics carefully enough to make the connection.)

Prior to this point, I was somewhat Parked in the Sixties, musically speaking, listening to such groups as the *Jefferson Airplane*, *the Animals*, *the Zombies*, *Simon & Garfunkle*, *Country Joe and the Fish*, and *The Ventures* (of course!). Naturally, after making the connection to "Red Barchetta," I immediately became a *Rush* fan and began catching up with the band's considerable catalog.

Well, now we have to flash forward again, this time to 2006. At the DC International Motorcycle Show, my friend Dave told me about a book by Neil Peart, titled *Ghost Rider*. In the book, Neil described how he tried to find himself again following the tragic deaths of, first, his college-age daughter and, subsequently, his wife. Emotionally, he was completely devastated and just empty--beyond any level that most of us can imagine. Eventually, all he could do was to keep moving, so he got on his R1100GS and started riding. Many months and well over 100,000 miles later, he began finding the will to return to life and to stop being the "ghost rider."

My friend Dave thought the book was outstanding and recommended it to me highly. Last Fall, I bought a copy, and I soon found myself in thorough agreement with Dave's assessment. It was a moving and eloquent story, and I couldn't put it down.

In December, I wrote a letter to Neil Peart saying how much I liked *Ghost Rider* and explaining that I was the Richard S. Foster from "A Nice Morning Drive" all those years ago. I wasn't especially optimistic that Neil would even get the letter, since he and the other band members receive thousands every year, but in early January I received a package containing a copy of his newest book, *RoadShow*. It had a very nice inscription on the title page, and there was also a long letter in the package.



In his letter, Neil remarked on the many connections we had between us, dating back roughly 35 years. I responded in a letter that, in addition to the story, song, and the fact that we both currently ride R1200GS's, another similarity is that I, too, am a member of a world-famous "power trio," *The Surftones*. (You say you haven't heard of this band? Neither had Neil...)

Thus began a long series of e-mails that eventually led to planning a GS ride together while Neil was on the East Coast for the 2007 "Snakes and Arrows" World Tour. We arranged that I would meet him on Sunday, June 24, near Tom's Brook, VA, following the band's performance at the Nissan Pavilion the night before. From there, we would follow Neil's route into and through West Virginia, and then head north toward their next show on Monday night outside of Pittsburgh.

I dutifully arrived and found his bus at 8:00 am after a 115-mile ride from Catonsville. To avoid the tedium of life on the road for a several-month tour, Neil rides his BMW from one venue to the next. For use at the concert and to exit the area after the show, he has this tour bus. The trailer holds his new red 2007 R1200GS (already with 7,500 miles on the clock), Michael's similar (but blue) '07 GS, Neil's "emergency backup" older red R1200GS, with close to 100,000 miles, and bus-driver Dave's Harley Davidson.

On-board the bus, I met Dave, Michael, and finally Neil himself. After some introductory handshakes and conversation, I presented him with an autographed November 1973 issue of *R&T* and, naturally, a copy of Jim VonBaden's nifty R1200 maintenance DVD. Neil had a quick breakfast ("Set the microwave to 'popcorn'--that's the only setting that works!"), and we went outside to start the ride. Here The World's Greatest Drummer is making sure that his WV map is securely stowed. (As told in *RoadShow*, Michael's GPS "Doofus" and Neil's corresponding "Dingus" are not necessarily to be trusted...)

All suited up and ready to go, Neil and Michael indicate who the slower rider is...

Speaking of the slower rider, it quickly became apparent who the *slowest* rider was--namely me! These guys don't hang around. I won't mention any specific figures, but let's just say that the prevailing average on the two-lane WV back roads was higher than my mostly Interstate trip to Tom's Brook to meet the bus! It was actually a valuable education, watching Neil "read" upcoming corners and adjust his speed accordingly. It was also helpful seeing how far he was leaned over in the corners, and knowing that I was similarly leaned right behind him. Nobody was scraping pegs--but it's a good thing there weren't any turtles on the road...

