



# The Florida Gator Tale

Newsletter of the Florida Chapter of the  
Motorcycle Sport Touring Association

November 2022 - Volume 15 Issue 11

## In November 2022 Issue:

- Page 1 – [Feature Article](#)  
Page 4 – [Safety Talk](#)  
Page 5 – [Florida News](#)  
Page 7 – [Florida Rides](#)  
Page 7 – [Future Florida Rides](#)  
Page 8 – [Florida MSTa Apparel](#)  
Page 8 – [Classified Ads](#)

## Contact Information:

### South Florida Director:

Van VanSteelant – [busavanfilmsta@gmail.com](mailto:busavanfilmsta@gmail.com)

### Central Florida Director:

Carl Swofford – [carltr6@hotmail.com](mailto:carltr6@hotmail.com)

### Florida Gator Tale Editor:

Kim Longacre – [editor@flmsta.org](mailto:editor@flmsta.org)

## Feature Article

### Riding the Auto Train

By Doug Westly

If you live in the southeast U.S. and have never ridden the Auto Train, you are missing out. The [Amtrak Auto Train](#) runs non-stop between Sanford FL and Lorton VA. An overnight train that carries passengers as well as their cars and motorcycles, the Auto Train is a great way to avoid the riding horrors and/or boredom of I-95 or I-75.

The Sanford/Lorton (and reverse run) Auto Train is the only passenger/car carrying train in the U.S. Starting either in Sanford, just to the east of Orlando, or in Lorton, just south of Washington DC, the half-mile long train leaves at 5 pm and arrives at its destination around 10 am the next morning. Amtrak uses

specialty-designed car carriers to transport the passengers' cars, loaded by the Amtrak yard workers at one end and unloaded at the other. While the cars (and motorcycles) ride in the car carriers overnight, passengers can choose from a range of accommodations, from standard upright (and fairly roomy) airline-style seats, to full private cabins. The cabins are complete with their own toilet/shower facilities, a roomy couch which converts to a bed for the night and a second overhead bunk, a separate airline style chair, as well as a sink and some minimal storage space.

To use the Auto Train, you simply go on the [Amtrak website](#), select date(s) of travel (you can go one-way or round trip), indicated number of passengers, pick your choice of accommodations, indicate you are bringing a motorcycle(s) and buy your tickets. Make sure you read all the rules for bringing on your motorcycle. By the way, 3-wheelers are not allowed.



Sanford Auto Train entrance, showing vehicle check-in and the train



Motorcycles loaded onto the train trolley

On travel day, vehicle check-in and loading starts at 12:30 pm and goes until 3 pm. All vehicles must be checked in by 3 pm. The Auto Train staff is usually very accommodating to motorcyclists, allowing them to bypass the car check-in line and go straight to the motorcycle loading area. There you show your ticket, which has your motorcycle listed on it, and ride your bike up onto a loading ramp, where a specially-designed trolley is waiting. You ride your bike onto the trolley where you hold it while Amtrak staff strap it down. Then you get off the bike, grab your overnight bag, and head into the station to check-in and wait for boarding. It really is that easy.

At the destination, you get your riding gear back on, hop off the train and head over to the motorcycle unloading area. The motorcycles are brought out on their trolley cars and pushed up to the loading dock. When it's your turn, you get back on your bike as they unstrap it, and then they push you off the trolley back onto the loading dock. After that, it is all up to you.



*Trolleys hooked for loading*

We've done the Auto Train on a few occasions. As we live in Florida, it's a great way to travel in comfort overnight to VA, get the bikes off in Lorton, ride over to the [Blue Ridge Parkway \(BRP\)](#) which is only a couple of riding hours from the train station, and enjoy a couple of days riding back south on the BRP and backroads. As seasoned Auto Train travelers, we would like to offer a few tips...



