



Top: Back in LA on the final day, it's just a name, but you've gotta get there. Below: Craig Vetter's latest project – a modified scooter that does 100mpg at an average of 70mph into a 30mph headwind... and attracts attention everywhere he goes. Want one? Me too.



Day 11 Highway One, Monterey and the Corkscrew

Hello bike, it's good to be back. Today is going to be very cool. Out of Frisco, and head for the coast. Ride down Highway One, the legendary Pacific Coast Highway – one of the roads every motorcyclist should ride – to Monterey.

It's cold. The weather has changed dramatically. Cool enough for leathers and, judging by the languid car park shuffling, mine isn't the only sore head in the group. Tom, our guide warns us to stick close. Getting out of the car park and the first couple of miles will be tricky. Lots of traffic, too many traffic lights and the potential for our quarter mile of motorcycles to get split up.

We all try hard, but by traffic light number four we've lost four bikes. Mark in the back-up van thinks he saw them make a wrong turn, we pull up on the city limits and wait.

It seems like ages, but is actually only 15 minutes before the others turn up. By now, adrenaline has replaced alcohol in most of our veins and the run out to Pacifica is smooth and simple.

The first sight of the ocean is spectacular... eventually. There's a sea fog which not only keeps the temperatures down but takes the edge off the view too. Without the view or the sun, Highway One is just a road. Interesting in places, but busy and, after the asphalt we've ridden in the last two weeks, a bit disappointing if I'm honest. That's not so much an indictment on the Pacific Coast Highway as an endorsement of the brilliance of the rest of the trip. If this can be just 'okay', you can start to understand how mind boggling the rest has been.

LAGUNA SECA – LIKE CADWELL ON STEROIDS

The name means dry lagoon in Spanish and you rarely see a wet race at this stunning circuit just outside Monterey. Built in 1957, but only really known to most UK riders since the late 1980s when the track first played host to a round of the motorcycle world championships. In truth the 2.2 mile circuit doesn't quite meet the FIM's 2.5 mile length requirements for world championship racing (the very reason that Donington Park added the Melbourne loop section), but rules rarely matter where dollars are concerned and the challenge of Laguna is worthy of the world's best riders.

There are only 11 turns but most of them are memorable. The start finish straight rises over 100 feet along its length making the entrance into turn one at the start of a race completely blind. From there the track rises and dives through steep gradients, the most dramatic being turn eight, the corkscrew – another blind entry to a steep drop left, followed immediately by a sharp right. It looks stunning on TV, but when you see it in the flesh your respect for any rider that can race wheel to wheel here just soars.



The Corkscrew – from here it looks easy.



This is the corner where Rossi undertook Stoner on the dirt a few years back.



And this is what it looks like from the top of the hill.

My notes are brief from today. Cold, foggy, roads okay. We get to Monterey mid afternoon, with time to spare for a real treat. Eight miles up the road is Laguna Seca, home of the best US Moto GP round and Tom offers to take us for a walk around. Incredibly, there's no real security – you can just ride right in. And, if you, like me, have only ever seen it on telly, then the reality gives you a whole new respect for Rossi, Stoner and co. Simply riding the perimeter road is like an afternoon in the highlands. The elevation changes are ridiculous. Everyone knows the corkscrew, but what the telly doesn't show is the severity of the climb up to it or how the entrance is completely blind. And more than that, the second part halfway down – where Valentino block-passed Stoner on the gravel a few years back is steep, sharp and very definitely not the place to be mucking about.

We park the bikes close to the corkscrew. With no one about Tom gives us a leg up over the fence and we're on the circuit. Walking maybe, not riding, but dumbstruck at the chance to see Laguna from a rider's perspective. I don't do track days, but I want to ride around here. Eventually security turn up, but they're friendly. We chat for a bit and then go back to the bikes.

Monterey has its own Fisherman's Wharf. Classy, upmarket, but fishy all the same. Three frustrated vegetarians in search of something tasty chance upon a small outhouse, hidden on the edge. It smells like Indian. And it is. We're the only customers and service is, er, relaxed (Anthony Hopkins apparently has a house around here somewhere, perhaps they should name this place 'The world's slowest Indian' as a tribute), but the food is superb and a welcome change after 12 days of burgers, salads and Burritos.

