

How this came to be is something of a cross between serendipity and cosmic congruence. The tsars came into alignment between San Francisco and Boise. In other words it wasn't planned and highly unlikely to occur. But it did.

Some months ago Linda had significant surgery, and happily enough it worked out successfully – although I think by now she is half android. Successful though it was it also put an end to her biking days, at least for now. And so her gorgeous Harley Road King needed a new home – and on the market it went.

At the same time I came up with a marketing concept that required a full dress Harley. Not just any Harley – it had to be the big boss, the undisputed king of the road. Gee – guess who is selling one?

And so we came to a deal, and I bought the bike. One little detail though is that it was in Boise, Idaho ... and I was not! Obviously I knew that up front and honestly that was part of the appeal. Road trip! Hey – you're only young once.

And once I was young, but alas that was long ago...

In my demented mind I saw me, Jack Nickelson, Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper riding from Boise to Marin.

Glorious.

Well it was glorious – about forty years ago.

So we did this deal. Of course she could have sold the bike locally and I could have bought one locally, but friends are friends and we did the deal. Keep it in the family and all that. She loves that bike and hates getting rid of it, so now it will be in the right hands and to a great purpose of being significantly upgraded.

Now there were a couple of elements to this deal aside from money for product. Linda had to get me to Boise, and the bike had to be fully serviced for the long ride home. In this regard she performed perfectly, which was no easy task because it is the dead of winter and I needed a weather window of a few days good weather for the ride. Not an easy pursuit during an El Nino year. Rain and more rain. Weeks and months go by. Clock is ticking, bike is sitting.

Finally last week the forecast came up showing not only clear from Boise through Winnemucca to Novato, but temperatures in the mid 60s!

Some meteorologist needs to lose their job.

So I yell to Linda get me on an airplane now is the time! She snags the perfect flight, although unfortunately she will be out of town so I don't even get a hug before leaving and I'll be on the road. Maybe not so unfortunately because my schedule is terribly tight

and even thirty minutes over a coffee would hurt me getting to my first waypoint. I planned on spending the night in Winnemucca Nevada, and that is 250 miles from Boise.

So things go well and I arrive at Boise...



My plan now is to go directly from the airport to the Harley dealer that serviced the bike – then straight onto the road.

My plan had not allowed for three Jamaican taxi drivers named Moe, Larry and Curly.

I gave them the address and could watch the wheels come off the cart in slow motion. None of them had ever heard of the street, and were dubious as to the town itself. But wait! They had a \$19.95 GPS from Walmart! Sure wish they bought the twenty dollar version because this one didn't list the street where I was heading.

After considerable discussion it was decided we would get in the car and drive, while some higher being looked things up and would phone the driver enroute. And indeed we did drive – about half a block before he remembered the rear door has to be closed before

leaving the curb. And you can't just pull over in the airport lanes, so we had to do some silly loop to return to our starting point so he could close the door. Very sorry mon.

So off we go, and darn if his call didn't come through and in fact both the town and street do exist, and fifteen minutes later there we were at the Harley dealer.

Now this dealer claims to be the largest in four states, and I must say anyone would be hard pressed to argue with that. Big iron from wall to wall, and the walls were very far apart. This place is large. I hate to think about the check they must write to the bank every month.

But they had things in great order. The bike was serviced, road ready, and parked in front. The service manager is a good chap with a ready smile and he walks me out, tells me this is a great bike, and by the way I need to warm it up for ten minutes every time because otherwise they are notorious for leaking from the rocker covers.

It's a Harley.



Needed gas but that's it – ready to roll. I was out of there in minutes.

Now, there is one issue. Weather prediction was mid 60s. It was 38 degrees. And every indication was that's the high point of the day. Fortunately I'm a good little boy scout

and brought serious cold weather riding gear, so fifteen minutes of wriggling later I was ready to find a gas station and Highway 95 South. And so I did.

