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## Hull of a Tour 5

WANDA KENTON SMITH · UPDATED ON MAY 13, 2019

Today marks the final blog of Boaterz 'n Bikerz of America: Hull of a Tour 5, *The Dragon's Roar!* It's been a totally awesome adventure ... and wow, the time has flown by.

Today, we wrap our blog coverage featuring Thursday and Friday tour highlights.

Many of our riders had vacationed in the Great Smokey Mountain area for years, since it is truly recognized as mecca for motorcycling enthusiasts. There are countless backroads and byways that beckon and call; you could ride the tri-state region for weeks and still discover new and exciting challenges. From thrilling mountain twists and stunning vistas, to the glory of rushing waterfalls, natural wonders abound here at every turn.

However, few in our group had ever carved out time from former vacations in the area to visit our first tour stop of the day on Thursday. We left the Iron Horse Resort & Lodge and cruised an hour to the *Wheels Through Time Museum* in Maggie Valley, N.C. I'd heard about this place for years and thought it would be a fun and unique visit for our group of biker buffs. Suffice it to say, this special gem far surpassed our group's expectations.

Dubbed "The Museum that Runs," it includes a vast collection of more than 320 vintage through modern American motorcycles and automobiles, with 99 percent of them in running condition. Instead of wandering around on our own, I had arranged in advance to have a custom tour provided for our group which was presented by a highly knowledgeable and equally captivating young docent, Kris Estep.

Estep walked us through the 38,000 square-foot facility and shared a wealth of interesting insights regarding the evolution of motorcycling and automotive history. The displays were first-rate, bona-fide museum quality, and each exhibit told an amazing story of the machines and the people who built and rode them. There was an eclectic mix of rare machines — both motorcycles and classic cars — as well as artwork, gear, equipment, garage replications and so much more. Estep at times would jump start one of the legends and let us hear and experience its throaty rumble firsthand. It truly brought history to life!

A few of my favorite exhibits included the Hill Climb Collection, a group of 16 rare motorcycles built by the Big 3 of their day during the Great Depression: Harley Davidson, Excelsior and Indian. These models were designed to win national hill climbing contests, which represented big spectator events of the day. I also enjoyed learning about "the rarest American motorcycle" in the museum, a 1916 Traub motorcycle that was accidentally discovered in 1967 preserved in the brick wall of a Chicago home. I'd never heard of this brand; its story was downright compelling.

There was plenty of sexy auto eye candy, too, including a one-off 1949 Veritas that caught my fancy, along with some 32' roadsters, a Steve McQueen-owned 1949 Cadillac and a monster-sized, candy-apple red 1954 El Dorado, among others.

We spent several hours on site; I could have hung out the rest of the day. Founder Dale Walksler has created a stunning collection and if you're ever in the area, it's definitely worth the visit. For more, check out [www.wheelsthroughtime.com](http://www.wheelsthroughtime.com) as there are multiple videos and TV episodes available to view.

We wrapped the afternoon riding the area, with brief stops in neighboring Cherokee and the surrounding mountains. That evening, we parked our bikes and boarded a passenger van to visit the nearby town of Bryson City, NC. We dined at the Everett Boutique Hotel & Bistro, a recommendation from the owners of the Iron Horse. A red-bricked former bank building from 1908 complete with vault that has been beautifully converted to house both luxury lodging and dining, the hotel has earned rave reviews and media coverage from the likes of Southern Living magazine, among others. Situated in the heart of the town's historic district, the bistro serves up a mix of freshly sourced ingredients and seasonal fare. Top picks on the menu during our visit was fresh trout, meatloaf, steak, pastas and lobster bisque. Following dinner and dessert, we were treated to a personal tour of the hotel by co-owner Scott Mastej, plus given a view of the impressive private rooftop terrace with its beautiful, blazing firepit.

We had been so fortunate to have great weather to date, but we had concerns about the Friday forecast. While we woke to overcast skies, there was no rain predicted through early afternoon, so we happily revved up our engines and set out for Clingman's Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park via 19 and up 441.

Our ride was fantastic. The sun timed itself perfectly and broke through the clouds as we turned off 441 at the intersection of North Carolina and Tennessee. We stopped to add a layer of warmth and then proceeded to climb up seven curvy miles on Clingmans Dome Road, landing in a designated parking area. We then set out on foot to hike to the summit, huffing and puffing straight up a steep, half mile trail. No pun intended, but it truly was ... *breathtaking*.

Clingmans Dome Observation Tower is perched at the highest peak of the Smokies, at a lofty elevation of 6,643 feet. It represents the highest point in the state of Tennessee, the third highest in Eastern North America and the pinnacle of the Appalachian Trail. We snapped plenty of photos from the panoramic 360-degree observation deck with visibility in some spots reaching 100 miles. In other spots, we were in the clouds! One thing was for sure ... the hike down the mountain was much easier than the climb up!

Our last hurrah was phenomenal, a mix of easy sweeps coupled with a few tantalizing twists and turns that kept the adrenaline running. We stopped for lunch in Cherokee, wandered around the town, and then hoofed it back to the Iron Lodge for some final R & R.

That evening, our group gathered for our official and final Dragon's Roar Celebration Dinner at the Iron Horse, featuring a delicious feast hosted by our 2x returning sponsor Sea Tow. Their custom tour banner was a big hit with our group with their featured slogan: *"On a bike (or a boat) no one ever asks, "are we there yet? Enjoy the ride!"* We enjoyed an outstanding steak dinner, topped off by a delectable death-by-chocolate dessert. One final time, we retreated to the cozy firepit to toast the tour and to bask in the warmth of the many friendships that had been forged.

One final time, I must thank all our sponsors for their support which made this event possible. A big shout out to our title sponsor, Evinrude/BRP, which powered the tour, along with Sea Tow, Malibu Boats, Emerald Coast Marine Group, Boogey Lights, Born to Ride Magazine, Jim Krueger Photography and Kenton Smith Marketing. Kudos also to my event partner and co-founder Jim Krueger, for his countless hours of meticulous route planning.

In closing, I'd like to thank Soundings Trade Only for allowing me to share this adventure, and to you for joining along for the ride. If you missed one of the blogs or would like to check out the image gallery, cruise on over to <http://www.kentonsmithmarketing.com/dragon-s-roar.html>

As I gave my final hugs and bid goodnight to the crew, the last thing question I was asked: "When and where is the next Hull of a Tour?"

*I'll keep you posted.*