



Santa Barbara pier. The real end of the tour. Great location, mediocre food.



Tributes to Michael Jackson...



...outside his Neverland ranch.

### Day 13 Neverland, Santa Barbara, LA.

Everything you eat here is dripping in fat, but you'll never get proper milk for your coffee. The hotel in Pismo shows its cheesy side with a breakfast of psychedelic tartrazine cereals and saturated fatty everything else. Eating fluorescent Wheatos while watching the dolphins play is just another reminder that we aren't back in Lincolnshire yet. Although, the first 100 miles or so today remind me of riding back home. The run through Fox Canyon is low-lying with gentle curves and long straights, punctuated by the occasional 90° corner. This is Californian wine country. Huge manor houses, affluent estates, how very different from the farmsteads on Route 66. I guess there's a lot more money in wine than corn.

Tom pulls over at a small ranch gate. Nothing special until he tells us the name. Neverland, former home of a Mr M Jackson. It's very different today. There are tributes around the gate and a bemused looking security guard who looks tough for a moment behind the gate but then walks around the wall and pops out of the edge to tell us not to mess. Secure? Like the Maginot Line. We are all sort-of-fascinated in a morbid kind

### COPING WITH THE HEAT

Out in the mountains and deserts things aren't too bad because you are moving. In town though, the heat is intense and the dangers of passing out feel very real even if reality gives you a safety margin. The one thing we learned on this trip was that vented kit is worth twice its weight in gold. All the armour and abrasion resistance where you need it, but enormous cooling airflow where you need that too. My Triumph kit is more of an adventure style suit. It works superbly, had plenty of useful pockets and costs just £270. Julie's BMW kit was a lot smarter looking and you'd wear it much more often. It worked superbly too but cost a little more at £525 for the jacket and armoured jeans.

Full face helmets don't help in the heat and your normally ice-cold vents seem to have stopped working (they haven't, it's just that air passing through them is warmer than your head). But, a helmet is there to protect you and some people (me, for one) wouldn't ride in anything else. In the desert it feels cooler riding with your visor down than up because it deflects the furnace blast of hot air.

So, drink lots, nick as much ice from the beer cooler as you can at every stop and douse your head and neck with it at every opportunity. Some of our gang had gel waistcoats – dunk em in ice and they retain the cold for half an hour – which at just \$40 from the HD shop seemed like a great idea.

of way. But to be honest, the Filmore, back in San Fran meant an awful lot more.

There's one last mountain road over the hills and down to Santa Barbara. One last chance to warm the edges of the tyres, one last fast, twisty blast. This afternoon is straight roads and back to Glendale to drop off the bikes.

Santa Barbara is pretty. We ride up the wooden pier, strip off leathers (it was chilly again this morning) and head for the nearest vat of cola and salad. The food isn't great, but the location is unbeatable. Truth is, this is the real end-of-holiday moment. The last ride back into LA is just admin really. Everyone makes the most of the sunshine and the mood. It's been one hell of a trip.

Three hours later we're back at the bike shop. It should have been two but we got split up on the freeway. Six bikes lost in rush hour traffic. The rest of us parked up and waited. And waited, but they never turned up. Mark in the van had lost them too and then we'd heard that someone had crashed. Panic for a moment and then word that Mark had picked up the bike, everyone was okay and someone in the stragglers had sat nav.

So we pushed on to Glendale and strangely, a couple of miles from the shop, they came past us on the freeway and rejoined the group, as if by magic. Weird.

Engines off, helmets off, clothing off (boy was that last dawdle through the traffic warm), beers cracked and into the bus for the trip back to the hotel. The mood at tonight's farewell dinner will be relaxed (make that knackered as it all catches up with you) but rewarding. 24 people, a makeshift and ramshackle bike gang all lost in their own thoughts and own memories of the tour.

Long, drunken goodbyes, big, drunken hugs and a promise to keep in touch. And that's why you do it like this. This is why an organised tour is so flipping good. Forget the isolationist 'I want to be alone' nonsense. When you've shared the trip of a lifetime with a bunch of great new mates every experience, every memory is worth 10 times what it would have been.

So to all those who shared it with us, thank you. The only problem now is what to do next year. How do you top this?

### PILES (AND PILES!) OF FUN. 2732 MILES ON A SPORTSTER.



Julie Brown did America the hard way. No screen, a rock hard seat and 90 mile tank range. But her Sportster was the coolest bike out there, no question.

"In hindsight it was a silly choice. But we made it and I loved it. And, more importantly I loved this bike. I should have ridden a big twin, but to be honest, I don't like the look of them, didn't want the extra weight and HC Travel promised there'd be a jerry can on the van to top me up at every stop.

"It took a while to get the refuelling routine sorted and there must have been times when the rest of the pack were rolling their eyes as we gassed it up again. But on these roads, for me, it was the best bike, no question. Plenty of go from the 1200cc motor, easy to roll into corners, easy to manage in town too.

"The only niggles were not having ABS and no crash bars. You might have guessed that there's a relation between them. ABS would have prevented my tumble. I was



That's a long way on a Sportster.

nowhere near crashing into the truck that stopped dead in front of me, but I panicked, grabbed the front brake, locked the wheel and down we went. It was a teeny tumble – less than 10mph, but without crash protection it snapped the gearlever, leaving the bike unrideable, even though I was perfectly okay to carry on.

"Would I do it again on a Sportie? Yes, definitely. Would I buy one? Yes, it's on the list for this summer."

### ABOUT ORANGE & BLACK

Julie and I toured with Orange & Black, part of H-C Travel and one of currently just two Harley-Davidson® Authorized Tour Operators in the UK. For further information on the Wild Wild West tour, and other Orange & Black guided and self-guided US tours, please go to [www.orange-and-black.co.uk](http://www.orange-and-black.co.uk), call H-C Travel on 01256 770775. H-C Travel is ATOL registered and also offer guided and self-guided road, adventure and off-road tours on all five continents as well as rentals in the USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

**ORANGE & BLACK**

Harley-Davidson® authorized tour operator



### HARLEY-DAVIDSON AUTHORIZED TOURS

With the rapid growth in tour and rental companies offering tours on Harley-Davidson motorcycles, the purpose of the Harley-Davidson Authorized Tour programme is to offer tours designed for bikers by bikers, with Harley-Davidson motorcycles in mind.



Harley-Davidson works closely with a small number of Authorized Tour Operators across the globe who meet their strict requirements. This brings peace of mind that your tours routes have been ridden and hotels checked ahead of each trip. There are no hidden costs to the customer and emergency plans are in place to cater for incidents and extreme weather, leaving you free to have a great time! These operators source their Harley-Davidson motorcycles directly from Harley-Davidson Authorized Rental dealers. This guarantees you current year, low mileage, dealer maintained Harley-Davidson motorcycles under factory warranty. Look out for the logo.

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'Is it my turn to ride the Sportster?' 'No.'