

Biker Information Guide

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"Biker Billy Cooks with Fire"



The Gauntlet

I subscribe to a Yahoo group of local motorcycle riders. For you diehard holdouts who don't do the Internet thing, this is an e-mail forum where folks share information. It is a great place to keep abreast of local road conditions, good rides, speed traps, and elusive products and services.

A while back, folks were discussing motorcycle camping chairs. As anyone who has done it knows, motorcycle camping requires a careful selection of gear, and a durable, comfortable, easy-to-pack folding camp chair is a wonderful thing to have. Mine is probably one of the best on the market, designed by a man named Kermit, and the group discussion made me wonder where it was. It's been years since I have had the free time to go motorcycle camping, and about as long since I had seen the chair. I decided to find it and make camping a goal for this summer.

This should have been an easy thing to do since I was sure all my camping stuff was stored on two shelves in my basement garage. Oh, the best-laid plans of bikers! The camping gear was right where I thought, but that chair—which I recently learned sells for much more now than when I bought it long ago—was missing. Since I knew that I had not allowed my Kermit chair to escape into the land of loaned and lost, where "found" doesn't happen, this meant just one thing: I would have to dig through my vast array of boxes.

I know I've mentioned more than once that I'm a packrat, but every time I have to perform the art of storage-box archeology, I always remember why. Looking through things, I get lost on memory lane and end up reminiscing. Half-a-dozen boxes into my search I found the chair, still in pristine condition, but I also found some other things I had forgotten—things that I kept precisely to remind myself of lessons that should never be forgotten. They took me back many years to some painful memories from the late summer and early fall of 1990.

May of that year my mother passed away, followed by a summer filled with grief and the necessity of closing her affairs and home. By August, I was exhausted in every sense of the word, and needed to find some peace and solitude to restore myself. I did the thing that has always been the best therapy for me—I went on a solo ride around the country, camping along the way. That journey began the process of healing my heart, and riding is to this day the best cure for whatever ails me.

When I returned, to keep it going, I used any excuse to ride—I took the bike on errands and pushed the limits of suburban two-wheeled utility. In the process, I discovered the truth in the saying that the first few miles

and the last few miles of any journey are the most dangerous. Those roads closest to your home are so familiar that you often let your guard down and miss dangers you would anticipate anywhere else. The same is true for car drivers, who run stop signs, make unsignaled turns, drive on the wrong side of the road to check their mailbox from the driver's seat . . . and the list of bad driving goes on. Add the unpredictability of traffic in the local downtown or shopping districts, drive-up banks, fast-food windows, gas stations, and (most dangerous of all) the supermarket parking lot, and you have what I came to call The Gauntlet.

Recently, in these days of outrageous gas prices, I've come to look at my motorcycle as not only a therapeutic friend but also an ally in my personal war on foreign oil. Yet I am reluctant to use it for local errands, probably because of the time and effort of changing from my comfortable, southern-climate clothes into my riding gear. You see, I always wear proper riding gear—boots, jeans, armored leathers, and a helmet—and I was reminded of the reason when I looked through that box.

What I found was a couple of leg braces. Back in that long-ago summer when I ran The Gauntlet every day, often multiple times a day, I let my guard down just long enough to be hit by a car. My gear protected me some, but I still spent weeks laid up and months wearing those braces and relearning to walk. That's why I saved them—so I would always remember the dangers that lay waiting in The Gauntlet. The truth is that every ride, whether a cross-country journey or a quick dash for some milk, passes through The Gauntlet twice. You always have to keep your guard up!

Cooling Cucumber Dip

Sometimes enthusiasm is stronger than reason, which can take you way past your personal limits. This recipe for a cooling dip can help if you happen to get over enthusiastic with the hot stuff.

1 medium cucumber, peeled and thinly sliced
1 (8-ounce) container of sour cream
Pinch of dried mint flakes (spearmint)

Optional

1 carrot, peeled and shredded
Golden raisins
Honey

In a small mixing bowl, combine the cucumber, sour cream, and mint flakes. Stir well to blend, cover, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Stir well before serving.

If desired, add the shredded carrots or, if you would like a sweeter dip, add some golden raisins or a few teaspoons honey.

Makes about 2 cups

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