As most of you know, I normally ride about 10 feet, stop, take a picture, and then repeat over and over again. On this ride, I could barely take in the scenery around me! There were hundreds of fabulous photo opportunities (which I plan to take advantage of some day), but I did stop every once in a while when I just couldn't help myself. For example:

Neil led the way, with me next, and Michael bringing up the rear, "making sure Rick doesn't get left behind and totally lost." We stopped every so often to stretch our legs and "burn a square," as Kitty likes to say.

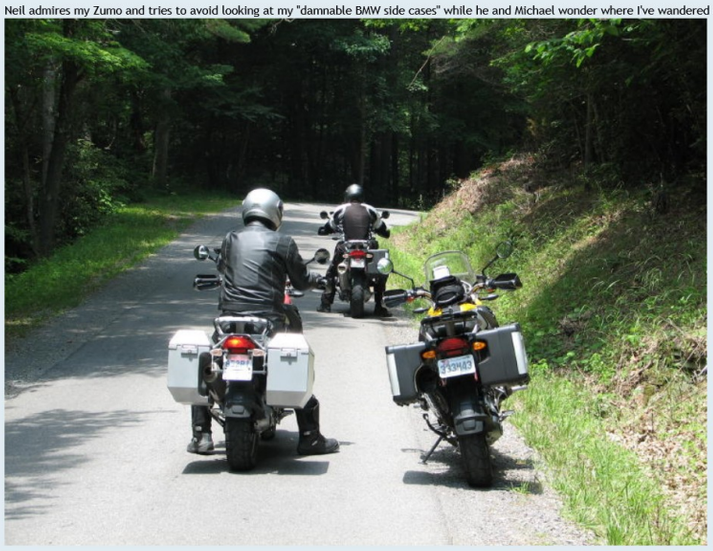
Shortly before lunch, we stopped to refuel, which is a routine that Neil and Michael have down to a science based on their tens of thousands of miles riding together: Everyone noses into the island, Michael runs the credit card, and the pump nozzle is handed from bike to bike. In this case, however, in the middle of nowhere in West Virginia, the station had run out of both premium and mid-grade, so we were forced to resort to regular. (It still beat the time a few years ago when Neil accidentally put diesel fuel into his bike.)

Here's another stop, with a handsome red, yellow, and blue trio of R1200GS's. Neil seems to be out of the picture, doing something that Michael and I both decided ought not to be photographed...

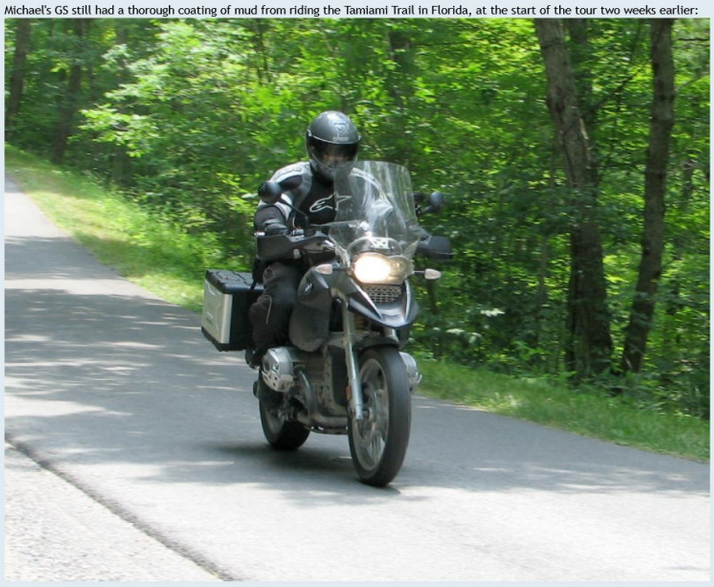
Neil's route was a magnificent combination of fun/challenging roads and beautiful scenery. Here, he and Michael "share the road":

Continuing our trek through the Middle of Nowhere Even by WV Standards, we encountered the Woodspoage Chappele. (Yes, that's the correct spelling...)

Neil admires my Zumo and tries to avoid looking at my "damnable BMW side cases" while he and Michael wonder where I've wandered off to *this* time.



