

T-shirt, goggles, small lid. Check.

FUELS AND THEIR MONEY

Fuelling up in America is bizarre. Cheap, but weird. You have to pay before you pump. Most stations have credit card pre-pay at the pump, but most UK credit cards don't work.

So you trot to the kiosk and pay for more than you need (credit cards are best – they always work inside). Back to the bike and fill up.

Twenty minutes after you leave, the difference between what you paid and what you actually used is refunded to your card. In California there's the extra fun of vapour-free nozzles which need to be pressed into a car filler to activate the pump. Do this on a bike and you'll only fill two thirds of the tank, so you have to hold the pump in one hand and pull the vapour lock switch back with the other. Maybe it's just me, but all I could think, every time, was... er... foreskin. Sorry for that image if you're eating while reading this.



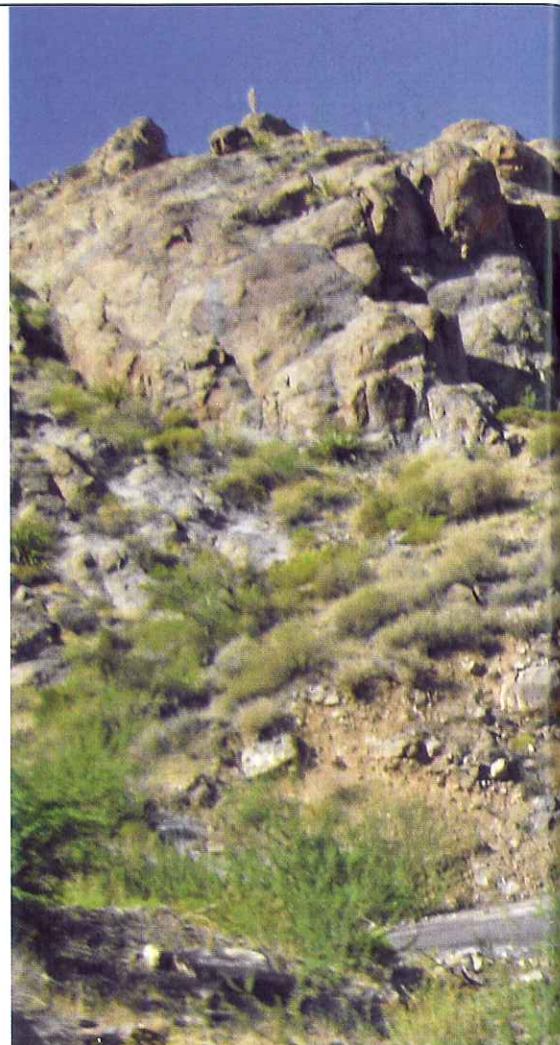
View from the support truck – Joshua Tree Park again.



There's two more hours of sunlight and 80 miles of twists and turns to go. Best get on with it.



The Million Dollar Bar, Oatman. Sign your dollar, stick it on the wall with the rest of them.



Black Hammerite, a brush and an enthusiastic owner lead to this.

Day Three Dawns

The Sportster is back on the road – we're a full size gang again. Today is all about the road. A fragment of Route 66. The best bits of Route 66 – Oatman, Seligman, Williams.

The Oatman road has a reputation. Oatman is a former mining town in the hills. The road that leads to it is tight, twisty and dangerous. Sheer drops, gravel and tourist traffic add to the tension. We stop in the town for a coffee, pat the donkeys (left here to roam when the miners left) and admire the million dollar bar where everyone leaves a dollar on the wall or the ceiling.

Last time I was here I stupidly volunteered to help with some filming and followed our tour guide at 60mph a couple of feet from his rear tyre. Two-up on a bike weighing half as much again as his one, wearing T-shirts and shorts. By the time we'd finished the brakes were cooked, tyres ragged and my pillion didn't talk to me for an hour. My memory of that ride is of a narrow strip of Tarmac darting left, right, up and down. That's it, nothing else. Today, at 25mph the Oatman Highway is beautiful. With time to take in the view and enjoy the challenge, the memories are very different. Everyone makes it without drama and you can see the relief as we pull up at Hackberry for a break.

A mate of mine who's also ridden here described Hackberry General Store as a real life fridge magnet. He's right, sort of. It's tacky and touristy, but a welcome relief after 50 miles of desert heat.

Route 66 is essential, but riding just a small section of it doesn't bring the sense of history we got when we rode it all a couple of years back.

Seligman is a key town in the road's recent revival. This is the town that fought back from the desolation brought by the interstates. It survived by embracing America's increasing nostalgia for the good old days (and anything over 50 years old is historic in this still-young society) and thrives today on the packs of Harley tours criss-crossing the area.

From Seligman we begin the long climb to Williams. Situated 6000ft above sea level, Williams is the gateway to the Grand Canyon, although there's a 50 mile Tarmac driveway between the gate and the main attraction. Williams is a cool place though. Olde worlde without being too tacky. Friendly without being in-your-face.

What follows is our best yet display of formation riding. 15 Harleys thrumming towards a setting sun. The American dream, the holiday dream, relaxed comfortable cruising in sync with each other. A long way from that hairy first day. Tomorrow is the Grand Canyon and the start of a run of 10 straight days of ever increasing wonder. We've survived the induction, learned to ride together and seen some pretty impressive stuff along the way. But the real tour starts here. Wide-eyed and excited. Go on America, make my day.

Thanks to

HC Travel, Tom, Mark and everyone on the tour for sharing their lovely photos with MSL

Next Month

Grand Canyon to Las Vegas. Breathtaking roads, eye-watering views and the fattest rattlesnake in Arizona

Above and below: Big Harleys do handle – good job because there's not much margin for error and hungry snakes in those hills.

