



The Florida Gator Tale

Newsletter of the Florida Chapter of the
Motorcycle Sport Touring Association

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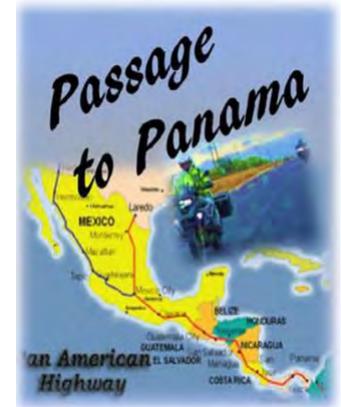
Feature Article

Passage to Panama

By Mike McCrary, Austin, Texas

[Ed. Note: This article was previously published in the April 2016 edition of The Florida MSTA Gator Tale]

It began with a discussion about joining another rider in South America for a trip to Tierra del Fuego. His bike was already down there. Ultimately, his description of the trip and what he wanted to do were not too enticing, plus I was not enamored of shipping my bike there and back, so I suggested to Darrel that we ride



to Panama instead. Just sort of rolled off the tongue. Simple. All land. Only 3,500 miles give or take. So The Three Amigos, Mike, Darrel, and Olie, embarked on the Passage to Panama on February 9th. Embark, Passage, and Panama (as in Canal) sound slightly nautical, but our chosen mode of transport was not a boat, rather the best, big, wide, shaft-driven, dual-sport motorbikes that money can buy (more or less) – one GSW, one GSAW, and one Super “Tinnerie”.

We secured our temporary vehicle import permits for Mexico on-line, so had only to obtain visitor’s permits when we entered Mexico at Ojinaga, just across the Rio Grande from Presidio, TX. I’ve crossed the border at Ojinaga three times, and it’s an easy transition because of its low traffic volume. In fairly short order, we were on the long, deserted road southwest. Our target destination for our first night’s stay was the Gómez Palacio/Torreón area, which we made well before dark.

The next morning we continued our journey south and, after 2½ days of easy riding through north-central Mexico, took a break in beautiful San Miguel de Allende. The sun and cool temps had been a constant. It was warm by noon the day we arrived, but we were still buttoned up due to the cold morning. We routed right through the city’s el centro: Three tall, loaded bikes; narrow, cobble-stone streets; pedestrians; cars, taxis, and buses. The drivers in Mexico and beyond all have a habit of stopping at the myriad topes (speed bumps), instead of just rolling over. Continual stop and go on cobblestones uphill and down was not fun – we almost overheated. By that I mean us, not the bikes.



After a pleasant stay at a hotel that was reminiscent of the paradores in Spain or posadas in Portugal, we left San Miguel on Saturday morning. Against my better judgment and instead of using ‘pilotage’, I let Senorita Garmin plot our exit from town (by the way, her Spanish is atrocious). She routed us straight up the mountainside, through the old barrio, steep cobblestone streets and all. When I say steep, I mean stand up on the pegs, lean forward as far as you can, give it gas, don’t back off, and hope-no-one-gets-in-the-way steep. There were several turns to negotiate, even a car or two to pass, but eventually I topped out at the main road. Olie showed up a few minutes later, but unfortunately, no Darrel. After about an hour, I finally got phone service and had a text message – Darrel had lost us at one of the turns and returned to our hotel. No big deal – I rode back down via the highway this time, fetched him at the hotel, then met with Olie and set out for Córdoba.

As we continued south, the highways ranged from deserted two-lanes, to fantastic sections of smooth-as-glass tollways, to pavement-sorely-needed, truck-rich “five lanes”. They were five lanes because you could get that much traffic on a two lane highway. The center section right down the middle was for passing, leaving two lanes as well as two shoulders. The shoulder would be where you go when a truck is passing another truck or bus. All swerve to miss the constant potholes, so when you’re passing you could easily get a surprise. But the drivers were not at all mean-spirited (ever drive in Houston?) and everyone seemed to know the rules of the road.

The ride to Córdoba was one to be remembered, as we had to compromise a lot: Lane-splitting when we encountered several miles of stacked-up trucks prior to one of the many tollbooths, then, when we reached a tollway that was completely closed due to an accident, lane splitting, shoulder riding, cutting through parking lots and gas stations, riding up the dirt “sidewalk” in town, etc., followed by nighttime riding to get to our destination. All against our own rules. After several detours, we were finally making progress once again, and made our way to Córdoba. Riding through the mountains, we topped out in the clouds. There were a lot of switchbacks, tunnels to negotiate, bonfires where trucks were stopped, and fields of rubble burning, which all added up to an eerie ride. But the hotel and dinner between ten and eleven PM were a great relief.

