

Daytona or Bust

..... it only took 30 years!

by Stu Segal

In '66 I heard about Daytona, a place where you could drive on the beach and see some cycle races. There was no bike week, no swap meet, no biker bars, no bikers (or at least we weren't called that). There was races - plain and simple, races.

We talked about going that year. We even talked about riding - I owned a 58 Beezer and Larry had an Indian. In those days we occasionally took a "long" ride, like Philadelphia to Atlantic City (about 60 miles) - whenever we did it turned into a two or three day adventure in the world of motorcycle repair. A ride from the Northeast to Daytona, in the late 60's, for 2 eighteen year olds would have been the trip of a lifetime (like the Fonda/Hopper L.A. to N.O. trip).

Well, we didn't make it down that year, or the next couple. Larry went of to a life of long-haul trucking and I signed up for marriage, kids, mortgage, 9-5, etc. Larry made it to Daytona a couple times (in his rig, not his bike) over the decades, but even though I kept riding, I never did make it.

Over the years what we originally wanted to see, races, became secondary to what became the main event - Daytona became a town that welcomed bikers (for a week a year), where you could show up, not need to worry that motel owners would flip on the "No Vacancy" sign when they heard your bike, and have a relatively hassle-free week in a Florida seashore town with a bunch of other bikers. Businesses that catered to bikers opened for BikeWeek, and eventually some actually made Daytona their year-round base.

Fast forward - 30 YEARS! 1996, I still hadn't got to Daytona but suddenly I've got a lot a free time in my life - why not go to the now-legendary biker Valhalla, Daytona. Unlike 30 years ago, I've now got a pretty dependable bike, Daytona is running something called Biketoberfest (in October), so we decided to ride down. We had a nice ride down, about 1,200 miles, mostly on the Interstate, never colder than about 45 and (til we hit Florida) never warmer than 75, and no rain.

We got to Daytona about five days before the event began, and checked into the Carol Inn; it's right on Atlantic Avenue and the front rooms open right onto the beach. Equally important, the folks who own the motel, Ken and Harsha, actively support BikeWeek and genuinely welcome bikers. These folks put on coffee in the morning, provide polishing rags, and generally do everything they can to ensure you have a good time. There were a couple other bikers at the motel when we checked in, and by the end of the week it was full of bikers.

What can I say about Daytona? It's a good place to vacation. There's a nice whitesand beach - you can swim wherever you want and the lifeguards won't hassle you. If you want, you can get a day permit and dive your car or bike on the beach (at low tide).

There are lots of restaurants, and whatever you're looking for you'll be able to find it. Every chain restaurant you can think of is there, so if you like Olive Garden, Denny's, Friday's, Beef and Ale, etc. it's there. If your looking for more local flavor there's some really great places - Aunt Catfish' is a nice restaurant the specializes in local seafood dishes; it's all good and they give you plenty to eat. The Ponce Inlet Fish Camp preserves the fish camp atmosphere while you eat out on the dock or on a dry-docked cruiser. Good Mexican food at Rio Bravo by the airport. If you're looking for fancier there's Sapporo Japanese Steak House. All of Daytona expects casual dress, so jeans and T-shirt are fine everywhere.

Every merchant I met welcomed bikers - apparently Daytona is no longer an "in" place and if it wasn't for the bikers the local economy would collapse. There is evidence of the official support of bikers in the way Main Street was built - ramps at every corner so you can get your bike up on the sidewalk, and bike parking permitted on all the sidewalks of Main Street.

Of course there was also evidence of resistance to bikers. Daytona Shores, the town adjacent to Daytona Beach, went out of their way to stop and ticket any moving violation they could find - when they picked up my motel room neighbor and took him to County Jail they told him outright "We don't want no bikers in our town". Too bad - cause with an attitude like that pretty soon there won't be any (and where will they be then).

Main Street - ever been to a biker swap meet? Main Street is basically a big swap meet - there's vendors, some of them permanent and some there just for the week - more of them than you've ever seen before, and with more stuff. There's bike companies with Major Presence on Main Street. HD of Daytona Clothing and Collectibles Store where you can pay a mere \$375 for a leather-trimmed nylon jacket. Then there's the Easyriders store, where there's a humongous bouncer to make sure you enter the "In" door and where they sell all Easyriders products (and actually they are real nice in this store) and upstairs there's the "Bros Club" which is open to - you guessed it - Bros. And there's the biggest building on Main Street, the brandy-new, probably 10,000 square foot Mike Corbin Seats building - I'm not sure why you need something the size of an A&P to sell seats, but once upon a time I bought a Corbin seat. It came packaged in a box that said "Serious Parts for Serious Motorcyclists" - at the time I thought it should say "Expensive Parts for Stupid Motorcyclists" - after seeing his building now I'm sure.

Bars - here - there - everywhere. Bikers welcome everywhere.

Bikes - anything you can imagine (as long as your imagination is limited to Harleys, V8s and BMWs) is on Main Street. Stock, stretched, touring, V8, springers, girders, rigids, etc., etc.

People - well there's bikers everywhere, along with the cast of slightly off-center characters that you always find at biker events.

Races - don't know, never got to the speedway.

Rides - the weather is warm and nice, and there are beautiful scenic rides along the ocean and the river. If you're looking for different stuff to do, DisneyWorld and the Kennedy Space Center are less than 90 minutes away.

I almost forgot - then there was H-D of Daytona. You almost have to see this place to believe it. Three years ago they build a new 20,000 square foot building, on about an acre of ground (an awful lot of land in a city). The building was designed to look like a hundred year old Spanish building, and it overlooks the Halifax River, so you can see it whenever you leave or enter Daytona (especially at night, when the whole thing is lit with neon). So we stopped in. As you know, none of the dealers have new Harleys for sale - guess again. This place has dozens of new bikes, which they claim are used???? Very interesting, since they have almost no miles on the odometer - but once a bike has been titled then Harley has no say about the price, so let's say you check out the dresser that in the Harley literature lists for \$18,500 - Surprise! Surprise! What you're looking at is a "used" bike, with 80 miles on the odometer, and it been "customized" with a new points cover, therefore it can be had for a mere \$24,000. Then we went inside - over by the register was, very clearly posted, a "No Returns" policy - I don't know about you, but I don't buy things from people who won't stand behind them. Then we found a line of 6 or 7 genuine custom bikes - the salesman told us they started at \$35,000 and went to \$70,000. None of these bikes, or the stock bikes, had price tags - a practice that makes me highly suspicious whether it's applied to home appliances or motorcycles. The long and the short of it - it was the most elaborate Harley shop I've every seen, and the one place in Daytona that made me really uncomfortable.

Summary - want a nice vacation where bikers are welcome? Go to Daytona.