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Perra goes on solo adventure through 48 states

Marilyn Anderson

ZUMBROTA - Until 2011, the farthest that long-time motorcycle enthusiast Jim Perra had gone on a bike trip was to Yellowstone and Cody, Wyoming. But all that changed as Perra acquired new connections and ideas through his association with the Rotary Club, resulting in a few other trips and culminating in his solo adventure June 18 through July 8 when he rode his 2011 Ultra Classic Electra Glide Screamin' Eagle Harley-Davidson through the lower 48 states. Perra purchased his first bike in the 1980s, and calls motorcycling "the best hobby - as soon as you leave your house, you are doing it."



During his three-week trip throughout the United States, Jim Perra of Zumbrota saw many natural and man-made sites. Here he is with the Golden Gate Bridge, which first opened in 1937 and spans the opening of the San Francisco Bay into the Pacific Ocean.

In November of 2010, Ken Rogers of Pine Island spoke to the Zumbrota Rotary Club about his personal 10,000-mile, 48-state adventure by bicycle. Rogers's journey with Steve Anderson, which was 30 years ago, raised donations for Make-A-Wish, a new foundation at the time. The idea of traveling throughout the country and meeting people sparked an interest in Perra.



Jim Perra visits the Bayou La Batre, Alabama, along the Gulf of Mexico. This was an area featured in the film Forrest Gump.

The Rotary also offers a variety of international fellowships for Rotarians who share a common interest to join together. The International Fellowship of Motorcycling Rotarians (IFMR) was the obvious choice for Perra to join. IFMR is a world-wide fellowship of Rotary Club members who enjoy and share the sport of motorcycling, travel, and community service. In the summer of 2011, Perra traveled to the international convention of the IFMR in New Orleans (by motorcycle, of course) and participated in two other IFMR North American rides to Kansas and West Virginia. Perra recently became District 5960 Fellowship Chairperson and IMFR Minnesota Ride Guide.

Although IFMR has a variety of planned rides, there wasn't an upcoming route that met Perra's desire to visit all the contiguous 48 states. By using an atlas, it took him only a few minutes to lay out a general route. Then, using a Harley-Davidson tour atlas to identify preferred and suggested routes for a cyclist, mixing and matching was done. Hours were then spent planning an exact route. However, as Perra actually traveled, modifications were made, depending on the weather, time-line, road conditions, etc. A factory-installed GPS as well as his atlas aided Perra throughout the trip. He found the GPS to be of immense help in larger cities.

In general, Perra took a clockwise route, heading from Zumbrota, and south on Highway 52 before heading east to southern Wisconsin. He noted that he was able to check off five New England states in one day. Two-lane highways were used the majority of the time, where he enjoyed the roads, scenery, and people along the way.

A stretch of road known as the Dragon's Tail near the North Carolina/Tennessee state line which has 318 curves over eleven miles is a favorite of motorcycle and sports car enthusiasts like Perra. He said the nearby Great Smokey Mountains were "just made for motorcycling."

Perra took nearly 1000 photos during his trip with his Smartphone. Several road signs were captured, warning of (or in Perra's case, inviting to) the curvy road ahead, for as far as 99 miles. Other signs designated the many places he had been or told about historical sites. He said he observed Rotary signs everywhere as he entered towns across the country.

Many photos were taken of the natural beauty of our country including the Grand Canyon, Sequoia and Rocky Mountain National Parks, and the coasts including one of Perra's favorite areas, Sea Ranch, California. Perra said the photos looked ordinary on his phone screen, but amazing when displayed on a larger screen. Since he regularly posted pictures on Facebook, he was told by family and friends they would check daily to "see where Jim is today."

Ken Rogers had dipped his bicycle's front wheel in the Atlantic Ocean on his trip through the US, but Perra said he wasn't going to do that with his cycle. Instead, he said, "I dipped my boots in the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico and stood on the rocky cliffs of the Pacific."

Overall, weather conditions were favorable. With warnings of Tropical Storm Debby approaching Florida at the same time Perra planned to be in there, the decision was made to just touch the Sunshine State and move on. The highest temperature occurred approximately 5,000 miles into the trip at Liberal, Kansas when it hit 114 degrees, making it a perfect time for an oil change. On hot days, a three-hour lunch break made sense, followed by riding well into the evening when it became cooler. During the entire trip, Perra rode in only fifteen minutes of rain.

While not keeping exact track of expenses, with costs for gas ranging from less than \$3.00 to \$5.25 (in the desert where he gladly paid the price), he estimated spending approximately \$950 for gas, averaging 40 miles per gallon. He spent nights in a variety of hotels and motels, depending on location and availability. He did not encounter any mechanical problems, noting that his Harley "worked flawlessly."

When asked about specific highlights of the trip, Perra replied, "The whole trip. Being able to interact with the whole country, shore to shore, was great." Throughout his journey, he saw "a lot of brown and drought." As a result, he was happy to return home where he was "welcomed by green lawns and tall, tasseling corn." He added, "Sometimes it is good to leave for a while to come back and appreciate where you live."

Perra thanks his wife, Pat, and daughters, Angela and Alyssa, as well as his employer, the Bank of Zumbrota, for "tolerating my absence."

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