

FISHTAIL WEST



#265

The elected officers of the Velocette Owners' Club of North America and Canada represent a registered non-profit organization.

CHAIRMAN	Mr. Paul d'Orléans	chairman@velocette.org
PRESIDENT	John Ray	clubman@velocette.org
TREASURER	Blaise Descollonges	blaisedescollonges@gmail.com
MEMBERSHIP	Debbie Macdonald	membership@velocette.org
RALLY PURSER	Kim Lohstroh Young	kim@614engineering.com
FTW EDITOR	JP Defaut	info@velocette.org
WEB MASTER	JP Defaut	info@velocette.org

Upcoming Events

2026 The Californian

7th March 2026

Santa Anita Park, Arcadia, CA
info@velocette.org

Moto Melee

27- 29th June 2026

San Francisco, CA
the_shoog@yahoo.com

VOCNA Canada Rally

TBC July 2026

Chilliwack, BC

cory.padula@gmail.com

Sierra Shakedown

TBC May 2026

Murphys, CA

info@velocette.org

The elected officers of the Velocette Owners' Club of North America and Canada represent a registered non-profit organization.

Submissions for the next issue: 15th February 2026

The views, opinions, and technical tips expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the club, editor or of any of the other VOCNA officers. On occasion, this newsletter may feature content from diverse sources: from online, older motorcycle publications, archives, member submissions etc... These might include photographs, articles, technical drawings, cartoons, logos, memes etc We try to acknowledge their source, wherever possible. We thank them for their use.

Cover image: Hillary Davis at the 49 mile ride, by Craig Howell October

Chairmans Chat by Paul d'Orleans

Hope you catch my ride report on the Catskills Rally last September: while the first East Coast Rally in 2024 felt impromptu (because it was), this time it felt more official, probably because I put more effort into it, which included our Summer Rally standards of written and hand-drawn maps for 3 days of riding. The countryside was extraordinary, we caught it at the best possible moment, with only dry and sunny days while the leaves were busy going psychedelic around us, but only in the mountains. Once we descended to the Hudson River, the leaves were still green, so it felt like entering the magic kingdom in the small roads of the Catskills. I'd ridden before through the area with Ultan Guilfoyle, who lives in the Beaverkill Valley: there are gravel roads crisscrossing the whole region, and it's possible to make a very long tour away from paved roads. Off-road has a different flavor back east, as these are very old roads, the originals from the 1600s actually, and generally have a very stable surface, so riding them isn't particularly challenging, as dirt roads can be out west.

Amazingly, I didn't include even a mile of unpaved roads during the rally, as the local small roads were plenty entertaining: endless 3rd gear stretches winding through those hardwood forests busy turning colors. I borrowed a Strike Bike '74 Triumph from the generous Ron Arbour, and was especially pleased it was an original shade of purple. What have we lost in our colorless world of vehicles – the 1970s was the era of fun color schemes, social strife be damned. Anyway, the Triumph purred along without a hitch, rolling in its sweet spot, hauling Suzie and me around happily, rarely exceeding 60mph as the roads were simply too mellow and lovely to absorb.



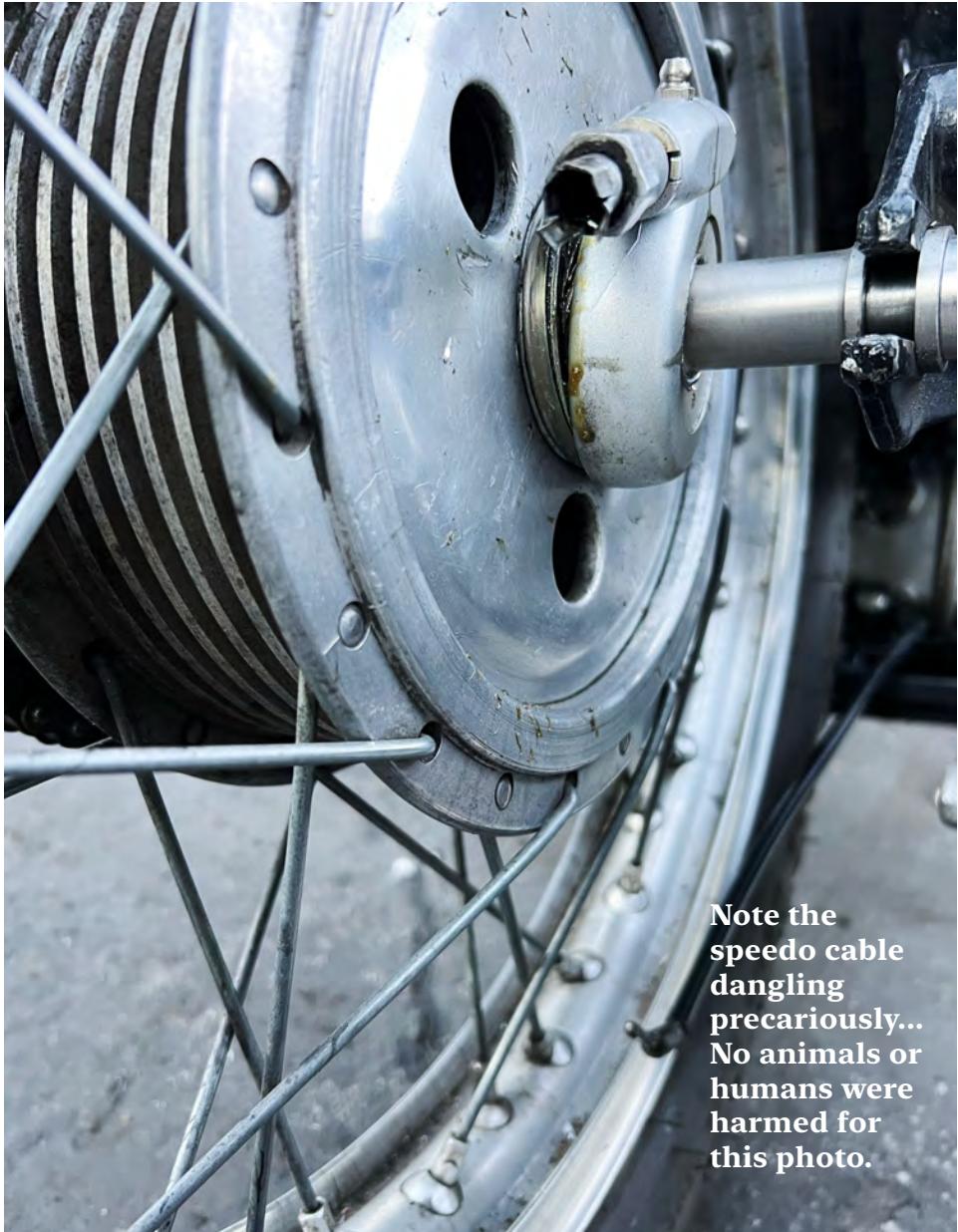
Paul d'Orléans with Suzie Heartbreak
© JP Defaut

