

Mt Hamilton 2011

The morning was just a bit cool with a few puffy clouds up high. The mountains to the west showed the fog trying to push over. I was gonna enjoy the cool when I had it as the temp was expected to get near the mid 80s.

We got a bit of a late start as a couple riders made it just in time (by that I mean a tad late – shame). We had 8 bikes with Meredith Lawler, Ed Buckner, Mark McCoy, George Schjelderup, Dave Buckner, Matthew Takeda, and me. New to the group was an old time emailer (since '07), Jerry Contreras. We started out with Mark covering tail gunner spot (thank you). We had 40 miles of freeway and I tried to keep the lane changes to a minimum. I didn't do too bad. That bit of good piloting will be erased as you read on. Sigh.

We took the El Cerro exit and started through the residential section of Danville. Normally the traffic on this road fades away and allows us to roll a snig above the limit. Today was not like that. We had traffic in front of us that kept at just below the limit. Oh well. And in a section of two lanes each way, we found out (with short notice) that the left lane was for left turn only. Guess which lane we were in? I looked and had room to move over safely – barely. I saw that with a bit of finagling and merging we could all make it. So with a perception to action time of about one second I waved, pointed and moved. Not my brightest of ideas. Meredith looked but did not see a car to her right and just behind her. George had the same car along side him. After a few honks and I would guess angry looks we merged into the straight through lane upright and unharmed. [boo boo number 1] We finally made it to the ARCO station across from the Blackhawk Auto Museum (great cars – go see 'em) for a break. I was expecting one, maybe two riders to join us there, but no one was there to greet us. We rested, got snacks, hit the head, and then rolled out for the first bit of gentle twisties. There was some traffic, but nothing to keep us from enjoying the golden brown hills on our way to Dublin and Pleasanton.

Once in Dublin the road is clogged downtown traffic and a lot of stop lights. Last year we had multiple dis-joints caused by red lights. This time we rolled smoothly en-masse. Well smoothly until it came time to turn left on Valley Ave. I had 'dry ran' this section Friday night on the computer and made a note that the turn onto Valley Ave was after going over a bridge/overpass. Smart, huh? Well we went under an overpass. This caused me to think I made a mistake writing my note down. I looked at the street sign, and with my bad eyesight saw the trailing 'LEY'. The right road I sez to myself, so I got us into the left turn lane. It was as you could guess the wrong street. And to top off my stupid a few bikes got stuck at the light. Then to add salt into my already wounded pride, it took over a mile before there was a way to turn around. Sorry, gang. In looking at the map (now at home), we could have gone just a bit further and joined up with where we wanted to go. I just didn't know that. [boo boo number 2 – and the last for this ride]

Once aimed back on our correct path, we made it to Hwy 84 and the gentle roll towards Hwy 680. This transition was my big worry. I must take the right lane after the off ramp to 680 north. And I must move the group in a quick right lane change after that to keep from getting on 680 south. I did it perfect. Dang proud of myself. [one to the good side]. At the bottom of the ramp a couple of hot rods (open engine, open wheels, open roof, shiny black hot rods) passed by, going where we would be going. Soon enough we caught up to them as they were stuck behind traffic. Once that traffic pulled off I expected them to scoot. Nope. A couple of slug-a-butts at the wheels that didn't know how to drive.

Calaveras Rd runs through Sunol Vly Regional Park and alongside the Calaveras reservoir. It does so with sweet, tight, mostly smooth pavement. I waited until the hot rods had passed up a nice wide spot without pulling over before I started to bip the horn at them. The fella's mirrors were so small and useless he had to actually turn and look behind to see us. He tried to get the attention of the driver in front to no avail. He finally, erg, pulled over (in a turn) and allowed us to pass. I was then able to get the attention of the second rod and he moved over. Free at last to roll with spirit. So we did. I pulled the group to a halt at various points to make

sure we still everyone. Both Jerry and Mark's sleds run a little low for this kind of road. Everyone made it fine.

Then all too soon we hit Felter Rd and, with a higher housing density, we had to roll downhill closer to the speed limit. Then the road changed to the steep downhill of Sierra Rd (where the Tour of California bicyclists raced UP) and into Alum Rock (a suburb of San Jose). We stopped for gas and a break before rolling to our lunch stop – KFC/Long John Silvers. Most of the offerings are greasy, but tasty. There is a fairly wide menu, so it's not the worst joint we eat at. It's just nowhere near the best.