*Auto Train private cabin*

First and most important, spring for the private cabin. Not the regular coach seats, or even the "roomette", as the latter does not have a private toilet/shower. The private cabin gives you complete privacy and a full toilet/shower, comes with complimentary dinner service in the dining car, bed turn-down service at the time of your choice, and a good night's sleep. You also get complimentary breakfast in the morning, during which time your room is made up. The room has a large couch that folds down into a bed, a 2nd smaller bunk above it, and an airline-style seat alongside the window. All of that, along with a shower after the ride to the station as well as another first thing in the morning and being refreshed for the ride makes the extra cost for the cabin well worth the price. The private cabins are all on the upper level of the cars, so you are also away from the track noise and get a great view of the passing countryside.

Get to the station and check in early. You will have to wait a couple of hours until boarding, but it's worth it. That lets you choose the dinner time of your choice, since there are at least a couple of seating times for evening dining. By the way, the dinner meal is usually very good and complete with salad, drink, entree, dessert and a complimentary glass of wine. Becky had salmon, and I had a really good steak on our last trip. As another unique offering on the Sanford end, the city offers a free shuttle ride to/from downtown historic Sanford, if you want to go hangout there for an hour or two before boarding.

Pack an overnight bag you can easily access on the bike, so you don't have to go shuffling clothes around. Also, bring some warm room clothes, as the train car air conditioning is usually fairly cool. The more you can leave on the bike, the better. Even the private cabins have only minimal storage space. We usually use one larger bag to stuff our riding gear in, leave our helmets in the bikes and carry a small overnight bag for casual clothes on the train.

Bring snacks and reading material, or your iPad/tablet to watch a movie, etc. You can buy some drinks and snacks in the bar/dining car, but the selection is limited. Other than piped-in music on the train, there is no other entertainment. The train does have WiFi, and since you're traveling on the ground, you almost always have an internet/phone connection as well.

The train will slow down and stop occasionally as it makes its overnight trip, once to change crews and at times to avoid other rail traffic. You do have to get used to that while sleeping, although we usually don't even wake up for it.

You also get to sit by the big picture window and look down at the passing scenery as you kick back and relax, avoiding all the hassle of the interstate and crazy driving. The Auto Train can't be beat. Now, if they only had one that ran from the East Coast to Denver, so we could avoid that whole Kansas/Nebraska/Oklahoma ride...

*–Doug Westly*



*View from private cabin, crossing the Potomac, heading into Lorton station*

## *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.*

### **Do Smarter Bikes = Dumber Riders?**

*By Doug Westly*

There has been a debate in racing venues for some time on the electronic / mechanical aids now being utilized on race bikes. The basic discussion is whether or not the use of advanced motorcycle technology actually substitutes for rider skill. Maybe, we should take a look at this from the average rider perspective...



Over the past 35 years, motorcycling has seen tremendous advancements in systems designed primarily to enhance rider safety. Starting in 1988, when BMW introduced the first Anti-Lock Brake System (ABS), and up to today, where we see advancements like Lean-angle ABS (L-ABS), traction control, wheelie control, electronic suspension, ride modes, and now even rear-wheel slide control, the sport has steadily applied more and more technology to riding. However, with this increase in technology application, are riders starting to depend on these safety and ride systems as a substitute for their own skills, and (another thought) is this even possibly changing how we ride?

So, are we starting to depend on these systems too much? After a lot of thought, and discussions with several industry professional riders, here are a couple of examples:

**ABS** - ABS was initially designed as, and still remains, almost exclusively a safety system. It only activates once the system detects a wheel lock-up or pending lock-up. In other words, in poor traction conditions or when the rider otherwise requires emergency braking, ABS is there to ensure traction between the tires and riding surface are maintained. Even this probably influences our riding skills to some degree, as how many average riders go out and practice threshold braking anyway? Even those that used to practice the technique probably don't anymore, once they start riding an ABS-equipped bike. When was the last time you practiced threshold braking?

**L-ABS** - Lean-angle ABS has been an outgrowth of further electronic advancements in motorcycling, as high-end motorcycles now typically utilize a 5- or 6-axis electronic measuring unit (EMU) to detect acceleration/braking, lean angle, etc. By doing this, they can adjust the amount of ABS (and even normal) braking force while the bike is leaned over, forcing sharing of traction. So, knowing this, would riders deliberately run faster into corners, relying on the L-ABS to keep them out of trouble if they have to apply later or more braking force? How many riders know about and/or practice trail braking?