Michael's GS still had a thorough coating of mud from riding the Tamiami Trail in Florida, at the start of the tour two weeks earlier:

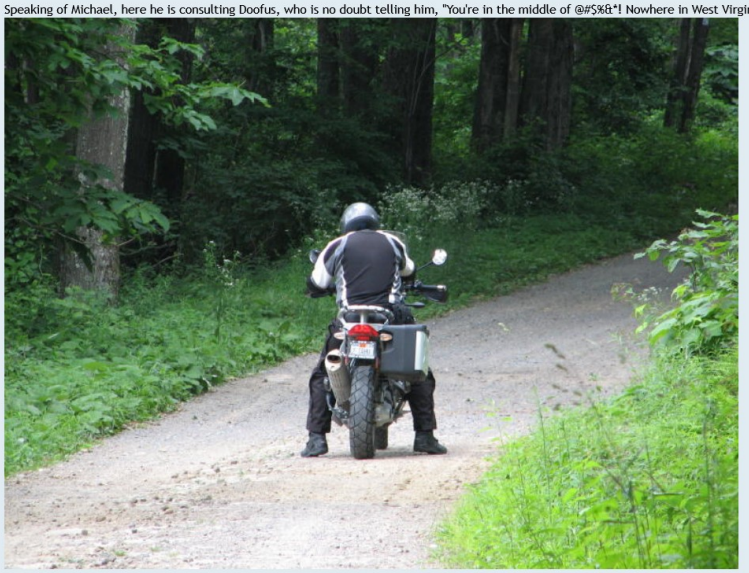


After lunch near the Snowshoe ski resort, in a restaurant that was closing forever the next day (what did we say??), we headed off to discover what a West Virginia dirt road was like. Very soon, we were scrambling up steep, rocky, gravelly climbs and tiptoeing down the inevitable declines. At least, *I* was tiptoeing; Neil and Michael managed to disappear in a cloud of dust ahead of me, while I puttered along at "only" 30 mph on the straight, level sections. On the more difficult ones (and let me tell you, there were *lots*), I learned that the Zumo speedometer would read in tenths of mph when you were going less than 10 mph (e.g., 5.5). Fortunately, after every tricky section, I would find Michael waiting for me to ensure that I was okay and still on course, just like Neil waited for him. I felt totally out of control "only" three times, all while descending steep gradients with lots of ruts, rocks, and gravel, but I managed to stay upright throughout.

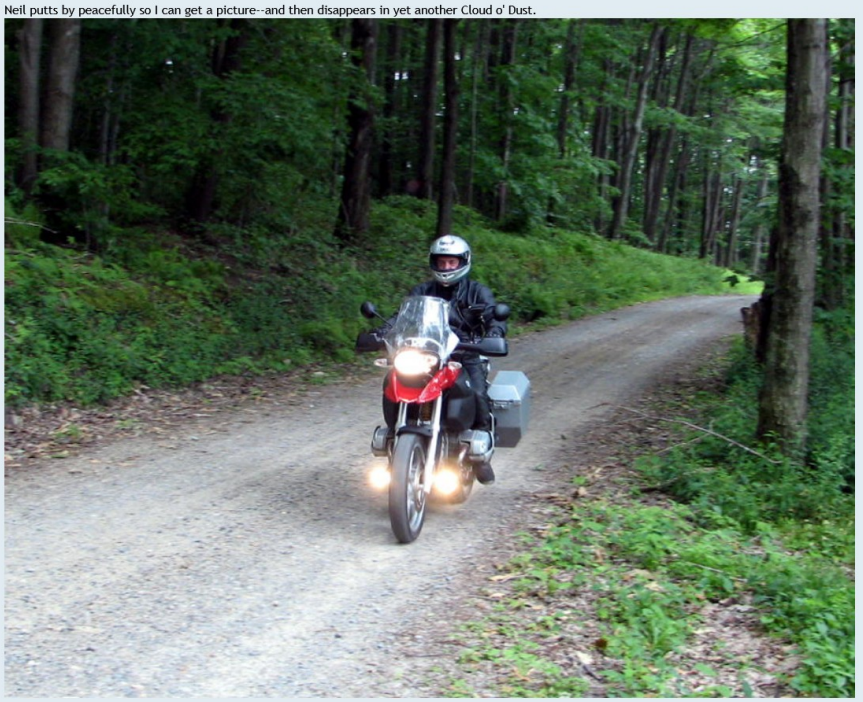
On one of the few sections level enough to actually park, we stopped for a moment to share the solitude of a WV mountain.