I announced to our crew of 14 riders that organizing a rally from 3,500 miles away was, well, dumb, and Neil and Margaret MacLean piped up with an offer to organize a rally in Georgia next October. They live in the north of the state, which is mountainous and simply gorgeous, and they ride the area constantly, so know the best motorcycle routes, and the best venues to host a ride. We chose the weekend before the Barber Festival to tie in the two events for those traveling through: the Georgia rally will run October 3-7, and is guaranteed to be worth the drive. Big round of applause to the MacLeans for stepping up, and flying the Velocette flag in an area most of us have never

ridden. Suzie and I passed through Georgia on the 2014 Cannonball, but only the south part of the state, which was also lovely, with rolling hills and farmlands. We even passed Jimmy Carter's old stomping

grounds in Plains, which brought back yet more memories of the stormy '70s...but the cars were pretty colors, right?

It's always good to remember that times have always been troubled, and great, all at once.



**Note the
speedo cable
dangling
precariously...
No animals or
humans were
harmed for
this photo.**

Tighten your nuts

by Someone who should know better

Don't forget to tighten your nuts. Yes, I know, it sounds like the punch-line to a joke told by a man with more tools than sense and fewer teeth than fingers. But it's also the best advice you'll get this month. Many of you have been unreasonably kind about this little evolution of a newsletter. You've called it engaging, informative, even "charmingly unhinged." Some, of course, have also felt the urge to offer "constructive criticism"; that polite euphemism for passive-aggressive sneering from people who wouldn't know construction if it came with instructions and an Allen key. You know who you are, and so do we.

Let's remember: the officers of this club are unpaid masochists who work hard to produce something that connects us like a group therapy session for people who smell faintly of petrol and regret.

Now, down to the practical. Some of you have been requesting technical advice, and in the spirit of fraternal survival, I offer this: tighten your damn nuts. Because if you don't, you'll find yourself sprawled across the tarmac like an unwrapped sandwich.

Case in point: I recently changed my tires. Followed all the sage mutterings of the Velo Mellow oracle, cleaned what I thought was everything (it clearly wasn't), applied blue Loctite with the solemnity of a priest anointing the sick, and tightened with what I believed was righteous conviction. And yet, I still managed to cock it up.

Somewhere on the Melo Velo, between the first day's late afternoon and my dwindling sense of self-respect, my speedo decided to take a vow of silence. Back at the hotel, I discovered the culprit: three retaining nuts, two gone AWOL, one dan-



JP on Mark Haines' Venom special in Kent on his way to the 2025 British Vintage MC meet.

gling on for dear life, contemplating early retirement. The crank had twisted off like a toffee wrapper in the sun. I was lucky. It could have been an unmitigated disaster, or at least a good story with a limp.

I spent the rest of the day fretting about the magneto, the spark lead, the condenser, those temperamental organs of British engineering that behave like Victorian poets: brilliant, erratic, and prone to fainting when warm.

The moral? Keep your nuts tight. In this life, it's usually the small things that come loose and kill you.

In the next issue, we'll be tackling the delicate art of chain adjustment, an exercise in precision, tension, and barely restrained masochism.

Send me your technical tips, and failures: info@velocette.org

The Presidents Palaver by John Ray

Hello Again Veloists!

Plans & arrangements for the 2026 Ride & Rally in Ft Bragg are proceeding well. **Reminder:** The dates for the 43rd VOCNA Annual Ride & Rally in Ft Bragg, California are **Sunday June 14 through Saturday June 20, 2026.**

We will be doing day loop rides Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, returning to the HQ hotel in Ft. Bragg each day. Then on Thursday, we will be doing an overnighter to Ferndale CA, and back to Ft. Bragg on Friday. Summary descriptions and an overview map of the provisional layout of each days route are included in this issue.

We now have commitments from the Rally HQ hotel in Ft. Bragg, and for our overnight stop in Ferndale CA. Details are below.

I have driven or ridden most of the backroads we intend to ride, and have found some very good Velo roads: scenic & bendy with decent pavement, for the most part. I have also tried to limit the mileage on main roads such as Highway 101. Not entirely possible to eliminate these stretches, since at times Highway 101 is the only N/S connect-or between the backroads we fancy.

I am still working with Treasurer Blaise Decollonges to digitize the



El Presidente John Ray ©JP Default

route maps, and will have more info on that in the next issue of FTW. And again, not to worry, we will have the traditional analog/paper route sheets for every registered participant.

Lodging & Meal Summary

Sunday 6/14 thru Saturday 6/20/2025: Harbor Lite Lodge, Ft. Bragg CA. 707-964-0221

Thursday 6/18/25: Ferndale, CA.

- Victorian Inn & Redwood Suites. 707-786-4949
- Gingerbread Mansion: 707-786-4000

Group Meals: Cost Included in Ride Fee.

- Sunday 6/14: Welcome Dinner, Harbor Lite Lodge, Ft. Bragg.
- Thursday 6/18: Victorian Inn, Ferndale.
- Saturday 6/20: AGM/Awards Banquet, Harbor Lite Lodge, Ft. Bragg.



