

# The Birth of Route 66 Bike Week

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It all began with Covid... Events were being forced to cancel, or were just shutting down of their own accord. Social gatherings were being banned, and cabin fever was at an all time high. We were starting to plan our 5th annual motorcycle event at the Saddle Sore Ranch, but the looming uncertainties were certainly present. Could we pull it off? How could we ensure everyone's safety, and not break any laws or Covid mandates with our event?

That's when I received an email from Jan Jernigan, of Needles Tourism & Visitor's board, stating that the City of Needles wanted to be involved in our event. This was the first "sign from above" that we needed to keep pushing forward... But what did the city of Needles really have to do with our motorcycle event at the Saddle Sore Ranch, near Kingman???

Next came an email from Oatman's Chamber of Commerce. They wanted

to be involved too, and help promote the event and cross promote each other. The stars were starting to align, and they were definitely speaking to me. We had been doing our motorcycle events at the Saddle Sore Ranch already for several years, but there was just a weird vibe happening at this time due to other motorcycle events in the area being cancelled (again), and everyone scrambling to figure out what was going on.

What we did know is that riders were looking for something... An escape... A release... Yet, how do I include Needles and Oatman, into my event at the Saddle Sore Ranch, and be able to adhere to Covid guidelines and mandates related to safety and gatherings? Then it came to me one night, as I laid in bed pondering how to fit all of this together. It literally made me jump out of bed.... It was an epiphany. A "rolling rally". Rather than having an event that is confined to some parking lot(s), I will make it a "roll-

ing rally", where the attraction is the RIDE... This way, participants are out enjoying the ride, as opposed to a large, centralized, single gathering... By doing it this way, the Saddle Sore Ranch would just be ONE of the stops, as opposed to being the entire event.

By making it a "rolling rally", we could easily include Needles and Oatman, and throw out a few points of interest along the way. Then came my second epiphany... Needles, Oatman and the Saddle Sore Ranch are ALL on Historic Route 66. Why don't we make it "Route 66 Bike Week", and have it stretch all the way from Needles to Seligman? After all, it is a fabulous ride, and it is the longest uninterrupted stretch of the mother road that still remains today. This was perfect! Rather than reaching out to a bunch of vendors to line MY pockets, I said "why not let the small businesses along Route 66 be the vendors? The

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stars of the show.”

It's no secret that many of these businesses struggle, even when times are good. Being bypassed by I-40 has certainly taken a toll. Nowadays, with Covid, most of them are barely hanging on. So I decided to put the focus on them instead. We also included small businesses along what is known as the “Laughlin Loop”. A scenic ride that connects Kingman, Laughlin and Oatman. When it came to lodging, riders were also encouraged to stay at any of the small historic motels along Route 66, so they could get the full experience.

Next, I had to connect the rest of the dots between Needles and Seligman. I reached out to Natalie, at the Kingman Visitor's Center, and received their full support and endorsement. Then the Seligman Chamber of Commerce, who also was very happy about the idea, and more than willing to be a part of it.

By now, I had started receiving emails from some of the small businesses along the route that wanted to be highlighted during the event. I came up with the idea of making them “rally stops”, which were included on an event map, and gave riders some sort of discount or freebie just for stopping in and showing your Route 66 Bike Week wristband. Additionally, we had some stops that offered free raffles, and I even included a scavenger hunt that was based off of the Arizona Route 66 Passport, as a way to support the Arizona Route 66 Preservation Society. Everything about the event was geared towards supporting the LOCAL economy and tourism, and it could not have worked out any better.

Riders came from all over the country. They stayed wherever they wanted, they rode whichever direction they wanted, they stopped and shopped wherever they wanted. All armed with our rally map indicating what each of the rally stops were

offering, they could plan out their days however they wanted. They were allowed to stop back by the Saddle Sore Ranch as often as they liked for the bands, campfire parties, activities, or just to say hello. All in all, there were 38 rally stops, 20 free raffle stops, 14 bands and over 250 miles (round trip) of the most picturesque riding the Southwest has to offer. Not to mention possible side trips to the Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam, Hualapai Mountain and more.

Plans are already in full swing to not only continue Route 66 Bike Week annually (4th weekend in April), but also to expand it into neighboring states. Hopefully, eventually, we can get it to stretch from Chicago to LA. Riders could hop on, and hop off wherever they'd like. For now, we are happy to call Arizona the “Home” of Route 66 Bike Week. For more information, visit [www.Route66BikeWeek.com](http://www.Route66BikeWeek.com)