From Córdoba, we headed generally south to Tuxtla Gutiérrez. The calendar said it was Saturday, February 13th, when we stopped there for the night. The land had morphed from Chihuahuan Desert and gradually-changing semi-arid landscapes to suddenly mountainous and semi-tropical. The afternoon ride through the mountains from Minatitlán to Tuxtla Gutiérrez was glorious – a two-lane highway, not a lot of traffic, beautiful green, karst mountains.

On Sunday we headed for the Guatemalan border. Our timing was impeccable - the Pope was due in Tuxtla Gutiérrez the next day, and it would have been a madhouse. Our route was east toward Guatemala, and there was a constant stream of Federales heading in the opposite direction toward Tuxtla Gutiérrez. We had one military checkpoint before arriving at the Guatemalan border; they simply wanted to verify that we weren’t carrying contraband. We talked, Darrel gave them some hard candy, took a photo or two, then we were off. The border crossing itself took about ninety minutes – no lines to wait in, but los documentos tend to take a while (a recurring theme). After clearing the border, we rode to Huehuetenango, Guatemala, and found a great motel with an Italian restaurant next door, continuing our string of good hotels and food.





The next day's ride in Guatemala was a long and exciting one. Constant mountains. Very difficult to identify roads, very hard to find the right one out of the towns. Suddenly we would find ourselves "downtown" in the narrow, dead-end, and one-way streets, and the "highway" out was not apparent. We took one-way streets the wrong way on a number of occasions – people might point it out to us, but no one got excited. We also missed an unmarked, hidden turn in the mountains twice – both going and coming back after our turnaround, so we took some major detours.

Once on the right road, as we ascended again, the pavement disappeared. We then had a long, rough, ascending and descending ride of indeterminate length. In other words, we had no idea how far it was to our destination or when (or if) pavement would reappear. It didn't until we hit the edge of the city of Cobán. It took us a while to find a hotel, and we even had a policewoman who was directing traffic stop her work, help us park along the plaza, and then direct us to a nearby hotel, all after dark.

We finally made it across Guatemala and entered Honduras on February 16th. The border formalities took two hours. We tried to arrive at border crossings and allow a few hours to get it done, and still make our target destination and hotel before dark. It generally worked out, so there we were just inside Honduras at Copán Ruinas. We were going to visit the adjacent Mayan ruins the next day, but it was raining off and on. Instead, we geared up and negotiated the wet, steep cobblestone streets until we were out of town. The rain didn't last long.

We had hoped to make it across Honduras and near the Nicaraguan border in two days, but that turned out to be "a bridge too far", because of continuous mountains, roads of varying quality, truck traffic, construction stoppages, etc. So our second night in Honduras was at Siguatepeque, north of Tegucigalpa. We lost Olie for a time in Tegucigalpa (read on), but just a delay of an hour or so. The next morning we were off again, headed for Nicaragua. After yet another border crossing, we were on our way across the country. Our route took us on the north side of Lake Nicaragua, but the volcanoes in the lake were not quite in sight.

Compared to Guatemala and Honduras, we saw improved highways in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Still very slow at times due to 18-wheelers, other trucks, buses of every type, pickups, cars, small motorcycles, bicycles, carts, pedestrians, cattle, horses, dogs, chickens, etc.



After leaving Costa Rica, our destination was Santiago, Panama. We had spent the previous night on Costa Rica's NE Caribbean coast, in the small beachfront town of Puerto Viejo ("old port"). It was about 50 km from the border with Panama, so easy early morning ride for the crossing, and a very old bridge across the river. The crossing formalities usually comprised export

self, export bike, have bike fumigated (sprayed), import self, import bike, pay for insurance, pay municipal tax. After a couple of two-hour crossings, the next two were at least three hours.

Often the traffic on the highway just comes to a stop at speed bumps, construction, buses disgorging people, cars stopping, cattle crossing, people walking, etc. In other words, you have to pay attention. As Ringo shouted on *The White Album*, "I've got blisters on my fingers". Not literally, but last summer's calluses were certainly re-established on my clutch hand since we had been constantly up and down the gears, up and down in speed, up and down in position, and up and down the mountains.

We became accustomed to using the "GS pass": When cars and trucks come to a sudden stop at speed bumps or construction or any change in the pavement, we would zip around them on either side, adjusting the speed to manage the obstacles. Speed bumps (known as topes or túmulos) came in all sizes, shapes, heights, and

degrees of abruptness. There were even times we used the edge of the road or the shoulder/borrow ditch if there was any real estate there. We're on dual sports after all!

Darrel had one flat that he had to repair, and a broken mudguard to remove (his GSAW was really loaded, and the backend banged down hard a few times). Olie had a boot failure and his top case bracket broke (similar reason to Darrel's mudguard). But nothing serious. Olie tended to creep in speed when he was out front (not too often), and as he was opening up a gap on Darrel and me, he was stopped by the police. Luckily, no ticket or he would have had to backtrack to town and find the magistrate for payment. We were stopped to have our documentos examined several times in Panama, and saw a lot of motorcycle officers stopped beside the highway with radar guns. That's what got Olie.

