

## Time to Quit and Call it a Day

### Myron Degenhardt- Life Member since 1987

Myron has been a H.O.G. member since the early 1980's and a Central Vermont H.O.G. member since 1988. "I'm not a charter member...I missed the first meeting because I was in Alaska on my bike. But I was at the second meeting." It's rare for Myron to miss a monthly meeting; traveling from his home in Champlain NY.



He started riding motorcycles when he was 44 years old. His first bike was a Harley Davidson Sprint, made in Italy. It was black and boasted a 250cc engine. He kept this for two years "until I needed a little bigger one". He then traded it for the first of several Sportys he would own. As with many enthusiasts, the bikes got bigger over time; and as time has it then they began to get smaller. "My favorite was the Electraglide, when I could handle it. Then I got so I couldn't handle it so well, so I went to a Road King. I had two of those and now I'm down to a Heritage Softail, which is even easier to ride. It sits nice and low and balances well."

The first time Myron ever rode a motorcycle was when he served in the Navy as a Seabee. "When I was stationed in Okinawa we had several bikes in the motor pool. One of my friends said come on, we're going for a ride. I told him I had never been on a bike. He assured me it was all right and that he would show me what to do. It was the only time I rode a bike with a suicide shift, and I swore never again." The Seabees are the Construction Battalions (CBs) of the United States Navy. Their best known unofficial motto is the simple phrase "Can Do!" It is a phrase that fits Myron well.

At the time that Myron became more than a casual rider he was working as an electrical designer for a machinery manufacturer – Sharon Iron Works. After the company changed hands several times "I quit... decided to call it a day and put my time into riding and skiing. I was 64 then." And ride he did. Feeling "foot loose and fancy free I wondered what I was going to do." After deciding that he would take a long ride he asked himself, "Well where are you going to go?" And he thought "Alaska is a long trip so I'll go there."

He spent most of the winter packing, unpacking and figuring out how to get things on the bike. He went to L.L. Bean and bought a good sleeping bag. "I was going to buy a tent there and told the fellow that I planned to camp for about 6 weeks up and back to Alaska. He said you don't want one of our tents, it won't hold up. He recommended a place in New Hampshire. "They were more or less outfitters. After four trips to Alaska, I'm still using that tent today."

The first trip to Alaska was cut short. It rained for days and the weather forecast predicted it wouldn't let up. "I was heading home and just outside of Haines Junction in the Yukon when it started to snow. Half rain – half snow. The closer I got to Haines Junction the harder it snowed and by the time I arrived it was all snow. There was an inch or two of slush in the road. I didn't bother with a campsite that night, I got a hotel. The next morning, there was about four inches of snow on the bike. I was going to go to into the village and take the ferry. I took off down the road and didn't I hit construction. Now this is a dirt road and it's a mess. I look down this hill and at the bottom it was a swamp. There was water all the way across the road. So I stopped on that hill, I didn't want to get in that mess. I was ready to turn around; instead I watched the traffic going through. Cars were going through with the rear end snaking around. I thought "oh no!" Just then a big truck came along and he went straight through with no problem. Hey, now that's the guy to follow. (continued)

So I waited for the next truck to come along and I got right behind him. I was about 15 feet behind his back wheels. I stayed right in his wheel tracks as I went through that water. Now that water was right up to the floorboards. I got in the middle of that and I thought "you damn fool. You dump your bike here and you'll be all through." I made it and continued on. Boy was it cold; the temperature was just above freezing. That was a trip and it was early July."

Myron's fourth and last trip to Alaska was when he completed his goal making it to the Arctic Circle. He describes the road and the ride as being the "loneliest piece of road I ever went on. There isn't much there but some scrub brush and a sign." He remembers waiting for a while hoping someone else would show up to take his photo there. "I have a photo of my bike there...just my bike and that sign...only things there."

