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Pittsburgh Rides: To the Four Winds

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August 26, 2010 12:00 am



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Old BMWs at the Four Winds Rally in Kittanning.

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By Garry Nelson

My motorcycle was thinking itself cool last weekend after returning from the 43rd annual Four Winds Rally -- the longest continuous running BMW Rally in the country.

The three-day BMW celebration was held at the Redbank Valley Municipal Park, just north of New Bethlehem. Two hundred fifty riders descended on a perfect park replete with a shaded grassy campground, out buildings, bath houses and kitchen in the hills west of Redbank Creek along Route 28, north of Kittanning.

The rally was started by the BMW Owners Association, Inc., a group of Pittsburgh BMW motorcycle enthusiasts. They held their first BMW motorcycle rally over a 1967 August weekend in Carrollton, Ohio. The second rally was held in Ohio. In subsequent years, the rally has been at various sites in Western Pennsylvania, giving the Four Winds BMW Riders the pride of having the longest-running BMW motorcycle rally in America.

Ride and Write

Welcome to Pittsburgh Rides, our regular feature on motorcycling. Here we bring you the latest in rides, trends and events, but we need your input. We're looking for voices from the local biking community willing to share (in roughly 500 words) your experiences on the road and what you think is hot on wheels. Send your story or pitch to Weekend editor Scott Mervis at smervis@post-gazette.com.

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My first Four Winds Rally was in 1984 at a campground south of Butler. It was an enjoyable weekend with many BMW friends attending.

But life has intervened, and I did not attend another event until last Friday. The Redbank park is 62 miles north of Pittsburgh, perfect for a late Friday afternoon departure.

Five o'clock found me searching for a campsite in a grassy, tree-filled park that encircled the bonfire and coffee shack. The Olympic-sized pool was sadly down for repairs, but the county fair snack bar was serving meals.

Saturday also found plenty of the motorcyclists taking in the wonderful roads around Brookville, Cooks Forest, Route 62 north along the Allegheny River, and a few attended a stationary engine event at the Coolspring Power Museum. The museum has large single-cylinder engines that powered lumber mills and water systems.

Saturday night, Four Winds hosted a barbecue dinner. The leaders gave out awards and door prizes, the most impressive going to an 89-year-old man for the oldest attendee who rode to the rally. I would sign on the dotted line to be able to copy that feat, but only time will tell.

The days began and ended with a large campfire blazing in the center of the park, providing warmth and a meeting place for the participants. Beverages were shared, along with tales of riding adventures. Many stories rang true, while others raised eyebrows.

Heavy rain forced most into their tents at 10 p.m. Saturday night. Some stayed in an open-sided building, sitting on picnic benches and perusing motorcycle-related reading material. Someone kept the coffee pot perking there 24/7, god bless their soul.

I had a great weekend reuniting with old friends and meeting new riding partners. It is an event that is going to be inked in on my yearly calendar, as it is a great motorcycle weekend.

Garry Nelson is an attorney in Pittsburgh.
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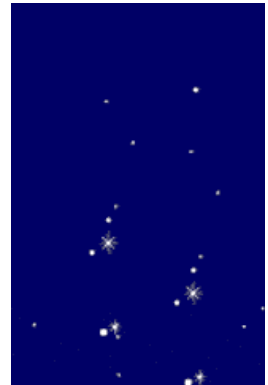
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