

AZ's Centennial Ride



The Centennial Ride in Phoenix Arizona... Helping our beautiful state celebrate its 100th Birthday... It only happens once. That's where we were on Saturday February 11, 2012. Even Mother Nature was in the mood to celebrate ~ providing 'Chamber of Commerce' weather for the day's enjoyment.

It's just amazing, as we reflect on our personal history in AZ's biker community, to see the rate by which motorcycling has gained popularity, and how far society's opinion of motorcycling [and AZ's motorcyclists] has evolved. From our early years involved in the Motorcyclists Rights movement and the work involved in improving civilians' opinions about bikers ~ to having the Copper Chopper motorcycle as the mascot of Arizona's statewide Centennial Celebration... and the Centennial Ride being promoted as a Signature Event. Outstanding! We've come a long way, baby!

Staging for this parade was at Mesa Riverview. Some riders chose to gather at their favorite dealership and do group rides to Riverview, including about 50 who rolled in from Chester's HD in Mesa. Most of the riders we observed throughout the day were independents. Although, we did make note of numerous organizations represented.

Music by the Bad Attitude Cats kept everyone entertained as they registered and then awaited the word to saddle up. We were in the midst of some 5000+ motorcyclists. Reports from DPS and the Centennial Ride organizers put the bike count at around 4500. While not the largest ride in Arizona's history, it certainly numbers among them.

Monies raised by this ride went to the Arizona Centennial 2012 Foundation; a non-profit 501c3. The money goes toward putting together all the Signature Events and Projects that are commemorating Arizona's first 100 Years of Statehood.

Coordinating the departure of this many bikes takes a lot of organization. The crew did a good job. As we awaited our turn in line, we heard a roar from people cheering as the first bikes took off. After that, there was the steady rumble of that beautiful v-twin music. The parade itself maintained a modest pace... There was a certain amount of 'rubber

band' riding; but things went smoothly, at least over all. We passed one bike & rider down. A followup with DPS determined that this was the only incident. Thankfully it was reported as an injury-only wreck. We also learned from DPS that when the leaders arrived at the Capitol, the tail end of the parade was just leaving Mesa Riverview; making this a 16-mile procession.

We THOUGHT we were toward the back of the pack, until we saw how many more bikes were coming in to park after we arrived! Once we got to the ride's end in Phoenix, we started exploring the Best Fest. The festival's footprint was from Washington to Jefferson Streets & from 10th to 17th Avenues. After checking out the Centennial Ride Village, we set off to explore the rest of the venue. There were plenty of places to eat, drink, be entertained, shop, and yes, even learn ☺ ... in a variety of themes... Western, Native American, Hispanic, sports.

The main stage at the Capitol Building was busy throughout the day with music & dance, cultural presentations, speechifying dignitaries, and the like. Featured prominently at the side of the stage was a memento of bygone days... a Ladmo Bag; offering those who grew up in Arizona in the 50's to 80's something to reminisce about. The Copper Chopper and its 'Front 48' entourage, including Phoenix-born music celebrity Dierks Bentley, were greeted by Governor Brewer for photo ops.

A bi-plane flyover by the AZ Antique Aircraft Association made a beautiful & graceful presentation. Rex Allen Jr serenaded guests with Arizona's State Song "I Love You Arizona". Famed Phoenix trumpeter Jesse McGuire performed the National Anthem. There was so much going on that you could have stayed right there for the entire evening, but we wanted to check out more of the Best Fest, so we moved on.

There were a lot of very interesting and informative displays... sciences, art, history, military ~ all of course from the Arizona perspective. You could learn about people, events, & accomplishments over the years that have brought our state to where it is today. There were exhibits about the future & preserving the past for generations to come.

There was an impressive collection of antique autos, ranging from a 1905 Cadillac Horseless Carriage to a 1915 Willys Overland.

An odd piece of memorabilia was on display amongst the military vehicles and collectibles ... Hanoi Jane's helmet. Hmm... Not sure what should be said about that.

Our appreciation of cars brought us to the Low Riders display in the Hispanic Village. This was a beautiful collection of automotive art, encompassing vehicles of all ages. The artists who paint them create moving murals; displaying a broad range of talents.

Our stop by the American Indian Village gave us the treat of listening to a couple of tykes laying down some remarkable blues. The one fella wasn't as tall as his guitar.

We missed hearing the Gin Blossoms, as we were elsewhere in the festival grounds... Not that we don't enjoy their music. We do ... going back to those early days where we'd listen to them at Nita's ~ our haunt in the river bottom. You know it as Tempe Marketplace now.... Ahhh, such is progress. But we were still exploring the Best Fest. There were still 'goings on' happening in other areas ~ 'this night only' type stuff. We met some nice people, saw some awesome displays, heard some great music.... It was super. As we continued to make our way back to the bike, there was still music calling and Pavilions were beckoning ... But it was time to go.

A fast-forward to Sunday the 12th...to the drawing for the Copper Chopper. Congratulations to Shelly Rohde for winning the Arizona Centennial mascot!

This was one of those 'once in a lifetime' events. If you were there, you know what we mean. If you were not, we hope we've been able to impart a bit of it to you.

Happy Birthday Arizona! We are so glad we could be a part of it.

Betsy & Bruce

see more pictures via the link in the AZ Vision photo gallery