Neil thoughtfully suggested the mountain road would make a good setting for a "biker camaraderie" shot, courtesy of Michael:

Speaking of Michael, here he is consulting Doofus, who is no doubt telling him, "You're in the middle of @#S%&*! Nowhere in West Virginia, you idiot!"



Neil putts by peacefully so I can get a picture--and then disappears in yet another Cloud o' Dust.



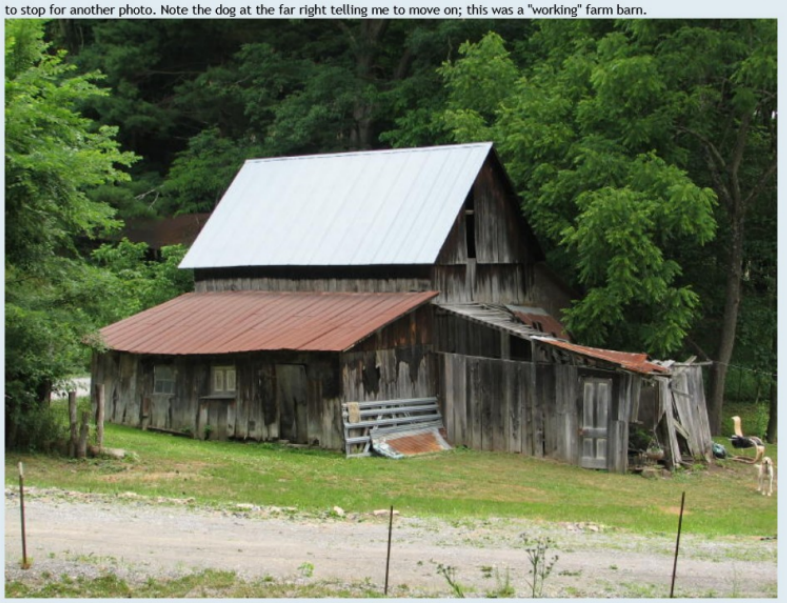
After approximately 280 miles (not counting my 115-mile ride to meet up with the bus), we arrived in Buckhannon, WV and found a suitable motel for the night. Neil poured The Macallan for all of us. I'd read about this amazing "tipple" in *RoadShow*: It was first produced in 1824, it's considered the world's best scotch whiskey, and this particular batch was 18 years old. It was fine!

After washing up, we hiked over to a steakhouse for dinner. Michael recommended a shortcut, which eventually involved climbing a near-vertical 30-foot cliff above a stream conduit. And this guy is in charge of Neil's safety?? Well, we all made it to the top and had a good dinner, presented by a cute waitress who did well putting up with us. During the dinner, thinking back on our pace and Assorted Passing Maneuvers, I said to Neil and Michael, "You guys are bad influences!" They grinned broadly and responded, "Damn right!" and "You bet, and we're proud of it!"

The next morning, Neil and I ate breakfast at the motel, while Michael got a little extra rest. On our way back, we banged on his door and yelled, "It's time to get up, Wendy!" The two of them have an ongoing exchange of jibes, insults, and witty repartee that has to be heard to be believed. Great fun, although it's a wonder they don't attack each other sometimes!

We rode back to Buckhannon and picked up Neil's route. However, the next WV dirt road that we turned onto ended abruptly with a closed (and locked) gate, so we had to backtrack. The same story, more or less, played out with the next 4 or 5 dirt roads that we tried. Although the GPS's showed the trails continuing, they ended at people's houses, farms, cemeteries, you name it.

Eventually, however, we found a proper dirt road, and Neil and Michael proceeded to do their best motocross impressions while I skittered along behind. At one point, I was so far back that I decided I could afford to stop for another photo. Note the dog at the far right telling me to move on; this was a "working" farm barn.



