

Remembrances

Dave Bucher looks back at some little gems of experience from his 45 years of riding and writing.

Stuck on Starrucca

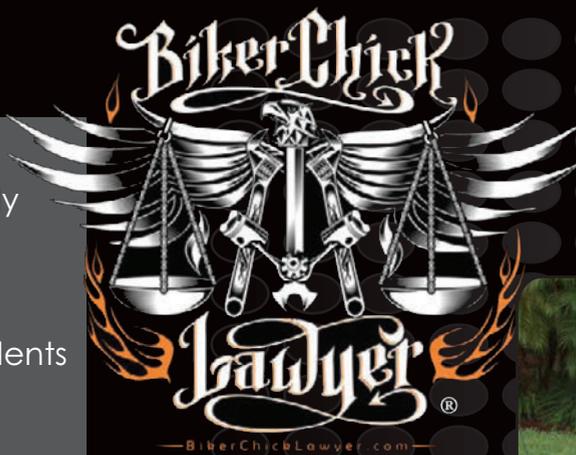
My absolute disdain of the American system of weights and measures was brought to the fore recently when my wife and I decided to cook something together. "How many ounces in a pint?" was not an answer that rolled quickly off either of our tongues. For God's sake, if He'd intended us to use anything other than the metric system, he'd have given us 12 fingers, or 16.

Which brought me to thinking about the Romans and their own cockamamie system of numerals. How exactly were they able to do all the calculations necessary to build their incredible feats of engineering, many of them, like the Parthenon in Rome or the amphitheaters and aqueducts all over Europe, still in use today?

Which brings me to Starrucca, more specifically the Starrucca Viaduct. This soaring wonder (110-foot high, 1,040-foot long) was completed in 1848 and still serves, without structural alteration, as a double-tracked railroad bridge. It's a use that its slender, elegant construction

seems wholly at odds with. How can something so thin at its apex support all of that dynamic load? The answer, of course, is the Roman stone arch. This bridge was built the very same way the Romans built their aqueducts, by making a wooden falsework, a kind of semicircular structure, and then piling stones up both sides until they almost meet. Place the keystone and voila, you pull away the falsework and the magic of compression takes over.

Since I first laid eyes on it in 1994, I have been fascinated by this amazing work that so directly ties us, in the twenty-first century, to the Romans before the time of Christ. I'd highly recommend your taking a trip to Lanesboro, Pennsylvania, to stand beneath it, gaze upward and be similarly inspired. And do take a motorcycle, because the surrounding countryside, in Susquehanna and Wayne counties, at the state's northeastern-most corner, is a riding paradise. Then, when you get home, you can sign my "Bugger the Inch" petition, to universally adopt the metric system.



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