

Sturgis 2009 Wrap Up Report

Bryan Harley Cruiser Editor | Articles | Articles RSS | Blog | Blog RSS
Yes, Harley is my real name. And no, there's no relationship. But I do enjoy riding Harley-Davidsons, which comes in handy as the Cruiser & Custom Editor of Motorcycle USA.

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I understand why Michael Licher chose 'Rabel Rousers' - Motorcycle lays that inspire us to Ride' as the theme for his display at the Buffalo Chip this year. There's no event that embodies that theme more than Sturgis, where it's a little primal and a lot pagan, a bastion of no-holds barred beer-drinking binges and late night slumbers back to the tent in the Chip. A place where bands are cheered or jeered by the revving of V-Twin engines while performing; in between, during, and after songs, it's a place where a guy backing his Harley through the mud of the Full Throttle Saloon after his bike got banged up in a hail storm, his rear end swinging wide one way, then whipping back around the other as he teetered on the edge of plopping over the highside, was cheered like a hero as he pointed the proverbial middle finger toward the purple skies that had just wreaked havoc on Sturgis 2009.

There's one other hero that comes to mind, too. It's the guy who paid the ultimate price doing something he loves. The rally looked like it was going to go fatality-free until an Oklahoma rider crashed in Rapid City Saturday afternoon at the East 57 ramp off I-90 and was killed. At least he rode out from Oklahoma and hopefully got to throw down hard and get in some great riding before he became the only fatality in the immediate rally area. Of course, we lost the venerable Bruce Rosemeyer on his way to Sturgis 2009, and a couple of fatal motorcycle accidents were reported in Wyoming, but considering the amount of bikers that converge on this South Dakota region, the number of fatal accidents was minimal.



Where'd I park my bike? Lost on Main St. Sturgis again. With this many bikers in attendance, you'd be bound to happen, but police reports of major incidences in 2009 were down in just about all categories.

Another encouraging note came from Sturgis Police Chief Jim Bush, who said that accident and crime statistics this year were down in almost all categories. The South Dakota Highway Patrol reported that through Saturday, August 8, there were 241 DUI arrests in Sturgis, down slightly from last year's 253. Felony drug arrests also dropped from 35 to 28, while misdemeanor drug arrests were way down, from 191 to 106. Attendance figures have yet to be released, but estimates put it on par or even better than last year's numbers. A report from 'The Sturgis Rally News' stated that 'State traffic counts for the first few days of the rally were up 2.3% over last year,' and there 'was a 12% increase in state sales tax receipts for Sturgis and Meade County for the first few days of the rally.' Though we're mined in a recession, you can't keep riders away from Sturgis. They just did it on the cheap. Tents filled yards throughout town, while I saw many riders who pitched pup tents wherever they could find soft ground and a little cover on the road between Sturgis and Spearfish.

The rebellious spirit of the original easy riders, Wyatt and Billy, are making a comeback. The motorcycle cult film classic, *Easy Rider*, is getting a makeover, something I was unaware of until Sturgis this year. Phil Pitzer, a dead ringer for Peter Fonda (only better), has taken on the task of researching and writing the script for the new movie, *Easy Rider 2: The Ride Back*. The movie will provide some of the back story on the original characters created by Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper. We met Pitzer at the Legends Ride in Deadwood, where he was in town with co-star Sherree J. Wilson (Dallas, Walker Texas Ranger) to promote the new movie. It will be a challenge to capture the raw appeal of the original, but Pitzer says he plans to use social issues in the movie in the same style that Fonda and Hopper did in the original. Plenty of scenes of the famed Captain America chopper riding again should help give the new film the tone and feel of *Easy Rider*. Pitzer came across as a straight-up guy who has worked hard to make sure the project does justice to the original, and Wilson, who plays Wyatt's little sister, was enthusiastic about her role in the new film.

