

## Ride Report - Touring on a Warrior – August 12-31, 2006

There might be more unsuitable bikes for a long-distance tour but I'd be hard-pressed to come up with one, on the face of it, less suitable than my Warrior. I bought Yamaha's top of the range XV1700 Road Star Warrior a couple of years ago because I liked the look of it, it received an excellent review from one of Britain's top motorcycle journalists and a recent second-hand one happened to come up at the right time. I particularly liked the high-tech componentry with the traditional North American big'n'lazy engine configuration. Most of all, I liked its lack of self-conscious ornamentation and frippery. I cannot claim that the low-slung dragster look is in any way practical: there's nowhere to carry anything and no weather protection. Moreover, anyone shorter than 6-foot might not be able to get used to the bad-boy, ape-like posture. But, because I liked the look of it, I was prepared to give it a try even after having been spoiled by the supremely comfortable Honda Varadero XL1000V adventure tourer which I'd ridden long-distances in Europe. The colour purple, however, was a whole other issue ... to me it's indigo.



Fig 1: Loaded up

My brother was far smarter. He was to join me on this trip since we both wanted to see what Canada looked like east of Montréal but, following his arrival on holiday from England, he arranged to buy a BMW K1200LT described by many as being the Cadillac of motorcycles. I think that meant it had loads of chrome and broke down a lot but, in true BMW manner, it was dead reliable ... except for the stands. It had an electric centre stand that would only work with a full battery and flat, level pavement. The side stand was for temporary use or else the pooled oil in the casings would emit clouds of noxious gas upon start-up. Of the 4 ferry crossings on our route, car drivers in the holds could be forgiven for losing their direction off the ferry when the dense black cloud engulfed them. Very poor show from the Bavarian boys, I'd say.



Fig 2: Bluenose III?

#### Day 1: Toronto to Watertown, NY

We decided to head south as soon as we could to avoid 401 boredom, crossing at Gananoque on bridges with spectacular views over the 1000 Islands, and then down to the border post where my brother had to go through certain entry procedures. At this point the Warrior was looking to be getting about 200kms from 10 litres which I thought was rather good since it was fully loaded up and previously I had only been getting about 180 km to the tank. I had even run dry on one doomed trip on a 400-series highway – that’s a tough way to learn the limit. Thankfully, after a bit of pushing to the gas station, it started again without trouble and I resolved to pay more attention to the handy distance counter on ‘reserve’. Of course the BMW is in a different league and was capable of going twice as far on a tankful (being a 20 litre tank) but my brother was happy for the smoke breaks. Finding the Days Inn in Watertown didn’t take long and we chatted with other bikers parked there while we unloaded. That immediate camaraderie is great, isn’t it – you just don’t get that with folk in cages.



Fig 3: Lake Champlain, NY

## Day 2: Adirondacks and Lake Champlain

It wasn't my brother's first experience of American hospitality by a long chalk, but the Days Inn set a standard of basic comfort and vast meals that he wouldn't go below, as we were about to find out in Montpelier. But I jump ahead of myself. The ride from New York to Vermont through the Adirondack Mountains to Lake Champlain was extremely picturesque and would have been perfect if not for the 'short cut' we were told about by an insistent local. We saw a lot more of the lovely Adirondacks than we had planned but at the Québec border we decided to be guided by the GPS, retracing much of our ride to join the 4-laner I89 towards Burlington. The ferry ride across Lake Champlain was just the most charming experience; gentle lake waters, glorious mountain views and with criss-crossing winds that challenged every sailboat out there. Guided by a biker through Vermont's largest city, we left Burlington behind us and found the dignified town of Montpelier, the geography of the area and genteel grace of the architecture bringing to mind the excellent novel, 'Midwives' by Chris Bohjalian. Alas, Montpelier also boasted busy hotels and one budget Econolodge – our only choice – which distressed my brother no end. My trust in a local's directions, and the selection of the Econolodge left him in no doubt as to who should not be making these decisions, and so we hit some pretty high-end inns after that.



