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Hull of a Tour 5: And We're Off!

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After six months of intensive planning, the [2019 Boaterz n Bikerz of America: Hull of a Tour - The Dragon's Roar](#) launched in Robbinsville, North Carolina, as an enthusiastic crowd of participants from eight states gathered at the iconic Iron Horse Motorcycle Lodge & Resort for the kick-off captain's meeting and Sunday afternoon mixer.

Besides reviewing the rules of the road and daily agenda, the crew joined in together for a round of Hull of a Tour trivia, plus was tasked to learn about their new tour besties by participating in a spirited ice-breaker.

Some interesting tour facts for this year's tour: of the 24 registered motorcycles, 17 are Harleys, with other brands including BMW, Yamaha, Honda and even a hot Can Am Spyder! The oldest bike is a 1986 BMW K75 owned by freelance boating journalist Dan Armitage, while the newest model is a mustard-yellow 2019 Soft Tail Slim that arrived with fewer than 500 miles, owned by Mary Strauss, director of marketing at Galati Yachts. Dan and his wife Maria, Mary and her husband Richard Strauss, director of technical sales and marketing for GG Schmitt, are four of 21 first-time tour riders, compared to 15 happy repeat offenders.

Following the casual business meeting, most of the crew gathered for a group photo in front of the Iron Horse that was staged and shot by Jim Krueger, event co-founder, road captain and photographer.

Then it was time to kick back, relax and partake of a truly sumptuous Southern feast of mouth-watering North Carolina-style barbeque. There was an abundance of delicious pulled pork, brisket, a mix of sweet and tangy BBQ sauces, homemade melt-in-your-mouth biscuits, potato salad, baked beans and the best buttery peach cobbler ever. The feast was hosted by Evinrude.

We also surprised Andy Lindstrom of Evinrude and Richard Strauss with a surprise birthday celebration including cheesecake and candles, followed by a terrible, off-key choral rendition of "Happy Birthday."

The evening featured some highly competitive games of pool, a friendly round of poker, and chillaxing outside, gathered around the resort's spectacular, multi-colored flaming fire pit. New friends and old ignited or rekindled relationships as we shared in our collective love of boating and biking, coupled with palpable excitement about the week ahead.

Monday dawned in the brisk 'mid fifties, but no one complained; we were just thrilled to be riding and thankful that the weekend rain and thunderstorms had passed. The crew expertly layered itself for the ride, donning leathers and jackets to fend off the cool morning bite.

We lined our bikes up and stretched out, dragon-like, over the property. On signal, we collectively revved up the engines. What a magical moment as we all shared in the exhilaration associated with the deep roar and guttural gusto of 20+ bikes in loud, synchronized harmony! Music to our ears!

On cue, we eased forward in anticipation of the 165-mile trek ahead. While 165 miles in a flat stretch is easy-peasy, the testy twists and turns of the Great Smokey Mountains requires a different skill set altogether.

Our day was spent entirely in North Carolina as we cruised like rock stars in a dazzling ribbon of glorious color through key towns and junctures including Topton, the famous Wayah Road, Franklin, Highland, Cashiers, Sylva and Robbinsville.

We stopped for lunch in the quaint town of Highlands and explored the downtown prior to lunching at the wonderful Mountain Fresh Grocery & Deli.

Following lunch, many stripped down to shirt sleeves as the sun broke into a full smile to warm the ride. We throttled forward beneath spectacular canopied trees and tight, winding roads all along the earthy -fragrant Nantahala Forest. We experienced the refreshing coolness of the rushing Ocoee River as we chased it for miles along the shoreline. The vistas were simply stunning!

One of the day's highlights was the stop at Dry Falls, three miles north of the Highlands in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Riders parked their bikes and hiked about a quarter of a mile to discover a majestic waterfall that cascades over a cliff. We went directly behind it without getting wet.

Our final afternoon leg featured comfortable, easy sweeps on the storied State Road 107, which wrapped us back to the lodge almost eight hours on the dot from when we'd departed.

We toasted our first full day of adventure with an awesome celebration dinner at the Tapoca Tavern, a lovely dining paradise situated on the outdoor deck of the historic Tapoca Lodge Resort in Robbinsville. We experienced a birds-eye view of the magnificent Cheoah River at sunset, followed by a thoroughly enjoyable dining experience.

Tuesday brings an especially exciting challenge as riders take on The Georgia Dragon, also known as the Suches Loop, featuring a series of 50 twisties that are sure to thrill.

Hull of a Tour 5: *The Dragon's Roar* is powered by Evinrude/BRP and sponsored by Sea Tow, Malibu Boats, Emerald Coast Marine Group, Boogey Lights, Born to Ride Magazine, Jim Krueger Photography and Kenton Smith Marketing.