

Ducati Travels



DUCATI 860 GT; DESTINATION - FAIRBANKS ALASKA

From the last time that I wrote the DIOC I was planning to leave for Alaska, (winter 78-79 we left June 15 79) Yes we did make it and no it did not take us three years. The Norton and Ducati (pronounced Duce-Cat in Fbks.) make it to Alaska quite successfully although the Norton was not under its own power when we did arrive. The Blazo on the sportster got sidetracked in Colorado and the Norton and rider tangled with a pick-up and trailer shortly after crossing the border near Tok Alaska.

It was an incredible trip riding up there after leaving Chicago. Six thousand miles in six weeks is definitely not a record, but taking into consideration the number of times we had to stop and allow the Norton to convalesce we made absolutely great time. Fortunately I really like Nortons and its minor mechanical failures allowed us to meet some truly fine people willing to help a couple of buffons out in the real world. The Ducati was not without its minor problems. I had to rewire it in Colorado and again in Oregon - yes it was the charging system fuse block meltdown syndrome. After making a few rounds in the local junkyards I found a, believe it or not, 4 fuse Lucas unit (MG or Triumph) that works quite well on the older twins, once all the superfluous electrical b.s. is removed - turn signals, idiot lights and handle bar switch - to start with. I found that an old style Lucas dipper/horn switch works rather well. Other than that the Ducati performed as expected. Oil usage was nil and clean after 2000 miles. It was changed anyway as 1000 miles is about typical changing time. It handled good in spite of a Daytona fairing, big leather bags and a gross of 850 lbs. I ran a fairly tall gear (36) and still had plenty of power for touring and got 45-47 mpg.

As I was saying the folks we met along the way were really great and completely restored my faith in human beings. Most people we met that were even remotely involved in bikes were more than willing to help, loan tools or offer information, sometimes even a place to sleep! We did very little freeway cruising and spent a lot of time exploring some very twisty backroads on near empty tanks. I have some very fond memories of southwest Missouri and Mark Twain park where we would go flailing along like a couple of wild guys out of control. The Twin Spanish Peaks in Trinidad, Colorado and Independence Pass were more fun than a Polish wedding. In Aspen we met some other fools riding Italian machinery. We managed to drink enough beer so that none could start their steeds of steel. They had been riding from New York aboard a Guzzi and a Duce-Cat. Needless to say they were very familiar with fuse block meltdowns! We did plan on riding together for a short while but they didn't have a sportster rider to contend with so we played stop and wait for a few hundred miles and then parted company. From there we rode to Salt Lake. The bar action in Utah is definitely very strange. We didn't hang around there very long and as a rule avoided larger cities.

After Salt Lake we headed for the coast via Idaho, de-

ecided to try and make some time we jumped on I-80 for a short while. But alas the Norton didn't agree to this and promptly blew a head gasket just outside Wendell, Idaho. Naturally the Duce-Cat came through and pulled the ailing Limey back into town. Three days later, many beers, several trips into Twin Falls, a valve job and several trips across the Snake River Canyon and we were ready to hit the trail again. Once entering Oregon thus leaving the desert behind the scenery slowly but dramatically changed. After riding into logging country around John Day, I became prepared for anything. Portland was hotter than a popcorn fart! A couple days there cruising the local shops and we were bound for Seattle after hitting Tillamook for a bit of cheese, a no headlight ticket from your friendly local and a night in the park. The ride up the coast was well worth having to wear rain gear most of the time. After arriving in Seattle we opted for the ferry instead of the infamous Trans-Alaska Highway. As it turned out the portion of the T.A.H. we did ride was definitely worth the \$400.00 it cost to get us from Seattle to Haines, Alaska, which is still 700 miles from Fairbanks including the 400 miles through Canada which is unpaved. The route the ferry takes is called the inside passage and takes approximately three days to deliver you to Haines which is not quite the end of the line, but is one of the few ports complete with connecting roadway.

Once aboard the ferry the threat of breaking down was completely absent from our minds. This gave us a real break for a change and a chance to view some beautiful scenery. If you got bored watching the whales or sick of looking at glaciers fiords you could always visit the full service bar. Of course you know how important that is once out to sea! On the last day we managed to group up some other folks headed for Alaska. We planned on traveling together and we planned on relying on the strength-in-numbers syndrome and actually made some of the best time on the whole trip while traveling through Canada.

After about 400 miles of dirt, dust and bugs we decided to spend the night in Beaver Creek Y.T., we fought mosquitos with pool ques until we no longer cared about a little blood. Too many tequilas and forgetting to fuel up separated us from our traveling companions in the morning. Just after crossing the border into AK Jim and the now famous Norton crossed paths with a pickup and trailer. Fortunately nothing was broken, but a crushed leg got Jim a plane ride to Fairbanks and his Combat bent forks included, got hauled to town in the back of a ford pickup. A Duce-Cat and Norton shop was hard to believe at first, but the hospitality that was and is extended makes it very hard to leave any length of time.

Fairbanks is just like any other small town. We just have the usual stuff here, Morinis, Guzzis, Laverdas, Ducatis and a whole variety of English machinery which we manage to keep running long enough to ride th months out of the year. We have the "Remember Pearl Harbor J-Model Roast" once a month and as you know the sun shines continually during the riding season, so we throw away our headlights and buy a case of dark sun glasses. There is even a couple of paved roads to cruise on so pack your saddlebags full of money and come on up.

PS: My apologies on taking so long to drop a line. My thanks to Joel and the DIOC also to W. Salisbury for taking the time to answer my original letter. Enclosed is a few photos of my 74 750 GT. I hope the shirt I'm enclosing for Joel fits. If anyone wants a Competition Shop, Fairbanks, Alaska T-shirt - they are not for sale, but if you send a T-shirt of equal value we will send you one. Anything with a J-Model on it will be used as a shop rag or in our fabric testing facility which located in the water closet!

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Eds Notes: Or Joel's notes for that matter. I would like to say thanks to John for the article and the T-shirt which I really love. It is black Hanes 50/50 Combed T that feels real snug and soft. The front has a drawing of a shaggy dog riding a real old, old bike and it reads COMPETITION SHOP FAIRBANKS ALASKA, Purveyors of European Motorcycles Since Christ was a Corporal. On the back there is a map of Alaska with a list of 18 brands of motorcycles listed. If you don't have a nice shirt to send to trade, send em a DIOC shirt. Neat idea huh? I thought that one up all by myself while I sat here filling space. We also have