A poster from the original *Easy Rider* movie was part of the collection that was Michael Licher's 9th Annual Motorcycles as Art exhibit at the Buffalo Chip. It was among other vintage motorcycle movie posters, some I had heard of, some that I hadn't. Couldn't get but a chuckle out of the sexual innuendos from the movie poster for *Angels and Demons as They Come*. The poster's headline reads: 'Big men with throbbing machines, and the girls who take them on.' The poster features a burlly biker wearing a spiked-helmet wearing who's popping a wheelie while dragging a guy tied to a rope behind him. Gotta love the cheese coming out of the early 70s. But there was serious artwork and memorabilia on display as well, from a red, white, and blue Evil Knievel helmet to Billy Lans' hubless motorcycle, the Moneyshot bike. One of my favorites was an old Schwinn Sting-Ray with the five-speed shifter on the backside. I think just about every biker that walked by the vintage bicycle cracked a smile as long-forgotten childhood memories came rushing back. We caught Dee Snider, the current radio host of the House of Hair and former lead singer of Twisted Sister, giving the old, classic bicycle a thorough look-over. Like many of us, he probably popped his first wheelie sitting on one of the Sting-Ray's barane seats.



Dee Snider, formerly of the band Twisted Sister and current host of the House of Hair, gave us a big 'Hell Yeah!' at the Michael Licher party.

Dee should be grateful that he wasn't on this year's lineup of bands at the Buffalo Chip. Headliners were having a tough time of it. First, Aerosmith's front man, Steven Tyler, takes a dive off the catwalk Wednesday night while trying to entertain the crowd after the sound went down. Then, Buckcherry put its concert short Friday night after lead singer Josh Todd's vocals started to fade during the course of the show. Todd was still recovering from a bug and was hawking stuff up all night and his energy waned as the show went on. Someone in the crowd, probably pissed off at paying \$120 for the Aerosmith show and another \$60 for the shortened Buckcherry concert, showed his dismay by chucking a water bottle that tagged the guitar player square in the chest. But to Buckcherry's credit, they did come back out with another member singing vocals and did a few cover tunes to try and give the crowd its money's worth. But it took the Guess Who, old school Canadian rockers who cut their first album back in the day of 45 rpm singles in 1962, to show the younger bucks how it's done. Not only did original members Jim Kale and Gary Peterson finish their set with a rousing rendition of American Wastair, but they came back out and belted out a couple of songs for an encore. Go figure that the oldest band on the block would show the younger generation how it's done. Nobody even seemed to mind standing in the ankle-deep mud that was the Buffalo Chip concert grounds to watch the show. Five days straight of evening thunderstorms had turned the Chip to a giant mud bowl. I sacrificed a pair of old Vans to the cause, my shoes soaked with South Dakota soil that it was better to leave them in honor of the affair than to try and clean them up and bring them back home.

There was some hell-raising going on between the Red and Buckcherry show over at the Kelson Playground as the Second Annual Baker Burnout Drag Competition drew a big crowd. All you had to do was follow the smell of burning rubber and the howl of V-Twins hitting rev limiters to know you were in the right place. A cast of 12 popular custom bike builders were competing for the burnout king title, names like Paul Widenen from Bare Knuckle Choppers and Paul Yaffe of Paul Yaffe Originals. The event is sponsored by Baker Drivetrain, the a transmission of choice for many entered in the contest, and of Bert Baker himself was having a helluva good time as master of ceremonies.

"It's just plain ol' stupid fun," Bert told us.



Wanna party like a rock star? Then Sturgis was the place to be last week. Wait a minute, this got to a rock star.



Mugging with the cast of the new *Easy Rider* movie. Phil Pitzer (left) helped write the script and stars in the movie, along with Sherree J. Wilson of *Walker Texas Ranger* fame.



It was a rockin' show - until Tyler fell.

When the smoke had settled, Bill Dodge of Bling's Cycles was edged out by Ken Wolfe of S&S Cycle for the title of Baker Burnout King 2009. The two were so evenly matched, it took three races to decide a victor. Wolfe won a \$1000 gift certificate for his winning efforts.

Another inspirational motorcycling icon that emerged from Sturgis 2009 has to be Dave Cook of Cook Customs. Cook has been a bridesmaid two years running in the **AMD World Championships of Custom Bike Building**, finishing just out of the top in three in both 2007 and 2008 with fourth place finishes. This year, Cook's determination to claim the coveted AMD 'Freestyle Class' crown paid off, as the Milwaukee-based custom bike builder became the first American to win the prestigious contest. His achievement is even more impressive considering that there were 83 bikes entered in this year's event, and more international entries than ever before. But Cook bested them all, showing the world that American engineering is on a level with the best of them.



Put your hands in the air like you just don't care! Dave Cook became the first American to win the AMD World Championships.