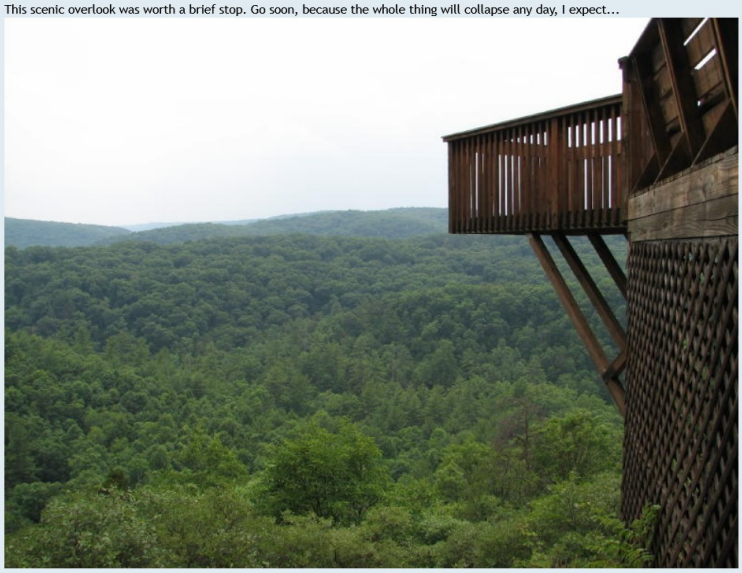
At the end of the unplanned dirt road, Neil goes for the map...

After 100 miles or so, it was time for me to head East (since I was flying to Cape Cod the next morning). We stopped at an interchange with I-79 south of Fairmont. Michael consults Doofus yet again, whilst The Drummer ponders the vagaries of electronic motorcycle navigation...

With a manly hug and a theatrical "We have faced Death together!", we went our separate ways. So, one rode East and two rode North, toward that night's *Rush* performance. Will I ever chance to see them again? Well, actually, keep reading...

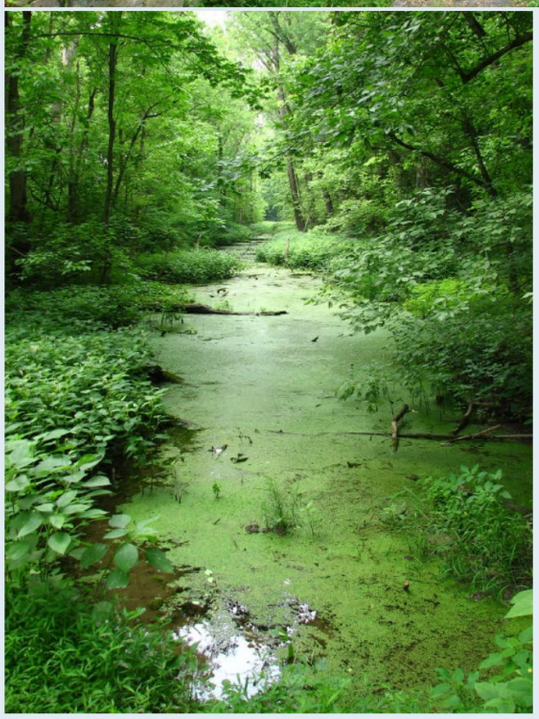
I'll provide a very abbreviated report of my ride back to Catonsville. I hit Penn Alps for lunch. It's near Grantsville, MD and right next to the historic Casselman River bridge and state park. This artisan village had outstanding food plus numerous original log cabins and houses, imported from the surrounding countryside. *Recommended*

This scenic overlook was worth a brief stop. Go soon, because the whole thing will collapse any day, I expect...