Do you know that three blocks outside of Boise there is - - - nothing? I mean I wonder if they even have air it is that desolate. It's already one o'clock and I have to make 250 miles in almost freezing weather across high desert prairie, on a bike I have no experience with. Piece of cake. What – me worry?

Fill up, and of course my credit card is rejected because of fraud check, so have to dig for my cash buried somewhere under all these layers of clothes.

It's about twelve miles out of there until I finally arrive at 95 South and can roll on the power all the way to Winnemucca. Now this bike is new to me. It is a two wheel car. It doesn't have foot pegs – it has floorboards. With me in the saddle we top eleven hundred pounds. It was designed in 1937 and is the model ridden by US law enforcement for sixty years. It takes three weeks of planning to make a turn. Nimble is not a word that comes to mind. Arnold rides one. It's large.

It's a Harley.

Normally when getting the feel of a new bike one would ride around the block, little trips, see what it's like, get off and poke at things, back on and ride some more until it feels right. Me – I have 250 miles ahead of me.

At about mile fifty I'm getting the idea of this heavy beast, and starting to feel in control. At one hundred miles I owned it – we're a riding team. The horse is broken. This beast doesn't want finesse, no flowers, no kisses – it wants to be dominated. Aggressive throttle, firm control, solid moves – one of us has to be in full control and I guess that's me. So now I can play and see what this thing likes to do.

And what it likes to do is 80 mph. At 80 it has a whole new personality. It honkers down, the horrible engine noise turns into something resembling a purr, the power curve comes up and it wants to cruise. It's an eighty mile an hour cruising machine. And so we do.

Snow on the mountains to my right. Snow on the mountains to my left. Snow around me. Not another motorcycle in sight. What's up with that?

I'm gas nervous. I don't know the endurance of the beast, and I have long empty stretches ahead of me, the next being one hundred miles plus. So I pull into this unbranded gas station. I'm the first customer since prohibition. There is a tumbleweed next to the pump. I don't know if I am in Idaho, Oregon or Nevada. I want my mommy.

Now out comes the attendant. I'm not saying he's old, but he remembers the Big Bang.

This guy belongs in a John Ford western, and maybe has been. He walks around the beast with an appreciative eye, then remarks as how he'd heard they had combined the gas tanks into one. Now folks, he's talking about a design change that happened back about when they invented corn. This guy is old.

So I get my \$6.87 worth of fuel and leave the Twilight Zone into ... well I'm not really sure. Nothing actually. Somewhere between somewhere and I don't nowhere. One lane each way. But now I'm buddies with the beast and we hit eighty quickly and settle in for the cruise.

Now that's an interesting sign: Open Range Next 112 Miles.

I wonder what that means? Oh well, it can't apply to me – I'm from California.

Hey there's a cow on the freeway! Why didn't someone warn me?

And on I go. Sure is a lot of snow. Oh look a summit. 5300 feet. Gee that's kind of high, hope it's the highest I get what with all the snow and cold. Yeah right.

Stop for gas again. Have to pay inside. No way I'm taking off anything but my gloves, and I walk into the store and give some poor woman a heart attack when she turns around and sees the Man From Mars seven feet tall looming behind her. Full coverage helmet and black from top to bottom. Sure hope she has ObamaCare.

Varoom and I'm off again. Now I can push this thing around like we're dancing. This is how riding is supposed to be, just one creature – not a rider and bike – just one creature and everything feels as natural as raising your arm. So of course there's road construction ahead and a half hour wait in the middle of nowhere behind eight thousand semi trucks.

We finally get to roll and I'm behind all these trucks, and they each have three trailers so I guess I'm now in Nevada. Do you have any idea how much buffeting there is behind a three trailer rig at 75 mph? Lots is the correct answer. Lots and then lots more. I have to pass. And pass, and pass again. Turns out if I really twist throttle on this beast it will give a reasonable response, and so pass I do until clear and nothing but open road – and snow – ahead of me.

Good thing is they can hear me coming no matter how loud their stereo.

It's a Harley.

