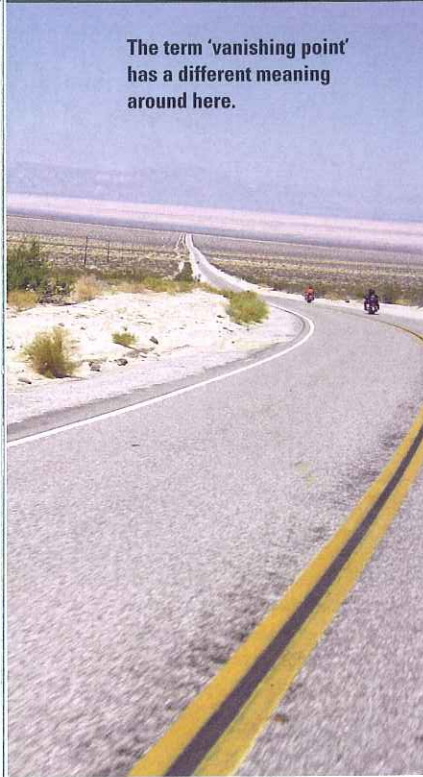


The term 'vanishing point' has a different meaning around here.



Day Two

It's an early start out of Palm Springs. It's already too warm for anything other than vented kit and the little hand has yet to touch nine. Today is the Joshua Tree National Park, then a stretch of Route 66 and on to Laughlin - a casino town in Nevada.

The road through Joshua Tree is lovely. Quiet and supposedly heavily policed, but not so heavily as to stop the Kawasaki ZX-10R and Triumph Speed Triple riders going back and forth at speed on the back wheel. Maybe I should have read the leaflet better, but as I understand it, this park is famous for the one kind of bush that only grows here and some uninspiring, not especially thrilling wildlife. It's pleasant, but not stunning and the scenery gets better the further in you go. Some of the rock formations are bizarre - they look man made, but the tree thing is a letdown. I'm tempted when I get home to buy a chunk of Lincolnshire, re-name it the Brussel Sprout Sanctuary, get U2 to write an album about it and wait for the money to roll in from tourists. Or maybe I'm still just jet lagged.

The town names are funny. We've been through Grimm, Essex and I'm sure I saw a sign to Larchass back there. Heading through the desert to Amboy we pass open-cast salt mines running for mile after mile. It's eerie scenery. You wouldn't waste a photo on it, but the memory sticks.

A lot of today is about settling in. We're riding better as a group, you can feel the chill despite feeling hot enough to fry an egg on my forehead. A right turn onto Route 66, which in all honesty looks pretty much the same as every other road around here. And out of the desert pops Roy's cafe, as seen on a million adverts and TV programmes.

Desperate for shade and a drink, but fascinated by the four old bikes parked up. Three Norton Commandos and a BSA Rocket Three. The owners get talking. They're an interesting bunch. One of them runs an adventure holiday company in Mongolia, another is a former Vegas night club owner who now makes high tech servo systems. The bikes are all his - with another 104 machines at home including a couple of rare Bimotas, a Brough and a 1934 Rudge. They flew them to Missouri a couple of weeks back and have ridden 2500 miles, heading for San Diego. The Rocket was the first one in America apparently - it was BSA's press bike and one of the Commandos is an ultra-rare (less than 400 built) LR model.

Quick chat becomes long break, pictures are taken and we head our different ways. Laughlin beckons. The locals we've met tell how lovely it is and the last 15 miles run in from Route 66 are a memorable ride. Fast, wide, sweeping turns. Easy riding and big grins.

Laughlin is a gambling town - Las Vegas Lite. Everything that America stands for is missing here. Everything America publicly disowns happens here with glee. A place where God-fearing, anti-drinking, righteous and naturally right-wing society goes to let their hair down. This is what happens when Christians go bad. If Jeremy Kyle opened a holiday camp, Laughlin is what it would look like.

Overweight, under-brained halfwits and their kids waddle through a smoke filled casino. They sit, drinking beer and gaze at a computerised facsimile of a fruit machine. Fools and their money being easily parted. It's fascinating to watch and we are thankful that we're only here for one night.

If Blackpool ever decides to rebrand, I'd suggest the slogan 'classier than Laughlin, Nevada'.



Joshua trees in the, ahem, Joshua Tree National Park. What else were you expecting?

Nobody fancy stopping off for a quick bite then chaps? Err... chaps... anyone...?



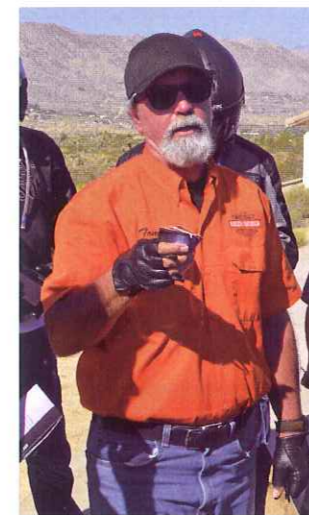
Rare straight section of the incredible Oatman Highway.



They'd ridden 2000 miles from the east coast. Only another 500 to go to LA.



The Ghostbusters had fallen on hard times.



Tom. Tour leader, ace rider.

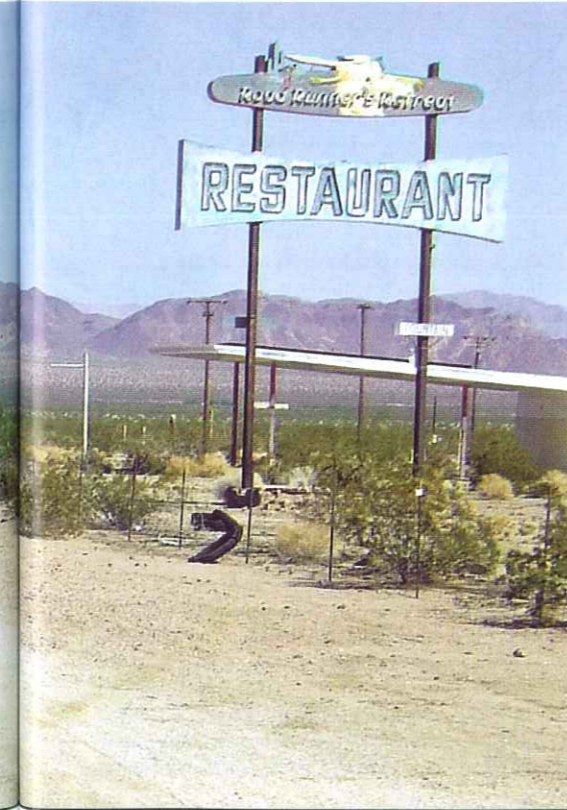
RIDING IN AMERICA

Drive on the right, overtake on whatever side you like and take double care at junctions. Those three rules are all you need to know. Filtering is illegal in most states, drivers get grumpy quickly and road rage might well involve a Colt 45.

But, the standard of driving is generally high. Fear of litigation means most drivers will give you room as you pull across six freeway lanes at high speed in rush hour.

Know your route in advance because the signing is vague at best and remember that it is legal to turn right on a red light if there is nothing coming.

Motorcyclists are well regarded in most of the places we visited. Ordinary Americans like Harley riders. They wave, take pictures and treat you like some kind of minor celebrity. Makes you feel weird after England.



Laughlin. If Jeremy Kyle opened a holiday camp, it would be like this.