After eating we took group photos. Mark said he was going to split early. So did Ed and his son Dave. That left us at just 5 bikes. Jerry said he was going to take the tail gunner spot, but as we left, Matt was at the back (thank you, Matt. And thank you Jerry for offering.). The few clouds were long gone and the temps had reached the high 70s.

We rode up the long straight road of Alum Rock Ave to the right hand turn of Mt Hamilton Rd. I was hoping that since the Tour of CA had used this road there might have been major repair or at least some of the worst spots fixed. As it turned out there were a few...maybe six...spots that showed some touch up. This road is tight, narrow, and in very bad need of repair. There are mean pot holes, cracks, ripples, dips, and doozies. There is debris in many places from cars cutting the turns too tight and all the fun stuff that the trees drop. In other words a fun road – well for me and others who have similarly sick minds. For the lower sleds, this road is a severe technical challenge for 18 miles up. The great views do compensate for the hard work, though.

At last we hit the observatory and rested before going inside for the 'tour'. If you take the 'full' tour, you will walk from the gift shop to the telescope room. Maybe 200 feet. We shortened our tour and joined in at the entrance and saved ourselves at least 50 feet. The real component of the tour is listening to the lecturer talk about how the 36" refractive telescope came to be (care of the very rich Mr. James Lick). I have heard this talk three times in the past and each time I learn something new. The lecturer had a nice, almost comic way of delivering the info. The telescope took eight years to build and it has been in use since 1888 - even just the Friday night before our ride. That and the other numerous other telescopes on the nearby hills are scheduled for every night. Just some folks luck out if the weather is bad. Cold ain't bad. Clouds and rain are bad.

Leaving the top of the mountain, we headed down the eastern side to get to Mines Rd for another 18 miles-o-fun. This downhill is way smoother and most of the time way wider than the western side. But it is still very steep, has a lot of tight hairpins turns, and debris here and there, so we kept the speeds low for safety. Finally the road reaches the valley floor and we can up the speed. I actually kept myself at or below the limit of 45. Even so a lot of the group faded from sight. Again I was making periodic stops all the way down to make sure we had everyone. The views going up, at the top, and going down are just fantastic...even with the slight haze we had.

We reached the Junction. This is a bar/grill that is at least 25 miles from anywhere. We got snacks and sodas then rested in the nicely AC-ed interior. From here we rode up Mines Rd. After what we had just gone through, this is flat and wide. I held my top speed at 45 and relaxed, going back and forth, left and right. Ahhhh. I was peaceful, but my guess was Jerry was working hard. He was, but staying well within his and his bike's limits. Wisdom does come to some, just not me.

Our last gas stop was in Livermore where there were about 20 or so bikes and 3-wheelers from Warriors Watch (if I remember their name). They do a good job for our returning vets. They had just a few (t.i.c.) American flags. And they were very tiny - only 3' by 5' – on the bikes!

Well from here our group split again. Meredith, George, and Jerry were going to head home via 580 to 680. They were tired. Matt and I chose to continue on the planned route to Morgan Territory Rd. This is a narrow

road that is really three roads. The first is a modestly well paved single lane road with ups and downs and left and rights. Oncoming traffic (and we had a few, including a limo) would take up most of the road causing us to nearly stop to allow a safe passage. Then we get to the infamous middle section. Here it gets seriously narrow and rough and dirty. Top speed achieved here was almost 35, but usually 15-25 was the most the road allowed. I did stop for one of the oncoming cars. There is just no way to roll by them sometimes. The last third is much wider, with even the middle double yellow lines to give a hint where everyone needs to be.

We made the last roll into Clayton along mild twisties and then up Ygnacio Blvd to get to Hwy 680 and home. I rolled into my garage with the odometer saying I had traveled 222.2 miles. Just too perfect. I don't think it touched the 80s...close but not quite.

The day included a lot of squirrels, a few wild turkeys, plenty of quails and other small birds, and little lizards. I think we missed them all. Getting to Morgan Territory Rd, I had a large vulture leap up and fill my forward view. He missed me by 4-6 inches. I was bravely upright behind my windshield. Ok, I was flinching and ducking down as low as I could get.