Well the adventure is going well and hey! Cool sign for the Pussycat Ranch up ahead. I wonder what they have there??? Never seen a ranch with cats before.

But no time to stop because the sun is dipping and Winnemucca is up ahead. All three blocks of it. Biggest most lively looking place is the Winnemucca Inn which is also a casino, and I elect to put in there.



Get my AAA discount (no remarks about AARP please!) and park the beast for the night after a full 250 miles in about four hours.



Now I'm not really hungry or thirsty and there are all kinds of interesting sounds in my head and ears from my hours on the road. So I peel off the layers and wander into the casino, and once again I am reminded that yes – people do still smoke. In this case all people.

Sit at the bar and have a Sierra Nevada while playing five cent bets on video poker. People next to me have five teeth. Problem with that is there are six of them and they have five teeth between the lot of them. Listening it turns out they belong to some RV club and this is a meeting spot where they have connected and now heading to all these various locations across the country. Kind of cool, in a white trailer trash sort of fashion. (Hey I drive one so don't give me grief!)

I get a nibble and just want to rest my sore bones, so I'm out of there and on the bed watching Nancy Pelosi promise free health and perpetual motion until I can't stand it anymore and hit the sheets.

Now I naturally rise early and was up at 5:30AM. Wandered back to the casino which is also the diner. There are people at the casino bar smoking and drinking. ??? What planet is this? I just can't get my head around that scene. But anyway I noticed the sign out front says it is 30 degrees. Need I point out that thirty is not mid sixty? It's darn cold.

So I know I should have a big breakfast to stoke the furnace because I have over four hundred miles to make today and not even minutes to spare, so I have to ride hard.

I eat and get out of there, shower and put on my gear. Now – I have more hide on me than a wooly mammoth. More layers than Boris Karloff playing The Mummy. I'm so swaddled that my joints don't bend. It takes half an hour to get everything tucked just right, snapped just so, belted this way and that. I can't go anywhere or do anything other than sit on a motorcycle and ride.

Which presupposes that the motorcycle starts.

Which it does not.

It's a Harley.

Yep – won't start. Cranks over great, turns and turns, but not a hint of a cough that it's going to catch. Brand new battery gives me lots of time to play and fuss, but nothing. This beast has electronic fuel injection which means there is nothing to do. No controls or magic buttons – it's all automatic. It just had a major service 250 miles ago and was running great (for a Harley). Won't start. I'm working up a sweat. And I checked out of my room of course. This is not good. No not good at all.

After maybe fifteen minutes I get the idea that it isn't going to start – period. So now what? I look it over and there is nothing obvious, and it was running fine when I parked. Plenty of gas, all wires intact, fuses good. And rarely do fuses pop at three in the morning with no activity for no reason. So something is amiss. Time to get on the phone.

First call to Linda. Hey do you know of any eccentricities this thing has? No? Always has run great? Any ideas? Call the Harley Owners Group (HOG) – OK. Well heck it turns out they have a silly sequence that first you join and then you break down. The economics don't work if you break down and then join. And I ask them anyway what could you do for me if I were a member. Oh heck you could get towed to a dealer at no cost! Yep in two days we would send out a truck and haul your broken ass up to Twin Falls, Idaho. Man – that's some great coverage right there.

A quick look through the phone book tells me that there are no Harley dealers within the solar system. And by now an hour has gone by. I call the dealer in Boise and get the service guy on the phone – never heard the like of it. Doesn't make sense. Can't think of anything to explain it. And I said I can, it sounds like vapor lock to me. No can't be, it has fuel injection. Well says I, there was an extreme temperature and elevation change, and that is a good formula for a vapor lock scenario. Nope can't be.

So now I'm stuck. Get a new room key, and shed my layers. Phone book says there are no pickup trucks to rent, so I can't haul the bike home. Thought about renting a car, driving back to Novato to get my truck, turn around and grab the bike.

But I've been turning wrenches as long as I've been riding – forty years – and I have never been stranded by a bike. Not going to start now.

