

Off Watch

“I think people boat and bike and sail for the same reasons. It’s the freedom, the feeling you get in nature with the sun on your face and the wind in your hair.”

BY HERB MCCORMICK



Planes and bikes and boats. Somehow, they’re kindred vehicles. I can’t tell you how many cruisers and sailors I’ve met over the years who were also pilots or motorcyclists. It’s downright uncanny. Count me as one of them, the rider of a 2001 Kawasaki W650 that was totally inspired by (or is it ripped off from?) an earlier Triumph Bonneville. Whatever the case, I definitely love my bike.

My enthusiasm, however, pales in comparison to the passion and dedication for the sport exhibited by a Harley-Davidson owner named Wanda Kenton Smith, an old friend and a veteran of the marine industry who for many years ran her own Florida-based public-relations agency.

I really enjoy riding my Kawasaki. Kenton Smith is absolutely consumed by riding her Harley. This I learned when she and a posse of like-minded riders descended upon my home town of Newport, Rhode Island, last summer on the final stage of a New England tour dubbed the Lobster Ride. It was the fourth such group outing for industry pros, including one cross-country tour from Florida to California.

Kenton Smith wasn’t always a zealot. It all started a few years back, after one of her agency’s annual strategic planning sessions. She’d mentioned in passing to a Harley rider named Jim Krueger, of Regal Boats, that she’d like to take a spin on his bike. Krueger agreed, and they took off. Kenton Smith had no idea what she’d bargained for; she reckoned they were going for a 15-minute ride, but Krueger had other ideas, pointing his bike from Sarasota to Daytona Beach, roughly three hours away, where Bike Week just happened to be underway.

“We were riding on AIA at sunset,” Kenton Smith recalled. “It was spectacular. Every cell in my body was totally alive. I fell head over heels madly in love with



EASY Riders

motorcycling that day.” Soon after, she enrolled in an introductory class at the local Harley dealership. A week after that, she purchased a bike. (Her husband, Ken, was eventually persuaded to do so as well.) She’s never once looked back.

Before long, she and Krueger decided to put together an event for marine industry members who enjoyed riding as well. The Lobster Ride was the latest. As with previous incarnations, Krueger did all the route planning — an exercise akin to plotting a coastal cruise — and then turned the itinerary over to Kenton Smith. Using a Harley-Davidson map planner, she negotiated hotel rooms and other logistics, including finding sponsors and boating activities along the way. Oh yes, this is as

Now a dedicated rider of a Harley, Wanda Kenton Smith was hooked on motorcycles from her very first ride.

much about boats as it is about bikes.

Starting in mid-July, over the next eight days the group covered nearly 1,500 miles, generally knocking off well over 200 miles daily. But there were loads of stops in between. The Freedom Boat Club, whose members have a wide range of boats available to take out whenever they wish, was a primary sponsor. And there were plenty of well-planned outings from Maine to Rhode Island, including a summit of Mount Washington, along the way. (The riders also feasted on lobster “in every variety possible,” said Kenton Smith.)

In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the riders boarded boats for a tour of the downtown area. There was a float down Maine’s Kennebec River. Farther Down East, there was a whale-watching excursion. In Hyanis, Massachusetts, it was a tour of the waterfront and the town aboard amphibious duck boats, where they took in the vast collection of pleasure boats. And then, for the grand finale, there was a sunset tour and dinner in

Newport aboard a tour boat called *Amazing Grace*. “Newport is really the melting pot, everything from small runabouts to America’s Cup yachts,” said Kenton Smith. “It’s stunning.”

But so was the whole trip. “When you ride, you see and experience things differently than when you’re just driving somewhere,” she said. “The boats just make it even more fun.”

Indeed, there’s a synergy between the two, one Kenton Smith said made a lot of sense: “There’s a crossover, for sure. I think people boat and bike and sail for the same reasons. It’s the freedom, the feeling you get in nature with the sun on your face and the wind in your hair. Nobody can hold you back or tell you where to go. It’s the reason I think there’s a calling to those of us who live in both worlds.”

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