Rally Venue/Lodging in Ft. Bragg:

The Rally venue for 2026 will be the Harbor Lite Lodge in Ft. Bragg CA. You can check out the Lodge at www.harborliteodge.com. We'll be staying there all week, with the exception of Thursday June 18, when we will be in Ferndale, CA. The Harbor Lite Lodge has conference rooms they are holding for catered meals for the Welcome Dinner on Sunday June 14 and the AGM/Awards Banquet on June 20.

The Lodge is holding 35 guest rooms for us for June 14 through 20, 2026 at a blended weekday/weekend rate with a 10% discount. The rooms being held are a mix of bed types (1 king or 2 queens) and with and without view, the latter being somewhat less expensive. They will also be blocking off a section of their large parking lot for us. Plenty of room for vehicles, trailers and our bikes.

Reservations can be arranged by calling the Lodge at 707-964-0221. (Online reservations won't work for the group rooms.) Be sure to identify yourself as a member of the Velocette Owners Club of North America. Or simply the "Velocette Group". These rooms will be held for us until May 24, 2026, after that date, you're on your own, although the Lodge may still have rooms available, since it is a fairly large venue.

Lodging in Ferndale CA, June 18, 2026:

On Thursday June 18, the rally route will take us north to the quaint Victorian Village of Ferndale. In Ferndale, the Victorian Inn, which was the HQ venue for the 2021 Rally organized by Chairman and Grand Poohbah Paul d'Orleans, is holding all their 22 rooms for us at the Inn and their companion property, the Redwood Suites, which is a half block away.

You can make reservations by calling the Victorian Inn on 707-786-4949. Make sure you tell them that you are a member of the Velocette Club of North America. We have also arranged a group buffet dinner that evening at the Inn.

An additional 11 rooms are being held for us a couple of blocks from the Victorian Inn at the Gingerbread Mansion, which includes breakfast in the morning and a wine event each afternoon. They will be holding the rooms until April 30, 2026. Call their reservation desk at 707-786-4000. Again, identify yourself as a member of the Velocette Owners Club of North America.

If you delay in making reservations in Ferndale, and the above venues are sold out, there are at least two other lodging options in Ferndale: The Shaw House (707-786-9958) and the Ivanhoe Hotel ((707-786-3977). These places are not holding rooms for us.

Provisional Summary of the Ride:

Here is a summary of the current planning for the week's ride. This is still provisional, since I have not yet checked out every road on the map. But I have personally checked out or gotten favorable first-hand reports from other club members for most of the roads. I have ensured that fuel stops are no further than 75 miles apart and done my best to avoid the four-lane stretches of Highway 101. Please refer to the included color-coded map.

Day One, Monday June 15: We'll start the week with a relatively short day to allow for typically slow first-day starts and last-minute fettling. Starting in Ft. Bragg, we'll ride north on Route 1 to the settlement of DeHaven, and head east on Branscomb Road to Leytonville. From there, we head south on 101 for 23 miles to Willits. This will be the longest stretch of the week on 101, but about half that distance is on bendy two-lane portions of the highway. From Willits, we'll ride west on Route 20 to Ft. Bragg. Approximate Mileage: 100.

Day Two, Tuesday June 16: We'll ride south on Highway 1 through the town of Mendocino and head east on the Comptche-Ukiah Road where we will cross 101 and take secondary roads north to Route 20. Head east on 20 towards Clearlake, where we'll take secondary roads west of Lakeport and turn back west on Route 175 towards Hopland. Just east of Hopland, we'll ride north on the Old River Road to Ukiah. Then cross back over 101 in Ukiah and head south on Routh 253 to Route 128 near Boonville. Then 128 west to Greenwood Road then west to Highway 1 and back north to Ft. Bragg. Approximate Mileage: 190.

Day Three, Wednesday June 17:

We'll head south from Ft. Bragg on Highway 1 for about 40 miles through Manchester and head east on Mountain View Road to Boonville. Then 128 Southeast to

Cloverdale. From there we will take secondary roads (avoiding 101) to Dutcher Creek Road where we will ride south to Dry Creek Road and head west. Dry Creek Road turns into Skaggs Springs Road, on which we will ride west to Annapolis Road, through the town of Annapolis back out to Highway 1 on the coast, and back north to Ft. Bragg. Approximate Mileage: 210.

Day Four, Thursday June 18: From Ft. Bragg, we'll head north on Highway 1 to Leggett, over one of my very favorite stretches of road -- with some of the BEST and smoothest bends -- then north on the Old Highway (parallelling 101) and the Avenue of the Giants (slow but smooth and very scenic), and out along the Lost Coast (Mattole Road) to Ferndale. Mattole Road has some stretches of abysmal pavement, but is as scenic as can be. And not hot! Approximate Milage: 165.

Day Five, Friday June 19: From Ferndale, we'll ride east and south through Fortuna and catch Highway 36 East. In about 45 miles, at Bridgeville, we'll turn south on Alderpoint Road to Garberville. From there, we will take mainly secondary roads paralleling 101 to Leggett, then Highway 1 -- back through those fabulous bendy bits in the opposite direction -- south to Ft. Bragg. Approximate Mileage: 150.

Approximate Total Mileage: 815.

I am currently working on finalizing the routes and selecting caterers for our group dinners in Ft. Bragg. We will have the rally registration form posted on the club website and an analog version included in the next FTW.

All for now. Stay tuned to this space!