Fig 4: Diner, NH

## Day 3: Green, White and Grey all over

The following day a heavy Green Mountains morning dew permitted a quick bike rinse down, then we gassed up and set off early; destination due east to Bangor, Maine over pleasant 2-lane roads through the heartland of New England. New Hampshire's White Mountains turned a drizzly grey all through Maine where café signs warned us of the heavy moose kill by vehicles, and vice-versa, on these well-forested roads. We drove with due care but had no luck in seeing any moose at all. Delightful road-side diners provided local charm and very satisfying food but we were continually warned not to ride at night (we were seriously tempted to just for the sight of a moose). The rolling green hills of highway 2 were beautiful though, occasional drizzle and fog notwithstanding, and took us almost all the way to the Penobscot River at Bangor where we traded for the I95, and a comfy Travelodge and considerable steak dinner at a ubiquitous north American mall – really, we coulda been in Vaughan, Ontario.



Fig 5: Fog in Maine

#### Day 4: Technology rules

We made a prompt start on Highway 9, still going east across a very quiet section of Maine towards the New Brunswick border at Calais, and the fog and rain persisted. This wasn't an enjoyable ride and the coffee/gas stops broke up an otherwise GPS-guided trek back to Canada and the ferry at Saint John over to Nova Scotia. It's an interesting fact that a digital camera has some infra-red capability, since a photograph of just plain fog out at sea and taken shortly after I heard a ship's fog horn near the pier, showed the venerable Princess of Acadia where nothing was visible to the eye. Sadly, it will need more than a couple of enthusiastic and damp bikers to keep that lovely ship in service because it takes as long for the crossing over to Digby as the Cat takes from Bar Harbour and other ports much further west on the Maine coast. The Princess did it with immense style though and we appreciated that as the evening skies cleared and we rolled into the Admiral Digby Inn ready for the main thrust of our tour; Nova Scotia and all points east. The Inn had the benefit of a fine restaurant and laundry facilities, which is always nice at a certain point in a motorcycle tour. In the course of our dinner, my brother and I got into an argument as to whether the Isle of Man TT races should be permitted to continue despite the death toll. We've seen some of the greatest racers show their brilliance there (only to get killed elsewhere) and we have heard of many others regularly meeting their deaths on the Island course. The right to take risks against the concept of race safety – a potentially polarising debate.



Fig 6: New Brunswick coast

#### Day 5: The Lighthouse Route to Wolfville

Nova Scotia is an interestingly-shaped province, lying as it does, as a diagonal lozenge at Canada's easternmost Atlantic tip south of the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel. We'd decided to start at the opposite end from the Cape Breton peninsula so we headed south-west down to Yarmouth and took the coast road, highway 3, round the southern tip and along the Lighthouse Route in and out of the coves and bays. There is also the choice of the more major highway 103 if time is pressing. But not to be missed was a side trip down to The Hawk at Cape Sable, the southern-most point of the Maritimes and where there was an very dense mist that suppressed all sound except for the fog horns. It really felt like a Hitchcock film-set rendered all the more real with abandoned wooden fishing boats. Then on to the lighthouses, in one instance overlooked by a wind farm. The bikes were running perfectly on what was a beautiful day; it was just one of those perfect times where the world is a glorious place to be biking. For my money, the blissful quiet and glorious scenery made this my favourite route of the whole trip, Cabot Trail notwithstanding, and I even saw a house for sale, handily near to a road-side ice-cream stand.



Fig 7: Cape Sable, NS

The Lighthouse Route is designated in the Province's tremendously useful Motorcycle Tour Guide booklet ([http://novascotia.com/en/home/planatrip/travel\\_guides/default.aspx](http://novascotia.com/en/home/planatrip/travel_guides/default.aspx)) which is a handy pocket size and gives you all the route and accommodation information you need for a memorable jaunt. At no point on this holiday did we book any accommodation in advance; just picked a likely motel from the booklet and called them up on the day to save a room for our arrival in the evening – sometimes quite late. All the places were motorcycle-friendly and not one disappointed. Please note that the ferry tickets needed to be reserved in advance but we never had a problem getting on. For our first 2 nights in Nova Scotia we had planned to stay with recently-relocated Toronto friends in the town of Wolfville, which is where the 'tobacco-free' Acadia University is situated just within mosquito range of the impressive Minas Basin, one of the upper branches of the Bay of Fundy.