Across the street is a Kragen. I walk in and ask to buy a spark plug wrench because my bike won't start and I want to look at the plugs. Guys says, "Harley?"

Yeah it's a Harley.

So I buy this wrench, and pull the plugs. Now there are two things I might expect to see, and I see the third.

First is the plug dripping wet with gas. That is what the mechanic said he expected was the system wasn't firing and was pumping gas. I doubted that, but wet plugs should be the case. Nope. Second thing was slightly wet plugs.

What I had was bone dry plugs. No gas getting to them. So back to Kragen for a can of starting fluid to test my idea and yep – the engine fires then dies. It isn't getting gas. I can hear the fuel pump, but there is nothing getting to the plugs.

Back on the phone with the Harley mechanic. Could be lots of things, need to bring it in. I still say it's vapor lock and he still says it can't be, just can't happen with that model. Sounds like the entire injection system needs to be gone through.

No thanks. I look it over and find a spot that looks to me, if I were a high pressure bubble of air, this is where I would live. Need a hex wrench. Back to Kragen. They know me now, I'm getting frequent flyer miles. But they have the little wrench kit I need, and I pop the cover and open the valve I have in mind. It sprays gas under high pressure. I charge the system again with the ignition, and bleed it again with my handy little wrench. Touch the starter – roar. Happy bike. Vapor lock. Can't happen. My ass.

I'm now three hours behind plan, with seven hours of riding ahead of me, but I have a running bike. Another half hour to get into my gear, a quick pass through the Kragen parking lot where they give me a big thumbs up, and I'm on the road riding hard. All my well planned rest stops are out of the question – I have to ride hard, real hard, to make it home before dark. Mapquest says it is 733 miles, and I have done 250.

Wham – Lovelock.



All is good – I’m rolling now, and steady at eighty. I could have taken a nap the road is that straight and boring with nothing to see. My big goal is Reno, not as a stop but a waypoint. By Donner Summit I need to decide if I am going to veer off and stay in Grass Valley for the night, or push on to Novato. But I’m rolling and the small towns pass by.

Another interesting sign: Dangerous Cross Winds Next 16 Miles.

Darn if they aren’t right about that.

Now just about the worst vehicle you can drive in a crosswind is a Volkswagen Microbus. Just about the worst.

The worst is a motorcycle.

