

SOUNDINGS
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Menu

[TradeOnlyToday](#) > [Industry News](#) > [Other](#) > HULL OF A TOUR: Riding the ring of fire

HULL OF A TOUR: Riding the ring of fire

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MOUNT HOOD TO CRATER LAKE and WHITE CITY, Ore. — We woke up Monday with fire in our bellies, eager for another adventure and a full day in the saddle.

We were hot to ride a spectacular stretch of terrain that falls within the “ring of fire,” a 25,000-mile continuum that claims 452 active and dormant volcanoes. On Monday we were riding a portion of the infamous ring, which falls within 680 miles of the Pacific Northwest from Vancouver, British Columbia, to northern California.

The morning was anything but fiery, however. We suited up appropriately for the cool 68 degrees and kicked into high gear for our first stop at Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood. The hour-long ride to the 6,000-foot elevation delivered a motorcycling mecca with sublime roads, staggering mountain vistas and fun-filled sweeps that brought out the grins.



The Hull of a Tour riders' first stop on Monday was at Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood.

At the historic lodge we spotted tiny ant-like figures at the top of the mountain, dotting the snow-capped slopes. We learned that this is a popular summer training camp that draws skiers and teams from throughout the nation, along with nearly 2 million visitors a year. It is one of only two year-round ski resorts in the Northwest.

Jim Krueger and Kyle Mazanti gave us a quick tour of the lodge, which was originally dedicated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and later designated in 1977 as a National Historic Landmark. It is a handsome building with real character and a wealth of distinguishable architectural craftsmanship.



It was time to keep the fire burning, so we revved up the engines and headed out for the main attraction of the day, Crater Lake. However, the highlights of the ride route itself were pretty amazing and deserve mention.

For starters, we were rolling down the highway when I spotted three gorgeous, snow-topped

mountains (maybe the Three Sisters?) looming in the distance ahead. At that precise moment and as is my habit, I just happened to take a quick sweep when I glanced in my rearview mirror — lo and behold, I saw yet another snow-crested beauty winking back at me!

It frustrates me that I can't adequately express the overwhelming sense of bone-deep gratitude I felt at that precise moment, but suffice it to say that I simply took some quiet time to thank God for America and these truly inspiring creations that I believe are His handiwork.

Moments of solitude and deeper introspection explain one of the many reasons I most love to ride. I see things, smell things, feel things when I'm riding and am at one with nature that I would never experience any other way. The ability to hyper-focus with heightened intensity is one reason the motorcycling community is so connected.

The next event that commanded my full attention was the dramatic temperature shift from the exhilarating mountain air to the stifling heat of the High Desert. As we rode the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway straightaway, the temperature skyrocketed to a blistering 97 degrees. We stopped at a gas station to fuel, peel off our jackets, rehydrate and lather on the sunscreen. One of our riders, Bill

Peach, told me his trusty Honda ST1300 registered 113 degrees at the fuel pump. Lawdy, that's nearly a 30-degree spike!

Another impression. We rumbled past a stretch of terrain that featured high, rocky crests and steep plateaus with gently sloping valleys below, exactly like a scene from an old Western. I kept glancing over, expecting to see cowboys, or Indians on horseback, appear on the summit. What can I say: Creativity and imagination just flow when my mind is unleashed and I'm on two wheels!

We zipped into the quaint, hip little town of Bend, Ore., for a quick lunch at the popular Deschutes Brewery & Public House. Tip: If you ever see a bunch of bikes parked in front of a restaurant, you've probably spotted a winner! Bikers always know where to find the good grub, and this local brewery was no exception. We cooled off, relaxed, shot the breeze and enjoyed a very good lunch together, and then we entered final countdown mode to Crater Lake.



The biker boys of Regal Boats proudly show their colors.

According to its website, Crater Lake is the deepest lake in the United States, at 1,943 feet, sporting among the clearest water in the world. It was formed 7,700 years ago as an eruption collapsed a massive volcano.

The ride into Crater Lake National Park is worth the price of entry. As you navigate the park roads and wind your way upward, you're sure to have the same response that many of our riders had when exposed to the lake for the first time. Whoa! The water color is a striking shade of shimmery indigo. It will take your breath away!



Crater Lake, Ore., was a highlight for Pacific Coast riders. Photo by Jim Krueger.

We lined up our bikes for a group photo, fed some friendly chipmunks, and then Kyle Mazanti and I were treated to a delightful surprise "Happy Birthday" serenade by our fellow riders. He looks much younger than his newly minted 60, while I remain firmly committed to 39 and holding. It was fun to share a birthday and such a special occasion with new and old friends alike.



Even the chipmunks warmly welcomed the boaters and bikers to Crater Lake. Photo by Jim Krueger.

As the sun started to sink in the late afternoon sky, we bundled up for our final leg to White City, another one and a half hours away. As we rode through dappled forests with warm sunlight streaming through the trees, I'm sure we all were reflecting on what we had seen and experienced and the magical day we'd enjoyed together.

I'll be blogging every day this week and next Monday, and I invite you to join us right here for a virtual ride-along! If you miss a day and want to catch up, check out the archives by going to the search window at www.tradeonlytoday.com and typing Hull of a Tour.

Wanda Kenton Smith is the event producer and publicist of Boaterz n Bikerz of America: Hull of a Tour. This year's Pacific Coast Rush is presented by title sponsor Freedom Boat Club; platinum sponsor Regal Boats; retail sponsor Alexander Marine USA; and media sponsor Soundings Trade Only, with Kenton Smith Marketing handling publicity.

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