Fig 8: Lighthouse Route, NS

#### Day 6: The Regatta and Tempest

Day 6 saw us being real tourists on another perfect sunny day. We headed for Lunenburg to see the Bluenose and buy souvenir fridge magnets, and then on to Chester for the Race Week regatta where my sailing brother was in his element. Perhaps that is why the barge-like size and sail-like screen of the BMW were so appealing to him; that and he could stow all his gear in the many lockers and cubbies on board. The trade-off of that mass of bike meant that the not infrequent u-turning on small roads, which often simply ended, was a bit of a tense affair. The Warrior is no light-weight but it carries its weight much lower down and can confidently be turned about without bother. Both bikes were measuring up well to the task and we were both very happy with them, as we discussed with our amused hosts over a celebratory dinner at the superb Tempest restaurant in Wolfville.



Fig 9: Lunenburg, NS



Fig 10: Bluenose sail



Fig 11: Chester Regatta, NS

### Day 7: Big City, small towns

You can shoot right across the pinched middle of Nova Scotia quite quickly on the uninteresting route 1 and into historic Halifax where, at The Split Crow pub, we enjoyed an Alexander Keith's from very near its origin – now that's history. Thence we ventured across the vertigo-inducing harbour bridge to Dartmouth and our next significant tour route, Marine Drive, which goes all the way along to Canso, a place I had wanted to see since I read about its history as the landfall for the first Atlantic telegraph cable. After an exhilarating sunny day riding along the coastal road, we spent a night at quaint Sheet Harbour and enjoyed a burger and pint in an enormous converted oil drum which now houses a bar ... well, why not, eh?



Fig 12: Sheet Harbour, NS

### Day 8: Road to Nowhere

More perfect weather and coastal beauty continued for the trip eastwards, which included an extended stop at historic Sherbrooke Village; effectively frozen in time in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It's fascinating to see the legacy of varied industries on the communities that once thrived in this part of the country. Hugging the coast road, we were somewhat surprised to see the GPS indicate the end of the road coming up. And with no apparent warning the road stopped at Country Harbour and a kindly gent asked for \$5 for the ferry across to where the road picked up again. During this surprising ferry crossing, he mentioned how he'd chatted with various famous folks who had journeyed this way before. I expect there will be a bridge here in due course but, in the meantime, how nice to be forced to stop and smell the flowers ... or the sea. We booked the next night at the Sea Wind Landing in Charlos Cove and what a gem of an inn it turned out to be – not cheap, mind you, but nice enough to keep us there for 2 nights right on the ocean listening to the clang of the distant buoy, with top-class cuisine and a very respectable Marechal Foch red wine from the Province's own Jöst Vineyards.



Fig 13: Doctor's House, Sherbrooke, NS



Fig 14: Ferry at Country Harbour, NS

#### Day 9: Canso

We took the opportunity to complete the Marine Drive route to Canso to see what we could see. The town was a supreme disappointment and exhibited every sign of the Province having turned its back on the community after the economic focus shifted to Halifax. It's a darned shame since the town was obviously once proud and buoyant, with potentially attractive wooden houses lacking the benefit of upkeep since the fisheries died out decades ago. In the whole Province, this was the only sad note – Canso is one place in desperate need of help, and it was the only area where gas and a nice place to eat were hard to find.



Fig 15: Sea Wind Landing, NS



Fig 16: Canso, NS

#### Day 10: Mull River shuffle

Nova Scotia is well-named; my first motorcycle tours were in the UK and involved taking my '77 Honda CB400 Twin from south of London, up the A1 to Edinburgh, through the beautiful Lowlands and into the southern part of the Highlands ... and did it rain?! So the familiar scenery in Nova Scotia was most welcoming, even when it rained. And rain it did on this day as payback for the previous perfect days. It's interesting to note that my luggage, all of it being the soft type, ballistic nylon Oxford bags in a nice shade of blue, got very wet on the outside but never let the rain in to any appreciable extent. I tend to pack my clothes, etc. in plastic bags before they go into the panniers anyhow, so nothing got wet even in the most torrential downpours which we did experience on occasion. I did take advantage of the extra outer plastic covers which Oxford provide for when the rain was at its worst, and also overnight to keep out the damp air. The covers stored neatly into one of the external pockets on each bag so were easy to grab and put on. The tank bag's cover was thoughtfully clear so you could still read the handy CAA TripTik maps if the GPS needed confirmation. The only trick with soft bags was to make sure that I fastened a bungee cord over them to prevent them billowing up, moving around or coming into