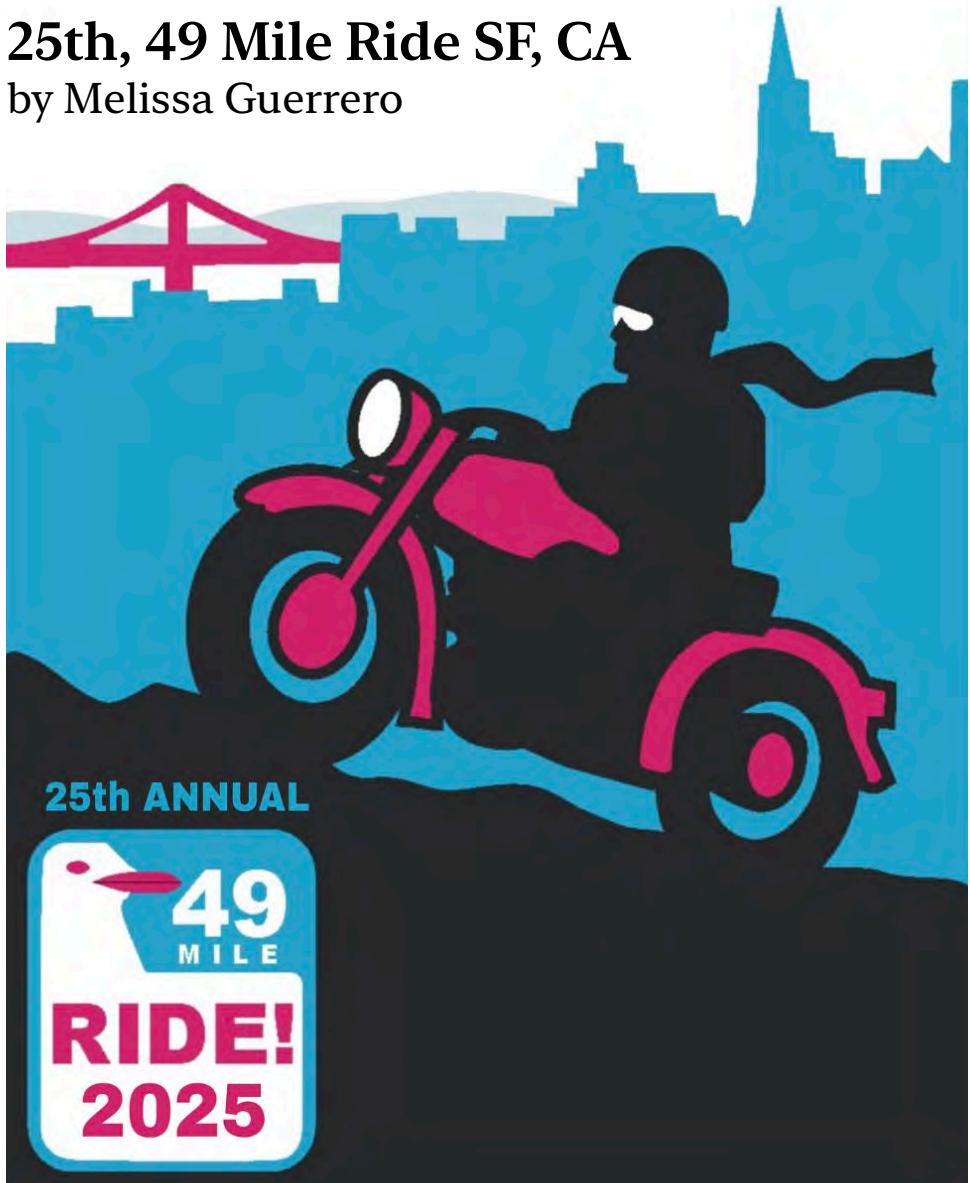
Your Humble Prez,

John

clubman@velocette.org

25th, 49 Mile Ride SF, CA

by Melissa Guerrero



San Franciscans and visitors have been enjoying the 49 Mile Scenic Drive since 1938. The now iconic seagull signs were implemented after a 1954 design competition won by local artist Rex May. Also known as the “seagull route”, the route has been modified over the years to include newer attractions and to avoid complicated ones, like the Bay Bridge.

Pete Young is the organizer of the annual 49 mile ride and this year was its 25th year. Held in late October, it's my favorite kind of group city ride. Sometimes the riders, and organizer, will come in costume due to it's proximity to Halloween.

Over the years, the meet up spots have changed but almost always they begin on the waterfront near the old



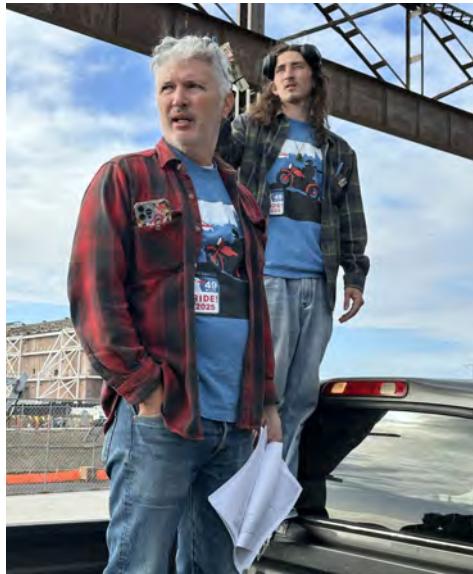
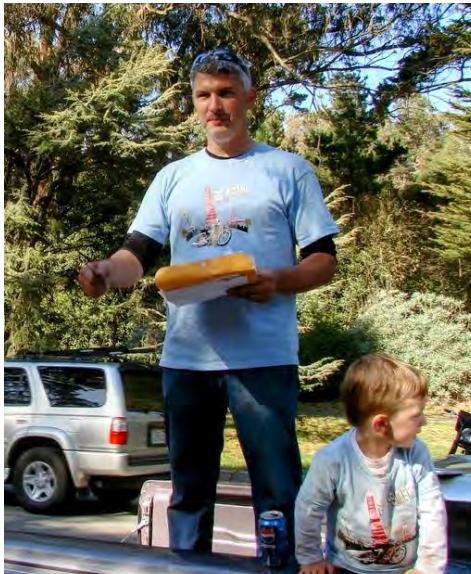
Bay View Boat Club. This year we gathered on Pier 70 at Breadbelly Coffee, also the new location for Scuderia West Motorcycle shop. The crowd was a good mix of riders from around the Bay, some on vintage bikes and some on modern machines. Most riders know each other from the city or from other group rides like the Moto Melee, and the Velocette Club, or they are members of the SFMC. Such happy faces on this October Sunday morning!