We largely navigated with maps, since the GPS simply doesn't do the job in Central America. Its compass was useful, and it occasionally showed the highways and major intersections, but not much more helpful than that despite my purchase of Central America maps. Most of the time, I'd see a motorbike icon in the middle of a blank screen. I'm sure it's the lack of good data that makes it almost irrelevant. Most highways were not marked, nor were intersections, so I led the charge based on the map and gut feel. An occasional turnaround resulted when the compass said we were not going the right direction.

The ride from the Caribbean coast south across Panama was through the mountains yet again, then about 60 miles of construction on the Pan-American Highway. We arrived at our destination, Panama City, around noon on February 24th, after 14½ days of riding. At about 4,000 miles, it turned out to be a few hundred more than my original estimate. We were glad to stop there, park the bike for a while, wash the road-weary riding suit, and visit the canal. We took one full day off, found a very nice, economical hotel with a great location near numerous restaurants, and a coin op laundry nearby. We all did a little laundry, including, in my and Olie's case, the riding suit. Darrel had vowed to not wash his suit until he was back home safely. It was light grey starting out...



The highlight of the stop was visiting the canal, of course – and seeing it up close and in action. Amazing that it has been in use for over a century. That says a lot about the vision and perseverance of those who conceived, designed, and constructed it. New parallel locks (wider and longer) should be completed this year and will allow more, larger ships to pass.

We left Panama City Thursday, February 26th, spending the first night in David, Panama, followed by Liberia, , Costa Rica. They were long days with no stops except for gas. Our return route took us along the Pacific and the view was beautiful in spots. It was Panama all day Thursday, Costa Rica on Friday, Nicaragua on Saturday, and there we were on Sunday evening, February 29th, back in Siguatepeque, Honduras. The border crossings, although not particularly busy, were slow and laborious, and we averaged at least two hours per. The good news at this point was that we were back in the cool mountains. Since crossing the mountains in Panama earlier and spending time on the Pacific side, it had been hot. The wind along the Pacific side had also been howling down the slopes, making riding a struggle at times.

We lost Olie in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, twice – both going and coming. When going south, he got up beside me (maybe not the best way to follow) and was boxed out when I took a quick exit to our highway south. Darrel was farther back (correct way to follow) and made the turn, so he and I waited for an hour or so for Olie to go up the loop for several miles, find a turnaround spot, and return to us. The second time, on the way home, I pointed out a McDonalds as we passed, but missed the exit so took the next one, rode perpendicular to our route, turned around in a gas station, went back over the highway and directly to the McDonalds. Olie had been in the middle, between Darrel and me, but somehow he didn't follow us out of the gas station. Nor did he come to the McDonalds, which we've talked about as our own special "town center", using their WiFi and facilities a

couple of times. So we took off for our destination city (Siguatepeque), sans Olie. He finally called and made his way there after a couple of hours. I'm going to recommend he tether his bike to mine if we ever go through Tegucigalpa again.

The next few days would see us head for the northern edge of Honduras, where we hoped to visit the Mayan ruins that we missed due to weather when we were traveling south. Then it was to shoot across Guatemala again, but not too fast on account of the roads, their direction (they don't necessarily go directly to where we want to go), the towns, one way streets, etc., etc. But Guatemala is very interesting and has an old-world feeling.

The calendar said it was March 3rd – I have to admit that much of the time I didn't know what day it was; when you're on the bikes for an extended period, it doesn't make any difference anyway – when we were ready to re-enter Mexico from Guatemala. We finally found an uncrowded, efficient, quick border crossing. The formalities of exiting Guatemala and entering Mexico were conducted quickly and effortlessly by the two very pleasant immigration officials, maybe five minutes each. The only problem was that the two countries' border stations were separated by about three hours, and miles of rough, rocky, hilly, two-track dirt road and a wide, swift-moving river WITHOUT a bridge. The "ferry" noted on one of our maps turned out to be a bunch of long, narrow launches the locals use to go back and forth between the two countries. People movers that is, not built for vehicles, especially the big ass, wide-load, heavy, dual-sport bikes that we know and love...

To digress, we spent our last night in Honduras in Copán Ruinas, at the same small hotel we used going south. Nice people, nice little town, good restaurant nearby, a coffee shop that served espresso, and Mayan ruins to visit. The ruins at Copán were near the southeastern edge of the Mayan empire and were interesting to see, as were the colorful macaws flying around and squawking. So we had a rare afternoon off for a history lesson.