contact with the huge muffler. None of these concerns arose with the BMW of course. The rain had largely ceased by the time we broached the Canso Causeway and selected a mixture of routes through the Bras d'Or Lakes area and to that part of the Province that has produced a prodigious quantity and quality of Celtic musical talent. My brother is a huge Rankin Family fan so we just had to visit Orangedale (no whistle heard but we did see a stranded train), Gillis Mountain and the Mull River. We ended up at Baddeck for the night, ready to tackle the Cabot Trail the following day – acknowledged as one of the best driving routes in the world.



Fig 17: Bras d'Or Lakes, NS



Fig 18: Mull River, NS

Day 11: Nirvana, NS

The Cabot Trail is about a 300 km oblong route around the northern half of Cape Breton Island, and the majority of which is spectacularly scenic cliff-edge, coastal driving, including going through national parkland involving height elevation changes that you wouldn't believe. Many view-points and scenic lookouts allow you to stop and take it all in at your leisure. Being bikers, we were shooting through enjoying the twisties of course, but

it might be better to give yourself a couple of days for this treat and really make it last with plenty of diversions and refreshment stops along the way. Traffic was, perhaps, a little heavier than we'd like ideally but it was mid-August. To cap off a brilliant day, my brother's birthday in fact, we spent the night at Canada's only malt whisky distillery at Glenora, enjoying local live music, excellent beer and great food.



Fig 19: North Sydney Bridge, NS

#### Day 12: Sydney Bridge and the North Atlantic

The route to Sydney is a great drive because the land goes up and down drastically, so the 4-lane highway 105 sweeps back and forth over the hills, and then over the North Sydney iron bridge, a reminder of that other spectacular Sydney Bridge which I was fortunate enough to walk over in my previous year's holiday Downunder. The ferry from Sydney was a substantial ship befitting a 4-hour journey across the Atlantic – well, a bit of it anyway – to Channel-Port aux Basques on the south-west tip of Newfoundland. We had ensured that we had proper tie-down straps for all the ferry crossings, although ropes or straps are commonly provided by the ferry operator. It is necessary to secure motorbikes against movement when they are parked in the holds of ferry-boats, so it is advisable to have your own straps which you are familiar with using and which you know have not been misused or strained beyond their proper limit. After a calm and uneventful crossing we grabbed a night's sleep at the nearest motel – booked by cell-phone from the ship – in preparation for a 2-day lightning tour of Newfoundland.



Fig 20: Ferry at Sydney, NS



Fig 21: Atlantic crossing

Days 13 & 14: Been there, done that

Newfoundland is a place unlike anywhere else in Canada. It's big, bleak and under-developed – but you knew that already. It's also unbelievably beautiful and 2 days is dreadfully insufficient to take it all in, but this trip was more of a way to get a snapshot of the Atlantic Provinces. This is an excuse for tearing through The Island traversing the TransCanada at top speed because we had a ferry to catch for the return trip from Argentia back to Sydney. Gas stops were handily placed although there were a couple of spots on the second day where I did panic and used my 1 litre spare bottle of gas. The first day, after 304 km, we stopped for lunch at Corner Brook and took the time to check out a nearby ski resort in Humber Village where Brits are buying up real estate like crazy to create an artificial holiday environment. 258 km later we were in Grand Falls-Windsor for the night and half-way across the island. All across The Island there were breath-taking vistas that were simply too big for photographs to do them justice. My brother was well settled into his cruise-control, i-Pod playing touring mode but, lacking these luxuries, I had to vary my speed to maintain interest. I feel this was a test for the Warrior which was, perhaps surprisingly, extremely comfortable and easy to ride on these long riding days and proved

an ideal tourer, tank size notwithstanding. I even got 230 km on one day so I guess the engine was still loosening up, being at 13,800 km at the start of this journey. The Mustang touring seat was the only non-standard alteration to the bike, apart from the soft luggage and a Streetpilot III GPS attached by RAM mount to the handlebar and protected from the elements by Yamaha's neat little fly-screen. More hard-charging on day 2 of our NF blitz led to more speed varying and my brother got quite anxious at one point when I left him behind and he failed to notice me getting gas ... really, there's only one road! In the afternoon we arrived at Placentia and unloaded the bikes at a somewhat unofficial-looking hotel of sorts. My brother set off for St John's for the evening while I decided that I had ridden enough for the day and explored the locality on foot. I'm not usually a fan of seafood but I had just the best fresh scallops and cod at Belle's place along with a fine local beer.