The weather report called for rain which may have kept some away but, rain did not come and we had a glo-

rious, sunny, and perfect California day. "Kick stands up" seemed to delay as everyone mingled around, enjoyed coffee and perusing bikes.

Because of the celebratory year, there were t-shirts and pins with the 49 mile design offered up for purchase by the Young off-spring, Sirisvati and Atticus. These two have been at almost every ride I've attended adding familia vibes to the event and why I love it so.

As Pete assembled us for a riders meeting, *we would be avoiding some regular stops like Twin Peaks, Baker Beach and Lombard Street*, the focus





Page 8 bottom left:
Pete and Atticus Young, circa 2006

Page 8 bottom right:
Father and son still at it in 2025!

Above:
THE moto paparazzi in full swing.

Below: Charlie Taylor reminding how to
get around the UK with "hand signals"





Oiling the parking lot at the Golden Gate

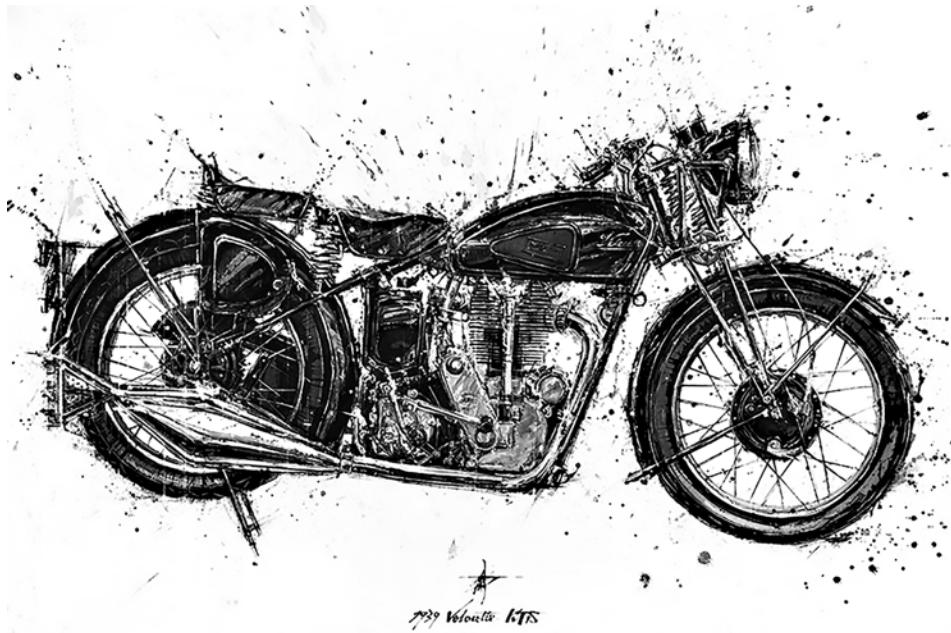
was on the new speed cameras installed throughout the route as well as some new red light cameras. Caution was to be made re: holding the lights as is common on bigger group rides.

Geared up and off we go like a serpentine of two wheeled machines. As we head towards the ballpark and the Embarcadero we stay mostly in our group. Go fast, not too fast, stay towards the front and follow the leader. When caught at the stop lights, I look to my left and my right and see old and new pals. This feeling never gets old! The joy watching a fellow rider and friend, David Battenfield, weave easily passed on his 1971 Vespa Primavera with his 9 year old son Max tucked in the front and grinning ear to ear.

Spiraling along the waters edge of the city towards our first stop, *the Presidio*, my reserve gas light comes on. Lucky for me busy Lombard St. is close and I can easily find a gas station. Knowing everyone will be at

Fort Point, I rush to meet up. Fort Point is a beautiful land mark and sits at the lower Southern side of the Golden Gate Bridge. Originally occupied by the Spanish and then the Mexicans, this fort and former mission has had many lives. Today it's part of the National Park Service and is a recognized historical site that is very popular with tourist and locals alike. Certain times of the year, the wave break is ideal for surfers and this day was exceptional!

Kick stands up and we are back on the bikes headed towards the Legion of Honor and down past the Cliff House in Ocean Beach. Turn left through Golden Gate Park and by the Botanical Gardens then meander towards 16th Street and back towards our starting point and Standard Deviant Brewing. Such a perfect San Francisco Day.



