

Remembrances

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



There's Always One

Dave Bucher

Can't think of anything I hate more than pretension. And it probably sounds pretentious to say that I remember sitting around a breakfast table at the Amherst House at Doshisha University in Kyoto many years ago with a bunch of college professors.

My wife and I were the only non-academic guests, so the conversation was laced with the affectations of that class. They finally got around to me and asked where I'd gone to school. I was so fed up with the pretentious tone of the conversation that I looked the questioner in the eye and answered, "I didn't go to college." That made all of them feel quite uncomfortable. And it made me feel good, despite the fact that I really had gone to a rather good college.

I guess I have an egalitarian streak, for some years later a similar situation arose when I joined the group for the first-night orientation for a ten-day, organized motorcycle tour of Great Britain. The guide for this smallish group was a tall German, and because I'd been assigned to do an article by a national motorcycle magazine he mistakenly assumed I was some kind of superior being. Right after I introduced myself he took me aside and, motioning toward the group, said, "Vitch von ist die aahss-hole?"

I was a little taken aback. When I asked him for an explanation he said

that every motorcycle tour group had at least one asshole. It was insider talk. Somehow he thought my supposed motorcycling prowess translated into my being part of some sort of elevated elite. My surprise was quickly replaced by the same kind of resentment I'd felt that morning in Kyoto, so I looked him in the eye and said, "How do you know it isn't me?"

Germans don't have much of a sense of humor. Either that, or he really didn't know he was being goofed on. So I decided that it was probably better to back off, since this was a free ride and he was my host. I played along by assaying the crowd and picked out the guy from California with his index finger in a big white bandage.

Turns out we both were right. As it developed, the bandage fellow was a whiner from day one. He was the guy who always had a problem with his bike, had problems keeping track of his stuff, problems being on time and, finally, he was the one who dropped his bike in a corner, sending it hurtling toward me as I was trying to take a photo. He finished the tour in the chase van.

Though spectacular, the crash didn't hurt him. But rather than feeling good about the accuracy of my initial assessment, I've always felt bad, as if my being lured into "fingering" him at that first meeting may have jinxed him and ruined his whole experience. That would certainly make me the real "aahss-hole." So maybe the tour guide was right. Pretension is a tricky thing