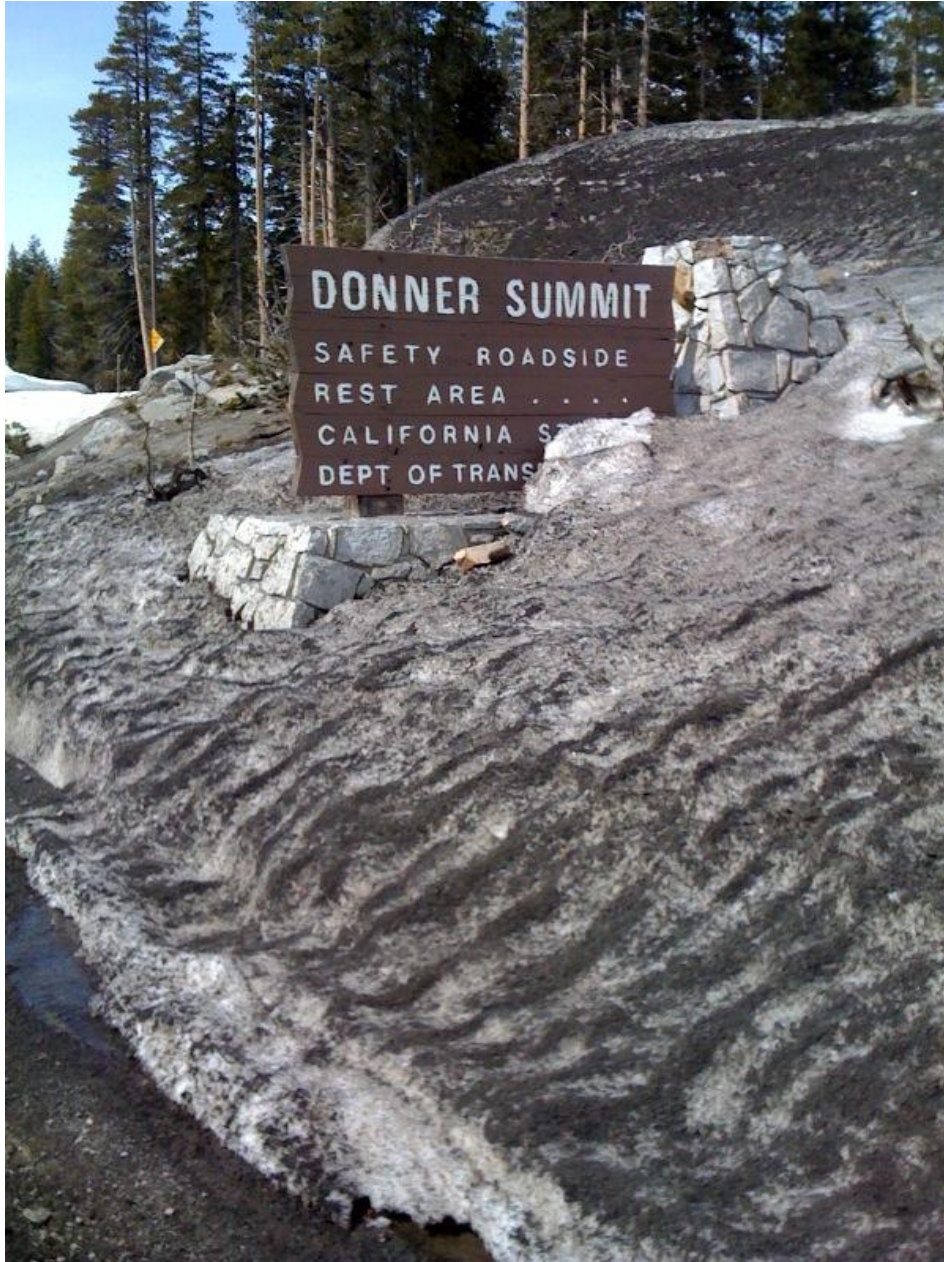
By now it isn’t so bad. I can’t feel much anymore. None of my joints work, and my legs are shaking so badly they have a cool disco beat going. Good thing is that at Fernley the road starts following the Truckee River which means it now has some long twists and turns, and for the first time I get to move the handlebars, and wear off the edges of the tires where I have been running them square on the straight road for so long. Wham I sail past Reno and Truckee, heading for the big pass.

Now I have ridden a motorcycle over the Sierras before many times, but not in the winter. It's very different. Snow, ice, water on the road, and lots of fairly tight turns particularly at these speeds. Invigorating.

And up to now I've had good roads. Small but well paved. Now in California, with the worst roads in the entire country, things get rough. But the beast has really wide tires for a bike, and air suspension, so I just keep pushing. Those bladed concrete slabs through the Sierras are a mess, but the climb up the summit was great fun. Very steep though, and that means a lot of throttle, and that means a lot of decibels. I'm pretty sure there is blood coming from both of my ears.

It's a Harley.

But I made the summit.



There were some people there very happy to see me. I think they wanted to reenact the Donner Party and eat my leg. So I kept on going. Going into what all bikers hate – roads with cars. So far I have been alone except for passing, but now I'm on Highway 80 with traffic. Yuck. Been riding for forty years and I can tell you that cars WILL change lanes into you even when they know you are there. So nonstop vigilance is required and I am tired. Three hours to go...

I'm beat. I feel like someone's bitch. I want to ride sidesaddle. The traffic is heavy and typically crazy. Bit by bit I push and make it home before dark.



Boise to Novato. Two days. 653 miles. Lots of dead bugs. It's good to be young.

I think I'm deaf.

It's a Harley.