



WOODEN HOTEL

Weekend



By Garry A. Nelson #62034

A quickly planned three-day trip is often the best medicine for everyday malaise that sometimes comes into play. I was bumping up against that feeling and decided I needed a prescription to fix my ills. I went through my mental notes of places I needed to visit and I came up with two wooden hotels that topped this list.

Years ago, I was riding through north-central Pennsylvania toward the Watkins Glen vintage sports car races and the two-lane blacktop took me between an old wooden general store and a wooden hotel which was built in 1848. The road passed between the Germania General Store and the Germania Hotel, and the hotel bar was calling me back.

In the late '60s, a friend and I visited the town of Bemus Point, N.Y., on the east side of Lake Chautauqua. He was riding a Yamaha 175cc dirt bike and I was riding my Triumph T100C. This was a weekend overnight trip, and by the time we attempted to get a room we had spent all of our money. We passed that night in a rental moving trailer parked in a gas station lot in Jamestown, N.Y. This newly planned 2011 weekend was to include a stay in Bemus Point's Hotel Lenhart, the circa-1880 wooden hotel that had eluded me in 1969.

An e-mail invite went out. I had three friends who needed the same getaway cure, so the game was on. Our group included a newer Oilhead GS, two Airhead R100RSes and another friend riding a KLR dirt bike because his R100S was apart for maintenance. It was a great bunch of old friends taking to the road to clear our heads.

The first day's destination was Germania, Pa., via the Piper Aircraft Museum in Lockhaven. Our first night out, we got rooms above the Germania General Store. I



Unpacking with the Germania Hotel across the street.

remembered the store's helpful folks from one of my first trips to Watkins Glen, which helped me make the call. I also considered the rumors that the hotel was haunted, but the spirits were not so daunting that I could not enjoy our evening meal in the tavern.

I searched the Internet and discovered the haunting was reported on an almost daily basis. Multiple witnesses had reported voices, party sounds in an empty hotel, knocks, bangs and objects disappearing. The Germania Hotel is a three-story, 30-room hotel, built in 1856 and is a great place for beer and dinner, but the ghost stories chased me across the street.

One of my road rules is that I do not drink alcohol when I ride, until I either have a key to a hotel room or my tent is erected and the candle lantern is glowing on the picnic bench. The hotel tavern was one of those hidden gems—beers for \$1.50 a

glass. For \$16 we each got a 1.25" thick New York strip steak, large baked potato and nicely grilled vegetables. After dinner, we retired to the hotel's front porch for a telling of lies while enjoying cigars and a few more beers before walking back to the general store.

We had a short second day, which included a visit to a WWII museum situated on Eldred's main street. I entered the front door wondering why this wonderful, new and very complete museum was located in this rural Pennsylvania town. During the tour we discovered that their pride in our soldiers was based in the unity of a town where the National Munitions Company was located during the war. Its products included trench mortar shells, incendiary and smoke bombs, and thermite hand grenades. The displays were complete, well organized and kept the memory of the



amazing record of our GIs' accomplishments in WWII alive and permanent.

Between Eldridge and Bemus Point, N.Y., is the Zippo Lighter Museum, which I have ridden by many times but never visited. On this journey I would finally visit this museum. Inside was an extensive display of Vietnam-era lighters with mottos, sayings and oaths inscribed by their owners while passing time in the jungle. It was a touching exhibit, which made me pause and remember those times. Those memories made me purchase a plain Zippo lighter with the well-known clink on opening and closing. I do not smoke, but this purchase is great for lighting my occasional evening ride cigars.

Bemus Point's Hotel Lenhart was a pleasant surprise, with a full length front porch and at least 30 rocking chairs facing west for a great evening sunset. A nice bar inside the



Above: The Hotel Lenhart.



Left: The Oilhead GS needs a jump from a very nice and much older R100RS. I like the tank bursting through the museum wall, but I like the old Airhead giving the new GS a jump start better.



front door provides a place to purchase cold beer and chips to enjoy while rocking back and forth. After dinner and an ice cream cone while walking around the nice lakeside town, we returned to enjoy our evening smoke while sitting on Adirondack chairs on the grass. A wooden hotel does not get to be 132 years old without some common sense about smoking rules. It is a great old resort hotel experience, and I look forward to returning with my girlfriend this summer. Breakfast was wonderful, with an impressive menu and crisp linen tablecloths. After a perfect meal, we were surprised to find that it was included in the room rate.

Dart Airport, just north of Mayville, N.Y. was our morning's first stop. The grass strip airport is a hot bed for gliders, experimental airplanes and keeping the dreams of early aviation alive. The Dart Museum is a perfect, eclectic collection of the 1920s and 1930s in the nascent industry of that time.

Exhibited in the museum are early home-built airplanes—one powered by a Henderson inline four-cylinder motorcycle engine—WWII trainers, many examples of early radial engines and many other items that brought that era of fixed winged flight alive. My favorite exhibit was a complete collection of plastic WWII Aurora brand model planes that my childhood friends and I purchased for 69 cents each. These models were made with skill and care that I could only dream of as an 11-year-old, but the sight of the Messerschmitts, Zeros, Flying Tigers, Focke-Wulfs and Spitfires had me transported to the backyard of my youth scratching runways in the dirt.

Three days on the road, evenings spent at wooden hotels, four great museums and the company of old friends who all share the love of the road on two wheels made for a perfect weekend getaway. We kept the days short, made many great stops and shared good cigars, beer and stories. It was the perfect cure for all of us, and we arrived home refreshed and ready to face the new week. 🍷



Dart Airport, Mayville N.Y. Waiting for the early aviation museum to open.