Upon leaving Copán Ruinas, we crossed from Honduras back to Guatemala. Leaving Honduras wasn't too bad, but getting back into Guatemala was another slow-moving bureaucratic maze, meaning 2-3 hours in the hot sun. Nice officials, but officials and official documents, and getting said documents signed and checked and stamped, and having them copied, takes time. Perfectly understandable... you can never be too careful with gringos and motorcycles and immigration and customs and fees and taxes. No telling what kind of nefarious schemes we might have up our hot, sweaty, dirty sleeves...

Once in Guatemala, we made our way northward to Flores, where we stopped for the night. It was our worst hotel of the trip (Darrel selected it). A/C didn't cool all night, mosquitos outside (dare I mention the word "Zika"??), bugs in the bathroom. But we survived and headed across Guatemala the following morning. We cleverly settled on a small, out of the way border crossing. Our maps showed it to be a proper highway, with a ferry across the river...

I may have mentioned that not only the GPS is useless beyond Mexico, the maps obviously leave a certain amount of information to your imagination. Our "highway" (shown like most real highways, a solid green line on Olie's map, red on mine) to the border turned into wide, packed dirt. Despite our hopes, not a construction zone since it never turned back into pavement. It just got narrower and rougher. In other words, the pavement ended well before the border; over forty miles according to Olie's odometer. We never saw the Guatemala immigration office set back from the road, but thank goodness they were alert and yelled and whistled at Darrel and Olie after I blew by. Back to the station, we learned that they couldn't properly export our bikes there. If we took them out of the country, there'd be the devil to pay if we ever returned to Guatemala. Somehow we decided that was OK (!) and had our passports stamped anyway. After cooling off for a while, back to the bikes and the dirt road. No man's land between countries (in an official, diplomatic sense) wouldn't be an issue, since Mexico was just a few miles and minutes away. Or so we thought.



After winding and climbing up and down on a two-track dirt road for an hour and half or so, we arrived at a small village on the riverside. The only concrete in town was a street/ramp leading down to the river. It looked promising until we walked out to the end – steep concrete steps that ended well above the rough river’s edge. No way was any bike going down that. A couple of locals led us farther down river to a steep bulldozed road that ended on the same rocky beach. Then up pulled the ferry, which was a launch. A long discussion ensued. The launch was about 30’ long, 6’ wide in the center, pointed at both ends, and had 18-24” gunwales (sides). Despite the assurances of the locals, we thought, “How the heck are you going to get a big motorcycle on that?”

After returning to the village, cooling down with water and Gatorade, sitting on the concrete ramp, and carefully considering our status and alternatives – officially out of one country, no bike export stamp, not yet into the other country, we decided the boat was a perfectly rational choice. No, the bikes were not insured in that particular country. But I volunteered to go first, so back down the road and onto the rocky beach. The process was to remove the panniers and top case to lighten the bike (not by much!); get everyone psyched up; put a short, steep ramp alongside the bow of the boat; about five of us rolled the front wheel up, then alternately lifted and moved the front and rear wheels to turn the bike; rolled it down another steep ramp into the boat; tied it down; crossed the river after a couple of swimmers navigated us through the shallows; beached the boat on the other side; pushed the bike up the ramp onto the prow; lifted it off. Voila! I was dry and in Mexico! Olie and the boat departed for the Guatemala side to get his bike, along with Darrel and his bike. After a couple of hours, they returned with two bikes on two boats. Olie’s boat had no thatched cover, so it must have been a freighter. The only place for him was astride his bike and he’d vowed to “go down with the bike” if anything happened. It didn’t.



As I was waiting in Mexico for the others, a great song from the film *The Motorcycle Diaries* sprang to mind: “Al Otro Lado del Rio” (the other side of the river). In the movie, Che swam it; thankfully, we didn’t have to.

After clearing the river and finding the Mexican immigration office, we mounted up and rode the hundred miles to Palenque, Mexico (site of another Mayan city), where we took only our second day of the trip off!

The objective the next day was to relax, wash clothes again, repair Olie’s top case mount and boots that were coming apart, generally catch up on the world. Then it was to ride the length of Mexico again, at least as far as Matamoros, and cross back into the USA. So that’s what we did, routing through Córdoba, the famous port cities of Veracruz and Tampico, and along the Gulf Coast on a great deserted highway to Brownsville, TX. Nice ride back to Texas and home.

Our hotels on the trip ranged from acceptable to very, very good, as did food. Finding gas was never a problem. At most military or police checkpoints, they just waved us through, although a couple of times, they asked where we had been and wanted to see import documents for the bikes.