Day 12 Breakfast with a legend, dinner with dolphins.

Before I came out here I'd been helping out on one of MSL's sister titles – *Classic Bike Guide* magazine. And I'd been talking by email with fairing pioneer and Triumph Hurricane designer Craig Vetter, who happens to live in Monterey. When I mentioned I'd be passing he suggested we meet up. And so, on a chilly Thursday morning in a motel car park I find myself staring at the world's coolest Honda CN250 Helix scooter and shaking hands with a legend.

The scooter is Mr V's latest project. Designed to average 100mpg at a constant 70mph into a 30mph headwind. "I use Highway One as my test track," he says in a matter of fact way. "There are a couple of places where the side winds are strong enough test aerodynamic stability to the limit.

"My hero was Buckminster Fuller. One of his ideas was that the future is all about doing more with less. Motorcycles seem to have lost their way though. Back in the Sixties most cars struggled to do 20mpg where bikes did three times that. Now though cars do 50mpg and motorcycles do less than before. They no longer do more for less.

"There's no point having these bizarre concept vehicles that do a million miles per gallon at 12mph because no one wants to drive that slow. Go ride your bike for a mile, turn off the engine and push it home. That's how much energy it takes to move your bike one mile. Motorcycles need to be lighter, smaller, more aerodynamic and with engines designed for economy too.

"In my lifetime there have already been two separate occasions when fuel shortage has been an issue. In the future it will happen much more often.

"I want to build a kit of my streamliner to sell commercially. I know only 10 people will ever buy them, but you have to start the conversation."

Wow. Now that was a breakfast to remember. The energy is astonishing and it's so good to meet someone who could easily be trading on his past, but instead is still so excited about the future.

Unfortunately our time is up. We have a date with some dolphins in Pismo Beach.



Squadron of pelicans followed us in tight formation for miles along Highway One.



Above; A seagull designed by committee. Round here they're as common as pigeons.



Above right; The white cliffs of Pismo. If only Vera had booked with HC Travel, she'd have had lots more to sing about.

Below; Monterey is famous for sardines, Laguna Seca and Jimi Hendrix burning his Strat' in 1967. On a misty Wednesday morning in late September 2012, it's the sardines we'll remember.

When you see a road sign that says 'Z-bends for the next 74 miles' you know this is going to be a good day. Even the weather (still cool, still foggy) can't take the shine off this stretch. But without the sun or the visibility it is just a road. And a busy one at that. Trapped on a Harley in a line of enormous camper vans carefully negotiating hairpins and switchbacks, there's nowhere to overtake and the frustration is mounting. Tom cut us loose a while back – there's only one road and no one can get lost. Meet up at Rugged Point for lunch.

The best stretch is the last 20 miles before lunch. The fog lifts a little, we're past the worst of the traffic and the road is sensational. Taxing and twisty, but predictable and reasonably easy to read. On a proper performance bike it would be incredible, on a Harley it's every bit as good, just different.

Rugged Point sounds like something from *Father Ted*, but in reality is just a mountain and a pit stop. Decent food, nice view, let's get back on the road.

After lunch it opens out a bit. The morning's cliffs and hairpins are swapped for swooping roads and longer curves. Question. How long do you ride this road before you stop looking out for whales? Like the bears in Yosemite, you know they are there, but none are coming up for air. We make do with more seals, basking on a beach, swatting themselves with sand to keep cool.

On the way to Pismo Beach we pass through Nitt Witts Ridge (in Cumbria, of all places), followed by Harmony – population 18. What happens when there's a birth or death? Do they have to order a new sign?

Pismo is lovely. The sun's come out, the last 50 miles have been wonderful, lazy riding and the hotel – right on the sea – is fantastic. Park up, wait for Mark to open the beer cooler, down a couple of tinnies and head for the beach. The dolphins are playful but won't come close enough to meet our pasty, paddling legs. Tomorrow is the last day on the road. Back into the frenzied LA traffic, but we're riding well as a group now. Should be a piece of cake.