We can go on and on. Does wheelie control really have a place in street riding? Does it simply encourage more aggressive riding behavior? Traction control is a great system, particularly in rain or other minimal traction conditions, but does it mean we're going to be less cautious on rain-soaked roads? Does electronic suspension allow us to start tackling obstacles that are at (or past) the limit of our skill set, and hope the system can compensate for any (possibly fatal) errors?

The bottom line is that advancements in riding technology have provided enhanced experiences in motorcycling, as well as offer additional safety margin in extreme or emergency riding situations. Knowing what these systems really do and are able to provide a rider, given specific riding conditions, is key to utilizing them properly. Simply knowing the system(s) exists on your bike and expect it to get you out of a jam is probably not a smart way to approach riding. Using them to become even more aggressive with riding behavior probably isn't the best approach to rider longevity. Riders need to SAFELY learn what their bikes are capable of doing with these systems, and ensure advanced motorcycle electronic/mechanical systems don't become a substitute for prudent, capable riding.

*Ride safe! – Doug Westly*



## South Director's Report

### **Another big storm will alter the Florida "landscape" for some time to come...**

Most of the reports from our west-side members have been thankfully tales of wind and rain, and little damage. Rich, in the Venice area, is coping with housing damage and decisions on what he'll do next. FEMA has come through already, and provided assistance to him. It was terrific to see him at our South Lunch Ride and share some camaraderie with the rest of us.

Carl's report on the Central Lunch Ride is below. Though Don Jose's endured some damage to their dock and seawall along Lake Jackson, they were most welcoming to the large crowd of 18 that gathered from both coasts and points in between!! As promised, a few Southies joined in the fun as well!!

Weeks later, the South Lunch Ride was held at the Log Cabin BBQ in La Belle. Another crowd of 19 enjoyed a scrumptious plethora of delectable delights!! In other words, good grub!! And the staff were just terrific. Though they didn't take reservations on the weekends, they were ready for us, even when we overflowed to another table! With their embracing tableside digital ordering and payments, and a competent cook staff, we were in dining heaven! A must repeat declaration was made by all!

A good number of the attendees were the 11 riders who gathered at the 7-11 in Loxahatchee! We settled on two groups separated by a quarter mile to keep the ride safe and "user friendly" for the other motorists who may need to merge or exit. Our Senas were put to good use, and worked as advertised! My thanks to Jim, Steve and Buck for their efforts to make the ride safe and uneventful. The "Melbourne Boys" and usual "Westsidiers" rounded out the attendance. Seems the combo of good weather and a popular destination just worked!

A result of the great turnouts, this month's 50/50 sums were significant! Don M. was a repeat winner of the Central pot of \$25 while first time winner, Ellen, made off with \$46 from the South total. Our new Chapter total is \$926. Always a **BIG THANKS** to all who participate in our raffle!!

And some of you may have caught that our Safety Article is NEW this month! As a result of Doug and Becky stepping away from their Honda Demo duties, Doug has made himself available to us again to contribute a few new articles over the next year. He may also revisit several of his previous articles and "freshen" them up for us!! A most welcomed return to the Gator Tale!!



*A crowd of 19 riders for the South ride enjoyed scrumptious food at Log Cabin BBQ in La Belle.*

## What's Next??

Ok, I intend to support and encourage everybody's decision on whether to ride, eat and be merry. All restrictions have been lifted for all enterprises across Florida. No new warnings or mandates will be forthcoming. We will continue to contact the restaurants to be sure they can handle our groups. Recent experience indicates everybody is back to pre-COVID protocols.

The **Central Lunch ride** happens first. Head to **Goodrich Seafood & Oyster House in Oak Hill on November 5th**. One week later, the **South Lunch ride** "invades" **Solomon's Castle in Ona on November 12th**. Look for the announcements soon.

