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HULL OF A TOUR: Swathed in a silvery mist

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BAR HARBOR, Maine — Tuesday dawned a misty gray, the color of the whale we had spotted in Lubec the day before.

Despite less than idyllic conditions a little fog couldn't dampen the spirits of our hardy crew. Although we prefer sunny days and blue skies, riders simply roll with the punches.

We boarded our trusty steeds with a bounce in our boots, fired up our engines and set out to hug the Maine coastline en route to the famous hamlet of Bar Harbor, our destination for the night.

Our adventure wound through quaint towns with names such as Machias, Jonesport and Milbridge. The fog was dense, and it spilled tiny water droplets onto our windshields, so we had to focus intently on the road ahead. Although the weather kept us from seeing the best and brightest of coastal life, in time the day revealed its unique allure.

We pulled off the roadside in Machias so our ride captain, Jim Krueger, could slip on his rain gear and others could add layers to counter the damp chill. Some riders took the opportunity to chat with a very friendly couple who opened their door to ask whether we were OK or needed to use their facilities. Others crossed the narrow street to check out the local harbor, replete with traditional Maine Down Easters swathed in a silvery mist.

The tide had washed out, drying one of the boats, which was resting on its sturdy keel. In my part of the world that scene would represent a nightmare, but here it's just a natural part of the ebb and flow of life, with boats expressly designed for such conditions. We took some pretty awesome photographs, and when the crew was ready to rock 'n roll again, we followed suit.

We rode about an hour, stopped for fuel and then gulped down some welcome warm beverages. Chatting with some of the crew during the break, I mentioned how impressed I was with the strong show of patriotism in many of the rural communities we had traveled through, including the country store where we stopped.

American flags waved from light poles, homes, offices and stores. It made me feel proud to see the nation's spirit flying high in this state, whose heritage and founding is woven into our national tapestry.

Everywhere we have ridden we've noticed a great abundance of beautiful bursts of radiant color! Large and small pots of jewel-tone flowers spill out everywhere, from restaurant window boxes to residential porches, from wooden bridges to gas stations.

I'm speculating that because the season is shorter here, Mainers celebrate summer while they can, and that includes basking in the glory of bounteous blooms.

I've never seen so many old cemeteries fronting main roads. I've ridden past a few dozen of these graveyards, with their aging tombstones, huddled together in relatively small plots. Anyone able to solve that riddle?

I asked our crew whether they'd had any curious or interesting insights they might like to share. John Wooldridge, former editor of *Yachting* and *PassageMaker*, noted that he had spotted dozens of 1960s hulls and a generous sprinkling of old lobster and work boats parked in fields.

The latter had no doubt been put out to pasture, but as Wooldridge so aptly said, "The boats seem to serve as a reminder and a monument of what made the area great."

I doubt that I'll ever look at what I once would have considered an old junker quite the same way again, at least if it's parked in New England.

OK, back to the ride.

About noon we stopped for lunch at a happening local hotspot in Winter Harbor called the Pickled Wrinkle. Know what a pickled wrinkle is, besides a catchy name for a restaurant?

Owner "Crazy Deb," a petite fireball who welcomed our gang with gusto, says a pickled wrinkle is a large carnivorous sea snail more commonly known as a whelk. It has been pickled to preserve the protein and has become a Down East Maine delicacy.

None of us ordered whelks for lunch, but we did chow down on salads, sandwiches, wings, wraps and burgers! My favorite find? Oh baby, the naturally sweet blueberry lemonade — it's to die for!

Our last stop before hitting the hotel was a favorite roadside haunt, the local Harley-Davidson dealership. Although it was nothing at all like the professional operations and megastores most of us patronize, we did leave some bills behind for commemorative T-shirts with moose, lobsters and the like.

In midafternoon we reached the hotel, checked in, freshened up and went exploring. This was the first day for which we had an open agenda, so riders had the freedom to relax, sightsee, cruise the area, shop Bar Harbor or do absolutely nothing.

I jumped into Krueger's shiny red pickup, which serves as our chase vehicle, and he and three more of our pals rode up to Acadia National Park to check out the famous vista from Cadillac Mountain. Former tour rider Kristine Otte of Northern Wholesale, who couldn't make the trip this year, had highly recommended it.

Unfortunately, the fog was still as thick as clam chowder, so there was no panorama for us. However, we did climb out and take some photos, and one of the guys spotted a large patch of wild blueberries growing with abandon on the hillside.

We snaked our way down the mountain and cruised to Southwest Harbor, where we saw a Coast Guard base adjacent to a working wharf with boats of all shapes and sizes and crates of empty lobster traps. We watched guys fishing on the dock for mackerel, landing dozens at a time.

The fish flopped around on the dock before landing in the bucket. We learned that they're a favored lobster bait! A commercial fishing charter pulled up as we were standing there and dozens of happy campers piled off, proudly carrying their prized catch of the day — fresh Maine red lobsters!

Our final stop was Bar Harbor. It was my first visit, and I totally loved the eclectic vibe! Restaurants of all types mixed with tourist shops and upscale boutiques, and the namesake harbor was filled with dozens of glamorous yachts. I could easily have spent a leisurely day just poking around, but my shopping spree was compressed to the 20-minute wait for our table at Geddy's.

We bumped into some of our crew and learned that one couple had a near disaster at the park we had visited earlier that afternoon. Our rider Dick, a retired Navy veteran of 27 years, and his wife, Missy, were on their Harley cruising through the park and happened to notice a car pulled over and someone pointing to the tree line. His instincts kicked in and he gently braked or he would have collided head-on with Bambi, who came springing across the road.

Today it's a 5.5-hour run from Bar Harbor to Portsmouth, N.H., with a stop en route in Boothbay and Kennebunkport. I'm really looking forward to a fun late-afternoon boating spin hosted by franchise owner Jake Goodridge and crew from the Freedom Boat Club of Portsmouth!

Hope you're enjoying the ride!

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