The standard question from John Q. Public goes something like, “*Is Mexico (or fill in the country of your choice) safe?*” I’d sum it up scorecard-style:

- 6,700 miles outside of the USA
- 6 countries
- 28 days
- 3 times one rider became separated from the other two (Olie)
- 2 cases of mild food poisoning (Darrel)
- ½ dozen times up or down a one-way street the wrong way (me)
- 1 real river crossing
- 2 small bike breakages due to rough roads (Darrel and Olie)
- 1 day of rain
- Lots of nice, normal, hard-working people - everyone we came across
- 0 accidents, incidents, breakdowns, robberies, muggings, kidnappings, high crimes, or misdemeanors. In other words, ZILCH, NADA, NIL

Finally, thanks to *Truckin’* from The Grateful Dead:

“Sometimes the light’s all shinin’ on me; Other times I can barely see. Lately it occurs to me what a long, strange trip it’s been.” –Mike

Safety Talk

IMPORTANT NOTICES: *Ultimately, the safety of motorcycle riders and their passengers is their own responsibility. Nothing presented in the column supersedes, negates or relieves a motorcyclist and/or passenger from assumption of personal responsibility for their actions and safety. [Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from the April 2018 FLMSTA Gator Tale.]*

Florida Riding – Not for the Faint of Heart

By Doug Westly

Van says...Adding 500,000 new residents to Florida last year, we have many more potential "Hazards" to contend with. Doug's words ring ever more true..

As we rode home from the latest MSTA lunch gathering yesterday, I realized I had promised Don Moe an article by today. Fortunately, it only took two miles from the restaurant to reach a decision.

In those first two miles, I almost got hit twice by inattentive drivers. Really? Anyway, that got me thinking about some of the different hazards we face in Florida, compared to the rest of the U.S. riding areas...

Hazard #1 - Older drivers. You know them. They have achieved their life's goals. They have retired, moved to Florida, bought a big car and are driving to their pickle ball appointment, usually slow and in the left lane. Beware the pickle ball driver, as they have no clue, change lanes without warning, and will skewer you before they even realize they have wandered.

Hazard #2 - Foreign drivers. I am all for legal immigration and opportunity. However, when a foreigner brings their (usually atrocious) driving habits with them, the result is serious danger to all of us on 2 wheels. To them, a red light is a mere suggestion. My hat is off to our MSTA brothers in SE Florida. I don't know how you do it. I refuse to ride in the Ft Lauderdale/Miami area, except to carefully and quickly scoot through on the way to Key West!

Hazard #3 - Wildlife. Alligators, wild pigs, buzzards, LARGE turtles, deer, turkeys (yes, the wild ones will fly)...you name it, we've got it. If you ride in the rural areas of central Florida, be prepared for the indigenous, non-human residents.

Hazard #4 - Local Idiots. OK, these are everywhere in the U.S. However, it seems we've got more than our fair percentage of them. You can usually tell them by the age and condition of their vehicle. If there is a gun rack in the back window, especially if it's being used at the time, I advise caution.

Hazard #5 - Other Bikers. Notice I didn't characterize them as "Motorcyclists." I draw a distinct difference between the two. Motorcyclists, regardless of the brand loyalty, understand the sport, are considerate of other riders (again, regardless of the brand), wave a friendly greeting and even say "hi" at motorcycle gathering spots. "Bikers" on the other hand are interested in themselves and how their bike enhances...well, whatever they are trying to enhance. This is where I apply my own "Chrome Rule". The more chrome (or carbon fiber; the two are identical for this purpose), the more suspicious I become of their riding intentions. Maybe they just love chrome and they are actually accomplished, considerate motorcyclists. On the other hand, pass or be passed with caution when the Chrome Clown appears.

It simply comes down to this: We may not have the best roads in the country to ride, but we do get to ride them year round. There are good roads everywhere. Unfortunately, with our wonderful riding weather and good pavement also comes other highway users. It's up to everyone to keep a wary eye for that older, foreign, idiot weaving all over their lane, with their cell phone in their hand (almost forgot to mention that one!). Remember, just because you think you're an accomplished rider doesn't mean the idiot won't come for you! Pay attention out there, wherever and whenever you ride!

Ride safe! – Doug Westly

Florida News



South Director's Report

2023 is off and running...

While most of the MSTA membership is shivering and snowed in, we had 4 rides this month!! Who remembers how to winterize their bike...??? Doug hosted the Jan. 1 ride to our legacy destination, Peck's Old Port Cove. A great turnout and start for the new year of smiles and miles! On Jan. 14, Tom gathered the chilled riders at Charlie and Jakes BBQ to warm up over hot sandwiches!! See below...



On January 21st, a whole bunch of riders joined Van to return to the Gator Shack on Babcock Ranch. And on January 28th, another whole bunch of riders made their way to Solomon's Castle to kick off Doug's official start as our West Area Rep!!

The South Lunch Ride had much to offer. Great weather, a rustic restaurant in the middle of 100,000s of acres of truly old Florida, and few good S. Fl. roads! We started with 10 departing the 7-11, and added 3 more at Love's! We divided into two groups from there. A huge thanks to Jim Park, James Siler and Buck Jones for stepping up to make the ride safe for the riders and a non-event for the other road users!! Our Sena units performed admirably as well.