As with every motorcycle trip anyone takes, there are challenges. The fourth trip seemed to have its fair share. "I left Anchorage headed to Mount East. There was road construction along the way, the road crew had chewed up the pavement and left it there. It was tar coated stone and all loose. My tires threw this up into the belt and sprockets, which tore my belt up. I was about 150 miles out of Anchorage. I had an emergency belt that I put on...I wouldn't recommend that to anyone. It lasted about 15 miles then that broke. It was right near a campground and that was right across from the base for the construction crew. The owner of campground took me over to there and the foreman said he could get me back to Anchorage tomorrow on a small flatbed service truck that was coming in the next day. Well, we loaded the bike...let me back up a little. The foreman called driver that day he talked to me and told him my situation. The driver said he would be there early; he must have left Anchorage about 3:00 A.M. cuz he was there at 7:00 A.M. He got me back to Anchorage in the middle of the afternoon. As we pulled in to town you could smell smoke. Well overnight the HD dealership building had burned...not the showroom but the repair shop. It was in ashes and there were burned bikes all over the place. I was thinking that this is a sweet mess. I talked to one of the guys who worked there and he said no problem. We have a special shop for high performance bikes. He put me back on my bike by the next afternoon. Now that is service!"

From Fairbanks to the Arctic Circle the road is gravel, which made his trip more interesting; that and the voltage regulator started acting up. "I'd be going along and all of the sudden the bike just stopped. I'd let the bike cool off and it would start and I'd go again. Something inside that thing would act up when it was hot. But I made it all the way. Then just a few miles outside of Fairbanks my bike quit for good. "

"I got that fixed and was headed home. I had spent the night in Haines Junction and was going to take the Top of the World Highway. You leave the Yukon River and ride uphill I think its 8 miles. When you get up there you are right on top of the peaks and this road follows the peaks all the way to the Alaska border. Now it's a dirt road, with high crowns. And one side drops right off 1-2 thousand feet. I thought "oh boy I don't want to get over into there."

Oh to go back a ways, to get there from the village you have to take this little ferry: it's free. It can carry maybe eight cars. As I got near the ferry there was a line of about 20 cars and here I am in the back of it. The guy steps out and points down and motions to come up here. It looked like he was talking to me, but I wasn't sure so I pointed to me and he shook his head yes. So I pulled up past all those cars and the ferry was full. There was about enough space for me to pull in crossways behind those cars. Wasn't even room to put the kickstand down. I had to stand there and balance the bike. They put the ramp up and that kept me from falling off and I went across the river like that. Now that was a funny experience."

Myron figures he has ridden over 200,000 miles in his lifetime. He tried to figure it out once remembering that he put 100,000 miles alone on one bike. His best year he logged 23,000 miles. Of all the (continued)

things that Myron has learned over the years while riding he has this to say. "I took a rider training course and I have never been sorry that I did that. I didn't take the beginners class, I took an advanced course. And I learned a lot from that. I would think that if you are a new rider, with the traffic today, it would be foolish not to take a beginner course. You can learn a lot from those guys. And if you ever take a ride to Alaska, don't take too much gear; you can get by with three changes of clothes."

Myron has never had an earring but he did have a beard once. He's never been married. He came close once but his love of fishing got in the way. He enjoys cooking stating that he is a meat and potatoes kind of guy and makes a mean Chicken Soup. While he had to give up skiing Myron still enjoys skeet shooting and his passion for riding is strong. "I really like to ride, just plop me on the bike and I can go all day. It's sure different than riding in a car. You can see everything, smell everything. It's a sense of freedom. You get out on the open road and get riding and forget all your worries. It's just great."



The one ride he has always wanted to do is to head down south to ride the Blue Ridge Parkway and visit the Smokey Mountains. "I've never done that and I guess I won't now." Myron has decided to sell his Heritage Classic but you will still see him touring around town on his police cruiser. For Myron "It's time to quit and call it a day."

Photos and Story Submitted by: Judy Wheelock and Caroline Heller