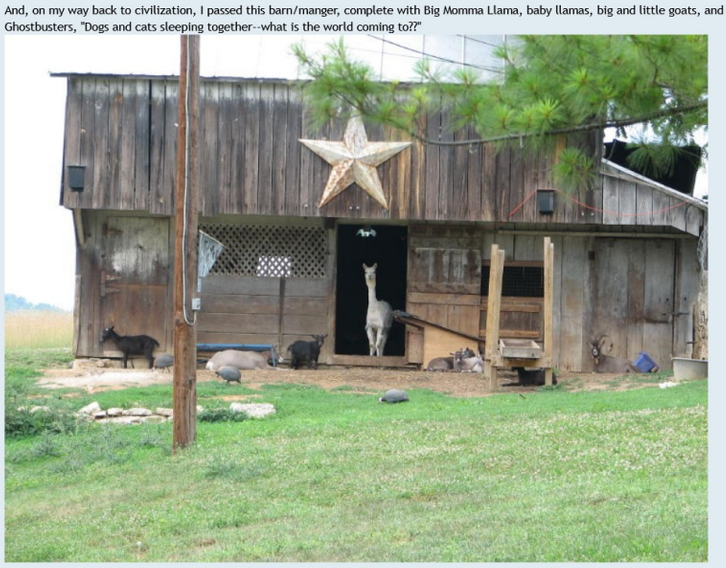


Although the day was running late, I couldn't resist another attempt at finding the lost ghost town of Two Locks, MD. I had tried once before and failed, as reported previously, but this time I had a GPS on my side. Here, I've parked next to one of the empty houses from the ghost town--without even realizing it at first! (Look carefully.)

A short hike brought me to the Two Locks area on the C & O Canal. A very pretty sight, as it turned out.



And, on my way back to civilization, I passed this barn/manger, complete with Big Momma Llama, baby llamas, big and little goats, and big hens of some kind. All of them seemed to get along just fine. To quote the Ghostbusters, "Dogs and cats sleeping together--what is the world coming to??"

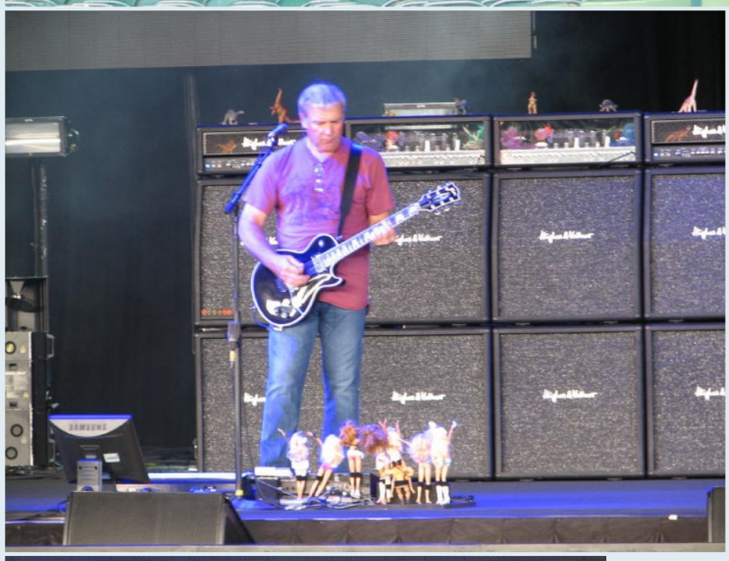


Normally, this is where the report would end, having completed 688 miles of riding in two days. But remember the part about me flying to Cape Cod? The primary purpose was to join my wife in Falmouth for a short vacation. But as it happened, *Rush* was playing at the Tweeter Center outside of Boston, only 60 miles away from Falmouth, on Wednesday night. Needless to say, a short road trip was in order.

So, after having left Neil and Michael in West Virginia on Monday afternoon, I drove to Mansfield, Massachusetts Wednesday evening and met up with them all over again. I was joined by the intrepid Buzz, my college roommate and best friend--and, for the record, the hero of the story "A Nice Morning Drive." He was vacationing with us in Cape Cod, along with his wife and their 9-year-old grandson.

At the Tweeter Center, a quick call to Michael got us in, and we found our way to Neil's bus. We were joined there by Neil after a few minutes, and we had a fun talk. Here is Neil's longtime friend Marty Deller (the drummer for the Canadian progressive rock band *FM*) with his Rockster:

And here is *Rush* itself at soundcheck: Alex Lifeson on lead guitar, Neil on drums, and vocalist Geddy Lee on bass and keyboard. Note Alex's Barbie fan club. (It's a long story!)



Neil kindly provided tickets to the concert for Buzz and me, plus backstage passes, t-shirts, CDs, tour booklets, hats, etc., etc., etc.--and dinner! We chatted some more with him in his practice room, and then we bumped into Alex, with whom we traded Important Lead Guitarist Secret Tips. Were we happy campers or what??