With clean roads and perfect temps, we enjoyed ourselves over hill and dale... Upon arrival, we established an impressive array of ST bikes along the back of the parking lot. All in, we had 22 for lunch. And

good news to report. Dorthy's new knees are rehabbing well, and Carl and Ilse are making headway with their return to two wheels. And we were blessed with several returning faces in the crowd - Dell Haverland, Gregg Franklin, Donald White! New member, Tim Lynch brought along a friend for good measure as well!



And how about the service and food at the Gator Shack?!? Despite only anticipating 12-15 of us, they simply rolled with the gathering crowd and knocked us out with great service and delicious food! Though there weren't any takers for the Eco Tour this time, I think a few seeds were planted for a return visit among some of the diners...

As is usual for such a crowd, the 50/50 raffle was well funded. Our winner, Jim Park, graciously donated his half of the pot back to the Chapter, adding \$120 to our total!! And, the West Lunch Ride added another \$61 to our total, after winner Dennis Mitchell donated back \$20 of his take of \$41. For now, that leaves the Chapter total at \$1,229. Always a BIG THANKS to all who participate in our raffle!!



On February 1st, we will subtract \$165 for the 2022 Chapter expenses for our GoDaddy obligations. A separate email will be sent to all members with more details. As a heads-up, 2023 will be our "catch up year" with renewals for the domain and the website along with the yearly marketing costs.

What's Next??

We have three! rides in February. The **East Central Lunch** ride on **February 4th** heads back **St. John's River Grille in DeLand**. A lovely setting! Two weeks later, join us for the **South Lunch Ride** when we head to a new-to-us location, **Sebastian Saltwater Marina**, on the water and oddly enough in **Sebastian!** And on **February 25th**, the **West Central Lunch** ride lands at the **Florida Cracker Cook Shack in Brooksville!** A new start for an old location.

Looking way ahead, registration is now open for STAR '23!! Members received a detailed email with all the info needed to make your plans...NOW!! Committing early makes it so much easier to ensure your attendance! Ya know it's in Knoxville, right!?

Membership News!!

If you are receiving the *Gator Tale*, but not my announcements, **PLEASE** email me ASAP to correct my files. I believe I'm up to date...

THANKS to Don Moe for his efforts EVERY month to bring our Florida membership up to date with all the news about our new and renewing members!!

Here's what we know today...

FLMSTA welcomes 3 new members – Wade Osborne, Tampa, Lodewyk Steyn, Loxahatchee, and Robert Henry, Dade City. Great to have you ride with us!

These Florida memberships have recently expired or will expire soon:

Frederick Blackall	Nir Frucht	Raymond Harcourt	Prior Powers	Eckart Schneider
Jeffrey Withrow	Ilse Zeigler			

These Florida memberships have recently renewed their membership in the MSTA:

Tom Batchelor	Michael Brennan	Robert Croot	Stephen Evans	Larry Gonzalez
Garth Jenkins	Carolyn Pastorella	Gary Pastorella	Bob Shields	Alan Spears
Dennis Villarose	Donna Villarose			

We urge all our members to renew their memberships and continue supporting their MSTA. If you have a question about when your membership expires, please contact the membership committee at membership@ridemsta.com. Renewing or joining can be done quickly and securely online at PlanetReg.com/MSTArenew or PlanetReg.com/MSTAjoin respectively. If you use a pre-printed form from STARreview or an ITR, be sure to mail it to the new member of our new membership team, **Scott Snedden, 11484 Waterwood Dr., Tyler, TX 75703**, and not to the address of any prior membership director.

If you only want to update your phone, email, bikes, or other details, you can do so quickly via PlanetReg.com/MSTAupdate. **Please include enough unchanging information to assure the correct member is updated in the database.**

When you encounter a rider who would seem to be a good fit as a new MSTA member, please pass along one of our brand-new **Invitation-To-Ride Tri-folds!** For each new member you recruit and who provides your name and/or membership number on the application, you will receive a coupon for a **raffle ticket for the motorcycle touring package drawing at our next STAR event**. Any new or current member who joins or renews as a Sustaining Member will likewise receive a coupon for a raffle ticket for each year of the new membership term.



Random Ramblings!!

Well, we've coped with COVID for over nearly 3 YEARS now, and likely you all have settled your score with the pandemic and your course of action. FYI, the latest Covalent boosters are available. As the variants continue to circulate around the globe, please stay vigilant and continue to be healthy. Oh, and remember, everything else we fought before 2020 is still out there as well!!

We are back to LUNCH rides for the next several months. And, we've begun to offer 3 rides a month for your pleasure!!

We've had a terrific year sharing good grub and lots of great gab!! Our new personnel ought to make 2023 even more better... 😊

Hoping you're living the life you love, and loving the life you live...