Paint The Sound by JP Defaut

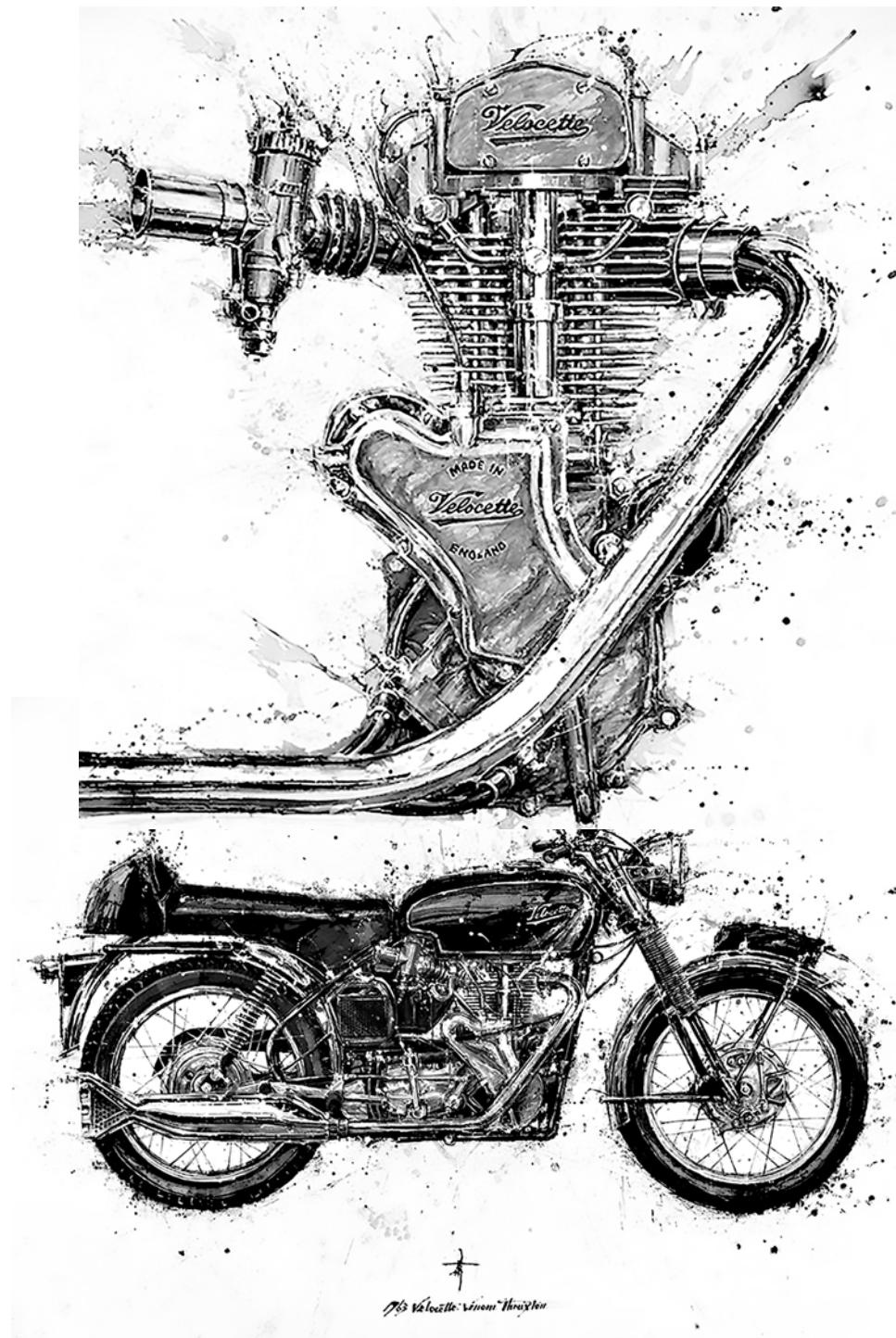
Makoto Endo crawled out of the salt-kissed womb of Niigata, a quiet Japanese beach town where the waves behave better than most advertising executives, and did the sensible thing: he fled to Tokyo before the place could lull him into respectability. Illustration and graphic design hooked him early, the way cheap bourbon hooks a freshman, so he marched into college determined to make pictures that would keep the wolves at bay. Naturally, this landed him in the advertising game, grinding out layouts for Tokyo agencies until he wised up and headed for New York, another concrete funhouse where he survived 25 years as an art director, without losing his sanity, which is more than you can say for most.

Then, in 2011, after one too many client briefings or a sudden spiritual jolt from the gods of combustion, Endo torched the ad-game playbook and declared himself a full-time

painter. He'd kept the flame alive the whole time anyway, daubing and doodling like a man storing ammunition. Landscapes, portraits, the usual sensible fare until the real obsession took hold. Motorcycles. Not polite watercolor visions of them, but snarling, oil-sweating beasts rendered live at rallies, where he stands alone like a high-wire act with no net.

His method is a kind of controlled madness: flinging Indian ink with chopsticks, because brushes, apparently, are for cowards. Bamboo gave him the right tensile snap, the perfect instrument for violence with intent. Now he assaults the canvas chasing a single, deranged objective: to paint the sound. Not the bike, not the chrome and certainly not the myth. Nope, just the furious motorcycle howl itself, the wild metallic bellow that riders hear in their ribs. And damned if he isn't getting close in this selection of Velocette pieces.

The man's got taste!



1963 Velocette Venom Thruxton

The Catskills Pajamas by Paul d'Orleans



The land of the covered bridge! Only one was still in use, but not this one in Millbrook.

My pet project for the past two years has been to establish an East Coast event for Velocette owners stuck on the wrong side of the continent. While we've always had a few stalwarts make their way out West every summer from the land of the setting sun, it's always seemed silly we've never had a rally out East. This year the call of the Catskill mountains was strong, partly because I was familiar with the area (especially around Hudson), and partly because a likely venue was suggested by a rider at last year's event in Massachusetts: Hunter Mountain resort. It's a skiing area, which means there are mountains, which means there are twisty roads – easy math. It helps that the Resort is fairly empty in the off-season, those 3 weeks between Labor Day and Leaf-peeping time at

the end of September. After consulting the AHRMA schedule to ensure Dave Roper could make it (can't have a New York rally without Dave!), I made the ignoble sacrifice to choose my birthday (Sept 11) as the rally start date.

While mid-September is not peak leaf season, as it turned out the leaves were already changing at the modest altitude of Hunter, so we got a good show. The 14 riders who arrived had brought along 6 Velocettes, plus a mixed bag of vintage BMWs, Triumphs, BSAs, three Vincent twins, and one modern BMW. In all, a nice mix. I'd visited Hunter Mountain one month prior to the Catskills Rally, just to check over the roads, and note any tricky turns...of which there were many, GoogleMaps be damned. Driving the route made it possible to



Jack Ramsdell with his German Velo.



Dave Roper takin' care of biz on Neil MacLean's Indian as Joe Wright takes notes.



Mike Tomany's Velocette trailer.



Rally hosts Neil and Margaret MacLean with hand-painted Rally tees!



Lew Beach, with no beach. Ultan Guilfoyle (3rd left) hosted lunch at the defrocked local church-cum-community center.

create a turn-by-turn route sheet, plus a hand drawn map in the style taught by Sam Jowett, our late lamented rally mapmaker of many years. And while it's always better to scout roads on a motorcycle to check for real-world conditions, it was fun to scorch the Catskills asphalt in the World's Fastest Car...ie, a rental with full damage coverage. No damage acquired, but much rubber lost: those wild mountain roads are a blast!