Here I am, together with more than 10,000 other attendees, just before the show began. These guys are just as popular as ever and have been filling every arena on the tour.

It was brutally hot, we were all jammed in together, there was zero breeze--and we were all treated to an incredible rock and roll performance. I knew from listening to their records that all three of them were exceptionally talented. It wasn't until I saw them in person, however, that I realized the full extent of their abilities. Alex would literally fling sweat off his hands and then launch into a breathtaking guitar solo. Geddy would switch seamlessly back and forth between the bass and keyboard, singing all the while in his trademark voice.

And The World's Greatest Drummer drummed his heart out in the 90-degree weather, with innovative styles, compelling and addictive rhythms, and feats that must be seen and heard to be believed. The crowd's favorite song was Neil's approximately 15-minute drum solo, featuring a revolving drum set. (He switched 180 degrees twice during the solo, to play the drums behind him.) It was mind-bending enough *before* he drummed in 3/4 time with his feet and 7/8 time with his hands... By any reasonable standard, this technique should be impossible. When I asked him whether the pattern coincided every 21 beats or every 32, he said it took him a very long time to learn to drum in this way, and he didn't dare think about how it actually worked!

Beyond the substantial energy of the band, their virtuosity with their instruments, and the exceptional musical innovation and fluidity, the lyrics to the songs must be mentioned. They are written by Neil and set to music by Geddy and Alex--and, in my view, they are a major factor in what sets *Rush* apart from so many other top bands. Despite their brevity, the words convey complex thoughts and moods and do so in ways that can in turn be moving, mysterious, or incisive. It's pure poetry.

The audience gave the band innumerable standing ovations (in part because no one ever sat down throughout the more than 3-hour concert), but eventually the encores were finished and we were all left with "the amplifiers ringing in our ears." We filed out in awe and drove back to a suddenly normal-seeming time in Cape Cod.

Well, that's it. I had a blast from start to finish. Thanks, Neil and Michael, for a rousing ride and a fabulous concert. I'll remember the whole adventure forever--or, given my age, as long as I can!

Rick F.

PS: Copyrighted material from *Rush* appears courtesy of the band. Copyrighted material from *Road & Track* will undoubtedly be appearing courtesy of *Road & Track*, as soon as they get back to me...

PPS: Our route through WV is available as a MapSource file, if anyone would like the particulars.

PPPS: Neil Peart's personal web site is at http://www.neilpeart.net/index2.html. It's well worth a visit. How many other world-famous rock and roll drummers can boast "Bubba's Book Club"??

Last edited by Rick F. on Mon Nov 02, 2015 2:37 pm, edited 5 times in total.

For all my tour articles, check out rsftripreporter.net.

2020 Mercedes-Benz SL550
2013 BMW 335i convertible (sold)
2007 Aston Martin V8 Vantage (sold)
2006 BMW Z4 3.0i roadster (sold)
2005 BMW R1200GS (retired)
2003 BMW F650CS (sold)

by **Ted** » Wed Jul 11, 2007 11:59 pm

QUOTE

WOW - a pretty amazing tale on so many levels!

PS - Red Barchetta remains one of my Rush all-time favorites 😀

Image TedV
Moto Pages
'94 K75RT
"There's No Old Road ... That Doesn't Have Something Interesting On It" -- RickF
BMWBMW MoTY - 1996

User avatar
Ted
Board Guru

Posts: 682
Joined: Wed Apr 30, 2003 1:26 pm

by **Dough Boy** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 4:56 am

QUOTE

Wow, Rick, GREAT STORY! Amazing the connection after so many years....

Front page BTS stuff...

Dough Boy

by **BKling** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 6:24 am

QUOTE

Wonderful Rick. Certainly some memories to treasure for a long time to come.

Your next ride story will have some very large shoes to fill if it hopes to compete with this one but I am sure you are up to the challenge.

