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DAN PEIRCE

Favorite Rally

By Dan Peirce

NTNOA Lake O' the Pines Rallye

**I heard,
“YEEEEHAAAA!! OH
DAMN IT!, PICK
IT UP BEFORE IT
CATCHES ON FIRE!”
I put the earplug
back in and went
back to sleep.**

I didn't know how long I'd been asleep, but I knew it was still the middle of the night. The earplugs had made my ears sore and woke me up. I rolled over in the sleeping bag and looked around the tent. No sign of morning light yet. Well, surely the insanity of the campgrounds had settled down and I could get rid of the earplugs. I pulled a plug out of an ear. As if I had just turned on a television with full volume, I heard, “YEEEEHAAAA!! OH, DAMN IT!, PICK IT UP BEFORE IT CATCHES ON FIRE!” I put the earplug back in and went back to sleep. The Norton boys were still having fun.

Of all the things in my life having to do with motorcycling, the NTNOA Lake O' the Pines Rallye is my favorite. I've made it there the last six years and I can't wait for the next one to roll around in October.

The Lake O' the Pines Rallye is the annual event of the north Texas Norton Owners Association. You don't have to own a Norton to be a member; the club is primarily dedicated to the appreciation of British and European motorcycles. It's the appreciation that counts. If you ride an American or Japanese bike, nobody will think twice about it. The rally began over 20 years ago when it was just a small intimate gathering of members looking for a weekend get-together. The rally was the same last October, but 400 extra friends showed up to enjoy it with them.

The rally is still one of the best-kept secrets in Texas. But there are so many remarkable things about it that it continues to grow in popularity. Lake O' the Pines is just as it says; a nice size lake nestled among the East Texas pine tress. The rally site is a ten-mile ride north of Jefferson,

GUZZIS IN THE MIST: Early morning mist rising from the lake frames the scene at the Lake O' the Pines Rallye.

STRANGE BEASTS: You never know who or what will show up: This creation is T.C Christianson's famed Norton twin engine dragster, known as the Hogslayer.

held at the campgrounds of the Big Cypress Marina. The rally is traditionally held on the first weekend in October, with Saturday being the big event day. But the hard-core members get there on Thursday to select the prime campsites and ride the remarkable roads around the lake.

Two county roads circle the north and south lengths of the lake. The northern route is full of tight twists and light traffic. Turning back on the southern track the road straightens out but rises and falls in a quick succession of hills and valleys. The road surfaces are surprisingly well maintained and provide a satisfying ride for a vintage Norton or a brand new Hayabusa. Some of the rally goers ride the loop several times in a day. The rally registration packet comes with a map detailing the lake ride as well as a much longer pine country loop just in case the lake ride isn't enough for you.

But the riding is only a fraction of what draws me to the rally. It's the setting that trips my trigger. It's the beginning of autumn and the leaves are just coming into color. The lake is blue and calm. And tall pines that still allow for a striking view of the lake and shoreline shade the campgrounds. All this makes for an exceptionally beautiful location to relax, tell lies and watch motorbikes. When was the last time you went to a motorcycle rally just to enjoy the day and unwind?

The highlight on Saturday is the vintage bike show. The show is set up so the bikes line up side-by-side and snake along the lake shore. If you're a vintage motorcycle nut as I am, this is the event you've been waiting all year for. Of course being a Norton club there are entire historical representations of both Norton and Triumph. But wait, that's not all. Mixed in with these British standards I've seen Ariel, Jawa, Zundapp, BSA, Rickman, Ducati, Brough Superior, BMW, Royal Enfield, Vincent, Matchless, Moto Guzzi, MV Agusta, and Benelli. I've even seen a pristine Sears Allstate.

But the show isn't limited to European treasures. There are also classes for American and Japanese marques. How about a 1921 Harley Davidson, or a 1917 Excelsior, or an in-line 4 Indian, or a Honda Dream? I've seen all of these motorcycles in the Lake O' the Pines vintage bike show. The bike show alone is worth the effort of making the trip.

A few hours after the show ends comes yet another reason I make the trip every year—the awards. Okay, the bike show awards are just awards, but the ceremony also includes honoring a person who has made a major contribution to the club or motorcycling in general.



DAN PEIRCE



VALERIE ASENSIO

WATERFRONT BIKE SHOW: Bikes are lined up along the shore of the lake for the annual bike show.

Grand Marshals have included: Ed Mabry—legendary bike builder, David Edwards—Editor of Cycle World, and Sam Wheeler—fastest man on two wheels. We've even had exhibits of the fully restored Texas Cee-gar, the streamlined Triumph that set land speed records in the 1950s, and T. C. Christianson's 1970s mighty twin engine Norton dragster known as the Hogslayer. It came complete with T. C. Christianson himself.

My first year attending, I naively thought that the British bike crowd would keep a calm and proper demeanor. But I learned that come nightfall the campgrounds turn into an absolute zoo. I can't tell any details without incriminating my friends. Woe be unto any fishing boats that float within range of a spud gun. I've camped out three times now. I've also stayed in a nearby Jefferson hotel three times now. My advice: if you camp—take earplugs.

Find out more information on the Lake O' the Pines Rallye and the north Texas Norton Owners Association by visiting www.ntnoa.org. RTM