It was heartening to see a mostly new group of riders tramp all the way to Hunter, which was actually close to only one rider's home (Doug Boughton with his hotrod Triumph Bonnie): everyone else decided it was worth the drive, which included Joe Wright from Iowa, and Eric Smalley from Wisconsin, who we'd just met at our Oregon Summer Rally. Both brought their Ve-

los. More long-distance riders included Neil and Margaret MacLean, who'd come from Georgia with an Indian Velo Thruxton and a newish BMW single, which Margaret prefers. Neil's Indian Velo had ignition trouble, which he's since sorted via a new Trispark. Mike Tomany won the Most Velocettes prize, as he brought 3 to the rally – a Venom, MSS, and Scrambler. I was lucky to borrow a Strike Bike from Ron Arbour: a 1974 T140 that was somehow also a T120, built with whatever was laying around at the factory during the workers' occupation, when they formed the Triumph Co-op. It hauled Suzie and I around with verve, prolly cause it sniffed out we're a couple of commies too. Ron's BSA Thunderbolt gave a little trouble on our last day, during a foray to the remarkable Olana Museum, the preserved 'orientalist' home of 19th C. mega-



All the way from Wisconsin, with a Velo and dog! Eric and Allyson Smalley

painter Frederick Church. Olana sits atop a hill overlooking several hundred acres of woodlands and the Hudson river, proper inspiration for the legendary landscape painter.

Our first day's ride took us up and around the hills through very rural roads of the type you rarely find out West, with a surprising number of houses, no traffic, and fun winding sections lined with mature trees busy changing color from green to orange and red. We were lucky every day with sunshine and warm weather, although our starts in the morning were cool before the mountain mist was burned away.

Our lunch stop was in the hamlet of Charlottesville, sitting on picnic tables outside their charming General Store, which makes great sandwich-

es. Like all our other meals, I'd kept it simple by not attempting to herd cats, and letting everyone cover their own meals. Dinner that night started early, as we convinced the owner at the Jägerberg Beer Hall in Hunter to let us lie around on their outdoor furniture drinking beer at 3pm, until they started serving food a couple of hours later. I highly recommend lounging in the mountain sun with a beer in the afternoon: many of us took naps.

Our second day sent us South through Phoenicia, a town with a population of 50% antique stores. We found cool stuff, although our youngest rider Jack Ramsdell (BMW R60/2) found the coolest - a flame red Fender guitar in its original case. After coffee, we sped over and

around the mountains to meet Ultan Guilfoyle on Lew Beach, which is not a beach at all, but part of the exclusive Beaverkill Valley. No, they don't kill beavers, apparently 'kill' is the old Dutch word for creek. Ultan, if you don't know, was half the curation team for the Art of the Motorcycle exhibit at the Guggenheim in 1998. He's also a very generous friend, who arranged for use of the local defrocked church near his home, where he supplied us with soup and sandwiches and a drone-taken overhead group portrait. He'd meant to ride with us a bit, but his BSA ZB Gold Star got a flat, which is exactly what happened last time I rode with him in the woods nearby, years before. We crashed a local bar at day's end for the necessary beers, and tumbled over to an Italian restaurant nearby for a big group dinner. By then, Wendy Pojmann and her posse of Italian sportbike buddies had joined us, and followed us the next day for lunch in Hudson proper, near Moto Café, a local rider's hub.

During a morning riders' meeting, I expressed my wish that someone else would organize next year's East

Coast rally, which is when Neil and Margaret MacLean piped up with the idea of a rally near their home in Georgia. They know the very roads we'd want to ride and the places we'd gather, and both have the enthusiasm to make something good happen. I suggested we pick the weekend before the Barber Festival, as it's only a 3.5 hour drive to Birmingham, and if we go all the way to Georgia, we might as well stick around for both events. And so it was decided: our Georgia Rally (name to be considered) will commence the weekend of Sept. 26th, and finish by Tuesday Sept 29th, to give plenty of time for racers to set up at Barber. We've already got interest from several folks who've never attended a Velo rally before, but like the idea. I think it's going to be a corker, as they say. I trust Neil's generosity and fine riding spirit to put together something really memorable. And it's a twofer for travelers, as the Barber Festival should be on every rider's bucket list. Mark your calendars now, and stay tuned for more details in the next FTW.

Picturesque moment
in Charlottesville





© i am this motorcycle

Steve Eorio, mellow motorcyclist, wine maker and ride host. ©JP Default

The The Art of Conviviality by JP Default

“Our society doesn’t only produce artifact things, but artifact people.”

Ivan Illich, Austrian theologian, philosopher, and occasional prophet of the obvious.

Illich’s words hang in the air like exhaust smoke on a cold morning: sharp, unsettling, impossible to ignore. They hum perfectly in tune with the Melo Velo ride, if not the entire ethos of this ramshackle motorcycle club. We live in an age of automated smiles, industrialized leisure, algorithmic friendship, and artificial everything. Consumerism still runs the asylum, wearing a friendly badge and shaking your hand while it empties your pockets. In a world like this, genuine conviviality is rarer than a sober Wall Street banker at closing time.

Conviviality, according to the Oxford dictionary (the same dog-eared copy my mother gave me when I was twelve, back when words still meant things), is the quality of being friendly and lively. Simple. Direct. Almost subversive now.

The Melo Velo Fellow Ride is conviviality in the flesh. Or rather, in the grease, the wine stains, and the faint smell of the grill. There is great food. The routes, drawn up by Steve and digitized by Blaise, covered every possible temperament, from the romantics to the mildly unhinged: Roads so good they feel like religious experiences, the kind that make you question your life choices and forgive all of them at once. There is camaraderie strong enough to keep you rolling when your magneto decides, once again, to betray you at the worst possible moment. There is wine made by a man who gives a damn, Belgian cheesecake that knocks all competitors into the weeds, and coffee so good it borders

on irresponsible. And yes, motorcycles. Real ones. Time machines. The Best of British, from back when “best” wasn’t a marketing term but a stubborn national delusion forged in steel.