Bryant

In Case of Emergency - OPEN HEAD - USE BRAIN

BKling
Board Wizard

Posts: 2821
Joined: Thu Dec 01, 2005 11:57 pm
Location: Hamilton, VA

by **Sonar** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 6:29 am

QUOTE

> Ted wrote:
> WOW - a pretty amazing tale on so many levels!
>
> PS - Red Barchetta remains one of my Rush all-time favorites 😀

Ditto, Ditto, Ditto!!!! I love this song. I first got into Rush in High School and can remember riding the bus home and having a very cool driver play "The Spirit of Radio" over and over. I've been hooked ever since but have never had a chance to see Rush live. I'm very envious Rick 😾

Great story! Thanks for sharing.

Don C
2014 R1200RTW
I Buyed it to ride it!
IBA#: 357

Sonar
Board Wizard

Posts: 1195
Joined: Thu Apr 01, 2004 8:04 pm
Location: Severna Park, MD

by **wiredcur** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 6:46 am

QUOTE

HOLY CRAP, RICK!!!! THAT'S AWESOME!!!

'04 BMW R1150GS - RatGS

"I lift things up and I put them down."

wiredcur
The Fluffernutter Kid

Posts: 3790
Joined: Sat Apr 24, 2004 6:39 pm
Location: N39.211501° ± 1.50° W76.818135° ± 1.50°

by **repo** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 6:52 am

cool!

repo

by **Blaster229** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 7:16 am

Yeah, but is he joing the club?? Great great memory made there. Sooooo jealous!

Blaster229
Ms. Kitty, Jr

Posts: 7695
Joined: Fri Dec 30, 2005 6:32 pm
Location: Balmer.

by **Bauer** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 7:18 am

Freakin' amazing! Great story!!! **Major Tigger Bounces!**

Günter & Christine (a.k.a. Tigger - T.I. double grrrrrr)
2004 Artic White R1200C & 1994 Red K1100LT

It could be that the purpose of your life is only to serve as a warning to others.

User avatar
Bauer
Dirty Rally Girl

Posts: 1785
Joined: Tue Apr 12, 2005 7:37 pm
Location: Hanover, MD

by **Deano** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 8:04 am

Best ride report ever.

2007 R1200GS - "Lucky"
2004 R1150RA - REST IN PIECES

Deano
Mildly Retarded Gubmint Worker

Posts: 2266
Joined: Sat Apr 23, 2005 7:37 pm
Location: Silver Spring, MD

by **Chiba** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 8:29 am

Seriously Rick, you need to be writing these things up for the BTS. Share your gift and talent with the entire club - not just those of us smart enough to hang out online

OH and I'm incredibly jealous!

--chiba

BMW MOA Digital News Editor **www.bmwmoa.org**
- 05 R1200GS - 98 K1200RS + Hannigan Classic sidecar -

Chiba
The FUNNY One

Posts: 6464
Joined: Sat May 06, 2006 8:01 pm
Location: Mechanicsville VA

by **griffin738** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 11:32 am

The ride, the show, the report (and the opportunity to read the report) are all awesome. And that you inspired a man who has inspired so many others - also awesome!!.

awesome

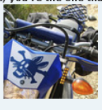
awesome!

AWESOME!!!

AWESOME!!!!!

Thanks for that post! (awesome!)

these roads don't move, you're the one that moves

. . . . . .  . . .

griffin738
Obi-Wan Cabana

Posts: 919
Joined: Wed Oct 04, 2006 8:22 pm
Location: Just so. . .

by **Ben_Ricci** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 11:40 am

Now **THAT'S** a ride tale. Impressively done with a impressive subject!!

Ben_Ricci

by **Hello Kitty** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 7:03 pm

Geez, Rick! You impress me more every time I read/see your stuff! Holy carp!

Yes, you do need to write this up for the BTS. Definitely.

Kitty

Hello Kitty
Boss of Tina

Posts: 7474
Joined: Tue Sep 21, 2004 8:13 pm

by **Graybeard** » Thu Jul 12, 2007 8:11 pm

wow

Larry
Germantown, MD
'06 R12RT, MD 0011 BMR
'16 S1000XR, MD 0052 BMR

User avatar
Graybeard
Board Guru

Posts: 887
Joined: Mon May 15, 2006 9:55 pm
Location: Gaithersburg MD

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