

Coffee Cruisers

Myth or Legend?

I had once heard a rumor about a loosely knit group of bikers that frequented various neighborhood coffee shops in an endless search for that perfect cup of joe. Legend has it, their horrifying logo, a winged skeleton clasping a cup of steaming brew in his hand while riding a bike straight out of a blood red sun, struck terror in the hearts of coffee shop owners everywhere. Was there any truth to this rumor? I wanted to find out.

In search of this mysterious horde of caffeine addicts, I headed out early one Saturday morning to visit one of their (supposedly) known hangouts, a small coffee shop located in the town of Mount Pleasant, near South Carolina's coast.

The day began like any other beautiful warm summer day, but as I neared the town of Mount Pleasant, things began to change for the worse. The sky ahead took on a dark pallor as heavy storm clouds began to blanket the horizon. As I approached the long series of bridges that lead into town, I could feel the wind beginning to pick up.

Starting up the first bridge, the wind soon began to howl and my beautiful sunny day quickly faded into an eerie darkness as the cloud cover blocked any sunlight from above. It was too late to turn around by the time I saw

the flashes of lightning illuminating the swirling black maelstrom that lay ahead. Nearing the top of the bridge, the rain began to fall in torrential wind driven sheets, blowing sideways across the road. Visibility went from being difficult to make out the cars, to where did the road go?

It was now that it dawned on me that tracking down this illusive group of caffeine powered bikers today, may



not have been one of my better ideas. With no where to turn around or stop, I remembered that this lengthy bridge has only a small guard rail between me and the long fall to the river. I dropped a gear, pointed the bike in a straight line and was trying to use the "force" to navigate when my luck changed. Ahead, I could just make out

the faint intermittent brake lights of a tractor trailer making his way up the next bridge span.

Aiming my bike towards the area where I last saw the red glow of lights in the distance, I kicked it up a notch and headed in that direction. When I crested the next bridge, the truck's glowing tail lights and bumper came into view. I scooted up to literally just a few feet behind him and followed that big rig through the raging storm and safely across the last of the bridges, down out of the clouds and into the town of Mount Pleasant. The weather situation was now vastly improving by the minute, and the rest of my ride over to the coffee shop was happily uneventful.

I must have been a sight as I ordered my coffee, since the girl who handed me my cup of joe also gave me a smile and a large handful of paper towels to dry off. After thanking her for her thoughtfulness, I sat by the window with my hot cup in hand, watching the rain eventually slow to a trickle as a few rays of sunlight beamed down.

As 9 o'clock approached, it occurred to me that this storm's remnants could temper even the most compulsive caffeine addict from his morning fix, and that my adventurous ride was probably for naught. I finished my coffee and was walking back to my ride when I heard the first faint rumbles of bikes approaching.



By Rocky

First to arrive, riding a red 1975 Shovel was Egor, head of the South Carolina Chapter of the Coffee Cruisers. I introduced myself and we retrieved another cup from the local proprietor and walked back outside to admire his bike. Egor began to enlighten me with the story about how the Coffee Cruisers came into existence.

It seems it had all started with a bunch of bikers who met regularly Saturday mornings at a local Dunkin Donuts store for coffee before their day's ride. As time wore on, word spread of this popular pre-ride morning coffee meeting, and the number of riders showing up began to increase.

By late 2001, they had formed the official Coffee Cruisers, "an association dedicated to people who love to ride motorcycles and drink coffee". Today, Coffee Cruisers has grown into an international organization boasting over 619 official members in 43 of the 50 United States including chapters in Canada, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Australia and New Zealand.

Egor went on to tell me the story of a crusty old biker named Willie. Willie had started South Carolina's Coffee Cruisers' Chapter in Charleston some years ago. One early morning, while they were sampling the brew at a local shop, Willie stood up, pointed directly at Egor and said "you got it now", walked outside, fired up his scooter and rode off into history, never to be seen or heard from again. Some say he ended up in West Virginia but no one really knows for sure.

Ever since that fateful day, Egor (with help from his wife Sandy) has taken up the reins to the Chapter and keeps an eye out for new and unusual locations to add to their list of caffeinated establishments to visit. They have a website (www.coffeecruisers-sc.com) and an email list to keep their members apprised of the groups constantly changing monthly schedule of coffee shops to drop in on each Saturday morning.

I asked Egor, what's required to join this traveling band of caffeine addicts? He said to officially join, go to the national website (www.Coffeecruisers.com/join.html) and order one of their famous patches, the membership is included free with your patch order. Or, you can just "jump on your bike and show up", since they weren't too particular about whether your membership was official or not.

As other bikes began arriving, Egor ordered his second triple espresso. I found some corn bread to feast on and watched the new arrivals show up. Apparently I was the only one to have encountered the storm, as this collection of folks riding everything from Harleys, Big Hondas, a couple of Triumphs and a crotch rocket arrived dry and cheerful.

The boisterous crowd soon diverged into several small groups and I wandered about from group to group listening to the various conversations as they sprang up. Topics ranged from recent bike wrecks to comments about Victory's wheel hubs, the new Indian Chief's good and bad points, Mustang seats vs. stock Harley seats and on and on.

As I met and mingled I was impressed with this diverse collection of riders. These men and women ranged in age anywhere from their mid 20s to their late 70s and even a couple of children showed up as a marine's (just back from Iraq) wife and daughters stopped by to say hello.

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Apparently the common ground in this unusual association was their love of riding motorcycles, and of course they take solace together in their mutual addiction to caffeine.

It wasn't long before I was again distracted by the ominously darkening sky outside. The other riders noticed too, and the conversations soon changed to where and what direction today's ride should take to avoid the approaching storm or whether riding today was a good idea at all.

Still wet to the bone, and having already had the displeasure of experiencing this storm's tempest earlier, I didn't need any convincing. I decided now was an opportune time to say my goodbyes and took my leave of this jovial crowd. With the coffee shop and the approaching storm front in my rearview mirror, I scooted back across the bridge most riki-tik.

So, the rumors were true, the "Coffee Cruisers" did exist. While not quite the type of folks that strike terror in the hearts of coffee shop owners, these friendly, social groups of caffeinated bikers do permeate many of the States in the US and have even taken root in foreign soil. As for their famous patch, it too exists. I ordered mine (\$9) from their national website (www.Coffeecruisers.com/join.html).

Looking for a Saturday morning ride? Got the shakes and need your caffeine fix? Track down your local Coffee Cruisers Chapter and stop by for a visit. What? there is no Chapter in your State? Be the first to form a new Chapter and receive a free patch and membership. See the website for details.

See you on the road.

- Rocky