There were plenty of killer custom motorcycles entered in the 7th Annual Metzeler Custom Bike Contest as well. I give the Metzeler contest props for being the only show that is sanctioned by the Custom Bike Association and that uses a more objective, standardized form of judging. I watched as judges and custom builders Eddie Trotsa, Paul Cox, and Chickie Ransom scrutinized each build. Another guy who knows a thing or two about custom bikes, American Iron's Eotor Chris Maida, was the hunk judge. The Metzeler contest pros far beyond great work, from a unique three-wheeler with a pair of close-set rear wheels and a sideways-mounted engine that won the People's Choice Award to the Best-in-Show winner, a racy number called 'Olive' made by Todd Silicato of Todd's Cycle out of Huntington Beach, CA. To add to the party atmosphere, Aerosmith's Steven Tyler made an appearance and helped hand out trophies. His small production motorcycle company, Dinco Motorcycles out of New Hampshire, won top honors in the Production Class. But my favorite was a sick bagger made by Dave Buckner of D&B Cycle out of Detroit. The custom-made V4 powerplant featured twin S&S engines and a custom Roots Blower and pushes out a claimed 300 hp. The bike has a 10-inch stretch to the backbone and a tank that holds in excess of 10 gallons, which Buckner said is a good thing because the high-powered bagger quickly burns up every last drop. It's the first true dragger bagger I've come across.



Talk about an industrial-strength motorcycling! Check out this build by RK Concepts out of Austin, Texas.

In between custom bike shows, concerts, burnout pits and bars, we got a little riding in. We got to participate in The Legends Ride on a 2010 Harley-Davidson Softail Convertible. It's the perfect motorcycle for Sturgis. You can lean it down, fill up its saddlebags, and cruise to your camoats, then pop off the small front fender and windscreen, saddlebags, and passenger pylon and you've got a clean cruiser for the rest of the week. 'Something tells me Harley R&D had Sturgis in mind when they created this bike. Got our first taste of the scenic beauty of the Badlands from the saddle of the Softail Convertible on Monday, then sampled more of the area's verdant pine forests, majestic spires and peaks, and postcard perfect lakes and creeks while taking a ride to the Crazy Horse Memorial on Wednesday. Friday we made a mad dash to Mt. Rushmore where we did our best Chevy Chase impersonation of the Griswold's visiting the Grand Canyon in the original National Lampoon's Vacation movie.



The show must go on! These girls were working when the storm struck the Full Throttle Saloon. At least they remembered to save their jant!

"Yes, that's Mt. Rushmore," we said with two nods of the head, a quick pic, then it was back on the road.

The weather at Sturgis 2009 then decided to leave its own bit of hell. Friday night, a dangerous hail storm swept in from the west, gaining strength as it approached Sturgis. It intensified its full fury just east of town as it approached the Full Throttle Saloon where we had just pulled up in a rental SUV. A half-hour battery of hail stones that ranged from golf-ball to baseball-size pummeled bikes, pashed out windows, peppered RVs, and fattened tents. From what we witnessed, damage estimates from the freak storm has to be in the millions. Mother Nature crashed the party with a vengeance.

So in the course of a week, we got to see Lita Ford, Toby Keith, Sevyn Stray, Aerosmith, Red, Buckcherry, and the Guess Who live in concert. We rode Harley's and Indians, visited scenic sites like the Crazy Horse Monument, Mt. Rushmore, and Spearfish Canyon. All of our pants are permanently stained with Buffalo Chip mud, and we'll never forget our first trip to the Full Throttle Saloon whose parking lot we were trapped in when the heavens opened up and dumped chunks of hail on us. We've perched with Rapid City locals we met at the Buckcherry show who laughed at our hail-riddled rental but were sympathetic to our plight and kicked us down some cold beer (thanks Darr, Caleb, Brandy, and the big guy whose name I can't remember). The smell of spent rubber is still in my nostrils from the Baker Burnouts, and I'm hearing Hank's voice saying, 'Welcome to the Buffalo Chip-H-H-I' in my dreams.



Don't worry, tiger girls. We'll be back next year! Yes, indeed we'll be back. See you at Sturgis 2010.

It was one helluva week.
I sacrificed one pair of Vans to the Buffalo Chip mud - Cost: \$50
Got caught in one speed trap on a dirt road - Cost: \$75.
Totaled one 2008 Ford Escape in a freak storm - Cost: \$19,000.

Cost of attending Sturgis 2009 - priceless.