Fig 22: Newfoundland vista



Fig 23: Glovertown, NF



Fig 24: Placentia, NF



Fig 25: Gooseberry Bay, NF

#### Day 15: There and Back Again

It is a tad embarrassing to say that we'd done Newfoundland in 2 days and so were now on our way back, however, an early start was required for the ferry trip back to Sydney from this, the far end of The Island. Once more the bikes were carefully strapped into the locations on the car deck and, after catching a glimpse of whales through a porthole while leaving the harbour, we settled into a quiet but relaxing cruise on this much longer 14-hour crossing. A road trip through 5 provinces and 4 states requires a lot more time to appreciate any of them but I considered this something in the nature of a reconnaissance for future more relaxed holidays to those places which struck me as being worth a longer, more leisurely stay. Much of Newfoundland falls into this category but my favourite province by a long way was still Nova Scotia and its gorgeous and natural south coast – the real Maritime gem in my estimation.



Fig 26: From the ferry



Fig 27: MV J&C Smallwood

#### Day 16: Red Shoe, Green Car

As if to reinforce my attachment to NS's Scottish heritage, the Clansman Motel near North Sydney is worth a mention as being just the place for bikers to stop over. Bike washing, laundry and decent food were all there, setting us up for an excellent day's riding back through Rankin country, including a stop at The Red Shoe Pub in Mabou, the Family's restaurant, and a chat with the lovely Heather, which really made my brother's whole holiday a big success. The fact that the local MG Car Club was having its main summer event was just a bonus.

#### Day 17: Caribou to Hopewell

After a night's stay at the historic and charming water-front Pictou Lodge Resort and their excellent crab-cakes for breakfast, we jumped on the Caribou ferry for a look at Prince Edward Island to complete the eastern provinces and take in the marvellous s-shaped, 13 km Confederation Bridge to New Brunswick. PEI was certainly pretty in an idyllic, safe sort of way but did not make a huge impression on us after the wilds of NS and NF, and we could do without the whole world o' Anne of Green Gables thing happening around

Cavendish. Across the bridge and a fast ride around the estuary of the Petitcodiac River and on to Chignecto Bay (gotta love those names) put us in position to see the Atlantic Ocean floor the following day.



Fig 28: Cape Bear, PEI

Day 18: The world's largest bathtub

We left the strangely alpine-looking Hopewell Rocks Motel to visit the ocean tidal exploration site that is the Hopewell Rocks, where the world's highest tides of 16 metres are experienced due to the 290-kilometer long funnel shape of the Bay of Fundy. Walking on, what is in effect, the ocean floor was a slightly unreal but interesting experience. After that it was time to high-tail it back north-westward; GPS-guided through New Brunswick and, after a curious section of unpaved road (one to correct there, Mr Garmin), on the Trans-Canada highway 2 into the fine city of Québec for a couple of beers and a night in the comfiest bed I've ever had in a hotel – thanks, Best Weston.



Fig 29: Hopewell Rocks, NB

## Day 19: TO

The drive into Toronto was the least interesting section of our trip, as all riders will attest, and to be avoided in any sane plan for a motorcycle tour. However, time was the issue here and, actually, we were quite tired so an undemanding ride was just fine, although it would have been nice to have been able to skirt Montréal. The drive from the ocean floor to downtown Toronto was comfortably done in 2 days and I had the red Fundy mud on my boots to show for it. In total we did just under 8,000 km in 19 days including about 2 days riding out the water on ferries.



Fig 30: Bug cage on the TransCanada

Both motorbikes performed flawlessly and both were superbly comfortable the entire time, which I was somewhat surprised to be able to say about the Warrior. Being able to take touring holidays on a motorcycle is important to me. I do not bike simply to scrape footpegs whenever I can on a sportbike, or to be insulated from the experience on a car-like luxu-cruiser, so I am especially pleased to be able to say that I am so happy with my selection of a Warrior for this trip.

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