## 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...

These Florida memberships have recently expired or will expire soon:

Stephen Albert	Richard Alleman	Tom Blake	Brad Coston	Mary Catherine Davis
Brian Dickerson	Diana Dickerson	Gary Gray	Mike Halburnt	Paul Heydemann
Steve Hudson	Dennis Mitchell	Joseph Walsh		

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

Robert Holder      Michael Shooks

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](mailto:membership@ridemsta.com). Renewing or joining can be done quickly and securely online at [PlanetReg.com/MSTArenew](http://PlanetReg.com/MSTArenew) or [PlanetReg.com/MSTAjoin](http://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](http://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!!

We swing back to LUNCH rides for the next seven months. For the end of this year, we pack them into the first two weeks to avoid conflicts of interest with the Holidays! We'll finalize the December Holiday and New Year's rides shortly.

Well, we've coped with COVID for 2.5 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.

*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**



### Central Director's Report

#### **October Central Ride – Don Jose's Mexican Restaurant, Sebring, FL**

In spite of Hurricane Ian damage and flooding, we had a good turnout at the Don Jose's Mexican Restaurant in Sebring. The weather was pleasant, and 18 riders turned out. Both the Central and South areas were well represented.

As usual the Don Jose's staff was excellent, accommodations and service was great. They seated us together at one long table. The food was tasty, and conversation flowed freely. It was a good get-together. All too soon, it was time to depart. Some of us on the east coast encountered some rain on the ride back home, but it didn't dampen our enthusiasm or spirit.



*Food and service was great at Don Jose's.*



*Great weather, and 18 riders turned out in Sebring for the October Central Ride.*

## **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 Central Lunch Ride**

When: Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **Goodrich Seafood & Oyster House**, 253 River Rd, **Oak Hill**, FL ☎ (386) 345-3397 ([map](#))

Description: We're going back to a waterside location!! An old favorite that always delivers!

Contact: Carl, [carltr6@hotmail.com](mailto:carltr6@hotmail.com), or ☎ (386) 793-0030

### **MSTA Florida South Lunch Ride**

When: Saturday, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **Solomon's Castle**, 4533 Solomon Rd., **Ona**, FL ☎ (863) 494-6077 ([map](#))

Description: The roads are fixed, and the latest photo gallery shows it's still a wonderful destination!

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

### **MSTA Black Friday Lunch Ride**

When: Friday, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **Marsh Landing Restaurant**, 44 N Broadway St, **Fellsmere**, FL ☎ (772) 571-8622 ([map](#))

Description: We will once again offer you an escape from the melee of frantic shoppers...And we'll head inland to an old favorite of ours! We had a great turnout last year, so we'll hit the repeat button!! Bring your appetite and good cheer for a wonderful afternoon of good grub and great gab!!

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

## **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.

### **MSTA Florida Statewide Holiday Lunch Ride**

When: Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **The Twisted Prop Bar & Grille**, 615 7<sup>th</sup> SW, **Winter Haven**, FL ☎ (863) 293-1937 ([map](#))

Description: A central location to maximize the participants!! New-to-us destination!! Plenty of room, friendly menu, and they took our reservation in October!!

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

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](http://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](http://RideMSTA.com)    *SE Regional MSTA* [MSTA-SE.com](http://MSTA-SE.com)    *Florida MSTA* [FLMSTA.org](http://FLMSTA.org)

---

We're also on Facebook: [facebook.com/FLMSTA/](https://facebook.com/FLMSTA/)

<b>More Contact Information</b>		
<b>Kim Longacre</b> Newsletter Editor <a href="mailto:editor@flmsta.org">editor@flmsta.org</a>	<b>P. 'Van' VanSteelant</b> South Director ☎ (561) 386-2594 <a href="mailto:busavanflmsta@gmail.com">busavanflmsta@gmail.com</a>	<b>Carl Swofford</b> Central Director ☎ (386) 793-0030 <a href="mailto:carltr6@hotmail.com">carltr6@hotmail.com</a>

---

### *Classified Ads*

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