When you can...

Join one of our monthly rides!!

And invite a friend to ride along!!

Ride well! Ride often!! Do it safely!!!

ATGATT Van

MSTA Florida State Co-Director

January 1st New Year's Day Ride – Peck's Old Cove, Ozello, FL – Doug Westly

The Florida Central MSTA gathering for New Year's Day was at the now traditional spot of Peck's Old Port Cove in Ozello. Directly on the coast, at the end of a winding, 10-mile road through the Florida shallows and islands, Peck's is a great destination for central Florida riders. The weather was perfect, as 16 MSTA riders gathered for a lunch of fresh-caught fish, crabs and assorted side dishes. Time to sit out on the waterside deck and enjoy the meal and stories!



East-Central Ride – Charlie & Jake's, Indian Harbour, FL – Tom Blake



We did an hour and a half loop west and north through the Deseret Ranch and then east through Cocoa and south past waterfront homes on Merritt Island to get to Charlie & Jake's BBQ in Indian Harbour Beach.



On the day of our ride, central Florida woke up to temperatures well into the 30's. It was around 40° at the rendezvous and climbed only into the 50's by afternoon. But, you know, some of us actually relish the challenge of a cold ride (so long as it's dry). Besides, the sun was out, and skies were blue. It was a beautiful day to be out and about.

Doug, Eckert, Larry and I, along with Space Coast BMW Riders Ed and Mike, set off from West Melbourne at 9:30 and did an hour and a half loop west and north through the Deseret Ranch and then east through Cocoa and south past waterfront homes on Merritt Island to get to Charlie & Jake's BBQ in Indian Harbour Beach. We could have gotten there in under

thirty minutes if we'd gone straight up. But what fun would that have been?

After reading the "Leading a Successful Ride" article in the latest STARreview, I added a quick stop at a McDonalds in West Cocoa so we could thaw, refresh and take care of business. We had only been riding for an hour but not everyone may have stayed warm and comfortable.

When we got to C&J's, I was delighted to again see Fermin and Anita, out-of-state MSTA'ers wintering in central Florida. (They attended the December ride.) Another **big** surprise was Jim B, all the way down from the Jacksonville area. Jim logged 200 frigid miles by way of Orlando to join us. Said he was interested in seeing the new Brightline RR track running east from OIA - not to mention taking a nice long, bracing ride to join friends for lunch. I get it, Jim. Terry, a third SC BMW Rider, met us at the rendezvous but decided he wasn't dressed warm enough for the loop. He joined us later at C&J's. Alan, from the Orlando area was the final arrival, for a total of 11.

We were warmly welcomed at Charlie & Jakes. They seated us in a quiet room adjacent the large, main dining area (which had a sports bar vibe). Our pleasant and accommodating server efficiently went about taking orders, keeping the coffee cups filled, delivering hot food to the correct people, etc. She was exceptional. The menu had something for every appetite. I think we were all very satisfied with the venue, food and service. Moreover, the whole staff seemed genuinely pleased to have our business. Of course, there was plenty of gab to fill the two hours we were there.

I was having so much fun that I completely forgot to snap some pictures inside. Ed, however, provided us with several he took with his GoPro on the ride over. Thank-you, sir.,

Tom

Note: My friend Ed, of the Space Coast BMW Riders club, was kind enough to put a link to the FL MSTA Rides calendar along with our green and yellow graphic on their Facebook page. Please check it out at: www.facebook.com/groups/spacecoastbmwridders. Some of our riders go on their rides from time to time and vis versa. The publicity is appreciated and in part reciprocated here.

West Central Lunch Ride – Solomon's Castle, Ona, FL – Doug Westly



The last ride destination of the month for central MSTA riders was at Solomon's Castle in Ona. One of Florida's most unique attractions, Solomon's Castle is a completely home-built castle, with a ship-shaped restaurant and lighthouse also attending the edifice.

It was another beautiful Saturday to ride, with highs in the low 70s. MSTA riders from all over central and south Florida showed up for lunch, with eventually 22 MSTA bikes taking up almost half of the paved parking!

Florida Rides This Month

Always remember to check the Florida MSTA [Event Calendar](#) and/or your email for updates on scheduled rides. Changes in times, dates, and especially locations are often out of our control and with short notice.

MSTA Florida East Central Lunch Ride

When: Saturday, February 4th, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **St. John's River Grille**, 2997 FL-44, **Deland**, FL ☎ (386) 855-2427 ([map](#))

Description: St John's River Grille – We've been here before during Bike Week. The restaurant is right on the St John's River west of Deland with plenty of boat traffic to eyeball while we gnaw and gab. Turn in at the KOA sign and follow the road back. It's a nice-looking place with ample paved parking.

Contact: Tom, tblakel@cfl.rr.com, or ☎ (321) 794-6147

MSTA Florida South Lunch Ride

When: Saturday, February 18th, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **Sebastian Saltwater Marina and Lodge**, 1732 Indian River Dr., **Sebastian**, FL ☎ (772) 918-4229 ([map](#))

Description: On the water, repairs made, and ready for us!!

Contact: Van, busavanflmsta@gmail.com, or ☎ (561) 386-2594

MSTA Florida West Central Lunch Ride

When: Saturday, February 25th, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **Florida Cracker Cook Shack**, 511 S. Broad Street, **Brooksville**, FL ☎ (352) 796-9197 ([map](#))

Description: This is the old Ma's Restaurant, now reopened as a BBQ place. Haven't been since the reopening, but it's got good reviews and looks good from the outside with a remodel.

Contact: Doug, flwingrdr@msn.com, or ☎ (813) 928-1663

Future Florida Rides

Note that the future ride events are included to facilitate longer term planning. The destinations and/or dates may be changed just before the ride dates. Please check the Florida MSTA [Event Calendar](#) for any updates.

Daytona Bike Week

When: Friday-Sunday, **March 3 – 12, 2023**

Location: **Daytona Beach**, FL ☎ (352) 795-2806 ([map](#))

Description: 82nd Anniversary of Bike Week in Daytona. Possible races:
Flat track / Supercross / Daytona 200 Road Race

Contact: www.officialbikeweek.com

MSTA Daytona Bike Week Lunch Ride

When: Thursday, **March 9th**, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **RiverGrille on the Tomoka**, 950 US-1, **Ormond Beach**, FL ☎ (386) 615-2004 ([map](#))

Description: This is a new location for our Thursday Bike Week Lunch. No one can complain about having a long ride from Daytona attractions to get here. There is a really nice spot alongside the Tomoka River just north of mainland Ormond. **They open at 11:30 and we'd like to be first in line.**

Contact: Tom, tblakel@cfl.rr.com, or ☎ (321) 794-6147

MSTA Florida South Lunch Ride

When: Saturday, **March 18th**, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **JR's BBQ & Saloon**, 15492 SW Warfield Blvd., **Indiantown**, FL ☎ (772) 597-0876 ([map](#))

Description: First time visit to a really local eastside location! Not much to look at on the outside, but the menu looks terrific!!

Contact: Van, busavanflmsta@gmail.com, or ☎ (561) 386-2594

MSTA Florida West Central Lunch Ride

When: Saturday, March 18th, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **Woody's River Roo**, 5717 18th Street E., **Ellenton**, FL ☎ (941) 722-2391 ([map](#))

Description: Can't go wrong with this one!! Get there early to grab the bike parking spots!

Contact: Doug, flwingrdr@msn.com, or ☎ (813) 928-1663

MSTA Florida East Central Lunch Ride

When: Saturday, March 25th, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **Eaton's Beach Sandbar & Grill**, 15790 SE 134th Ave., **Weirsdale**, FL ☎ (352) 259-2444 ([map](#))

Description: Eaton's Beach Sandbar & Grill – We tried this place a few years ago on a member's recommendation and thought it was a good choice and a nice alternative to Gator Joe's. It's a good-sized place with great views out over Lake Weir, which is a water sports playground. They have separate, paved motorcycle parking. Good central location with some really enjoyable roads.

Contact: Tom, tblake1@cfl.rr.com, or ☎ (321) 794-6147

For additional Florida events and information, [click here](#) to see the Florida MSTA website's Events page. The Florida MSTA chapter also has a presence on Facebook with upcoming events and past photos: [click here](#).

Florida MSTA Apparel



As a reminder, our Florida State Storefront is open online for your MSTA-branded apparel! Go to mstaflorida.qbstores.com. We have made arrangements with the supplier for our National Gearbox to allow our State membership to buy shirts, hats, etc. with our State logos directly from the source!!! No muss, no fuss!! Order yours today!! They offer both embroidery and digital print options. Click onto the Embroidered Apparel or Shop By Logo for each option. Don't hesitate to contact Queensboro directly with any and all questions. They are very customer friendly. They also offer Polo shirts and T-shirts with pockets!! Shopping finds online... We found some fun motorcycle t-shirts you can order online. Click the image for this particular t-shirt. There are other fun motorcycle t-shirts online at <https://teespring.com/shop/motorcycle-tshirts>.



These MSTA websites have extensive event information:

National MSTA RideMSTA.com **SE Regional MSTA** MSTA-SE.com **Florida MSTA** FLMSTA.org

We're also on Facebook: facebook.com/FLMSTA/

More Contact Information			
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Classified Ads

To find a buyer for your motorcycle items, please send your ad and pictures by email to editor@flmsta.org. Don't trash it, recycle it! One man's trash is another man's treasure!