Among the Empire’s proud mechanical hallucinations this year were not one, but two Vincent Rapides. That alone should qualify the ride as a minor historical event. As if summoned by the gods of torque and melancholy, our faithful troubadour Lance Lindborg sealed the deal by serenading us with Richard Thompson’s 1952 Vincent Black Lightning. It was one of those moments: rare, fragile, impossible to recreate, made sweeter by the near certainty that I will never own such a machine. But hell, it’s not a KTT. Not even close.

As if the universe hadn’t already overplayed its hand, Mike Cecchini barreled in from the East Coast to mark another lap around the sun. Carol Eorio supplied the candles, the cheesecake was lit, and for a brief, glorious moment, time itself seemed confused about what year it was. Another golden moment was seeing our friend Sean Duggan for the first time since he kicked cancer out of its shell; a few pounds lighter, but flanked by his son, his huge smile crushed us all, as did his laugh which is now louder than before...!

When Tim Kenney passed on the baton a few years back, it seemed only right to make this an official club ride. That decision required a proper wingman, and I found one in Steve Eorio, ably reinforced by his



Mark Stephenson weighing the British Empire over American freedom.

Another quick refreshment break.



wife Carol, hosts of near-mythical caliber. People often ask why we don't calendar the ride earlier, so everyone can plan their lives around it. A fair question, asked by people who still believe they're in control.

The truth is simple: we are guests of Steve, and Steve answers to forces far older and less forgiving than Google Calendar. Grapes ripen on their own schedule. You cannot rush Mother Nature, especially if you intend to make juice from the fruit of the gods. Like running an old motorcycle, patience is mandatory. Nothing happens quickly, and everything happens eventually, provided you don't panic. If you haven't joined us yet but feel the itch, check in with us and Steve sometime between mid-August and early September. The ride usually materializes after the harvest and the crush, somewhere in the honest chaos of mid to late October.

We hope you'll join us next year. Bring your machine. Bring your appetite, and become an errant pilgrim of conviviality.

The Palace of fine bikes.





Blaise hosting rider briefing in analogue format.

Mike Cecchini celebrates his birthday in style.





Top: Melo Velo smiles all round!



Above: Bread, jam and coffee, all the food groups are represented for Steve and JP.



Right: Sean Duggan and Arnaud debating the importance of the British Empire.



Top: Blaise and Simon play matchy-matchy.

Above: Scottie and Ally modelling for BMW

Left: Magneto Blues,
the second coming for JP
©Arnaud Goethals

Breaking News! by Niel Macdonald



Here is proof that our ex-president does know how to use the internet.

Here he is looking into information on his flathead ford engine with an overhead valve conversion. It took me 30 minutes to get him to put down the iPad. He kept saying "just another few seconds" as he searched down the rabbit hole called the World Wide Web.

Could this be the beginning of converting Carl into an internet savvy user? Not likely but it was a nice effort on my part to show him how useful a tool it can be...

Niel

Sent by a popular mobile device

The 2025 Northern California All-British Ride by Don Danmeier

It never ceases to amaze me that our run of luck is as good as it is. In 35 iterations of this event, we've never been rained out. Rained *on*, yes: in 2008, and once during the early 1990s, when a mere twelve riders braved pouring rain for the entire 100 miles, thus originating our tradition of riding "rain or shine". But rained *out*, never. In 2024 we squeaked by with rain just before and after the Ride. But to my mind, this year's conditions were probably the very best. Good weather around here means clear skies, no wind, temperatures favorable to old air-cooled English machinery, and dry roads. And that's what we had.

Visibility was limited only by the condition of your eyeballs. The scenery providing a backdrop for the day included nineteenth century farms and ranches, a couple of one-room schoolhouses, pastures of Angus and Holstein cattle, vineyards, oyster-shucking eateries, groves of eucalyptus, the Marshall boatyard, views of Tomales Bay, twisting, undulating roads, a swarm of bikes, and no cops. Shirley and I had scoured the southern half of Sonoma County for two days, checking out backroads that we'd enjoyed in the past, and some we hadn't. As usual, I was trying to include a little variety in the plan for the Ride. There are only so many permutations in Marin/Sonoma that you can come up with over 35 tries. I concluded that most of those Sonoma byways we'd been looking at hadn't been maintained very well, some not since the first time I rode them, by the looks of them. So, in deference to our aging demographic and owing to the condition of the pavement options, I decided on a shorter, more casual route. We'd pretty much stick to Marin. Assembly on Saturday morning yielded an impressive lineup of bikes on both sides of 7th Street in



The Don on his blue skies Velo Novato, in both directions. We had a total of 60 riders registered (it sure seemed like a lot more), but I learned later that there were folks who showed up who hadn't registered. In any event, we motored out of town on Novato Boulevard's new pavement, past the Marin French Cheese Company (oldest continuously operating creamery in the nation), as far as Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, then out to tiny Olema. We then picked up California route 1. There's a reason that "highway" is famous, probably several, but for us it was a combination of stunning scenery, made-to-order twisties on perfect pavement, and next to zero traffic. Our only pit stop was in the village of Tomales (pop. 187). We gathered in front of the William Tell restaurant and spent the better part of an hour continuing the tire-kicking that had begun before lift-off. That, and popping into the bakery/café across the street. As we were preparing to leave, a group of vintage Fiats pulled out from the front of Diekmann's General Store (dated 1897), presumably headed for Dillon Beach. Our return to Novato was by way of Chileno Valley. We arrived at around 12:45 and gathered at the El Rey cantina for lunch and more good cheer. What a day!

Custodian: A Life of Service

by JP Default



Randy Hoffman's 1948 Velocette KTT MkVII, it could be yours...

So what's it all about, then?

This business of collecting, fixing, riding, and occasionally weeping over motorcycles that were obsolete when disco was still fashionable. When, exactly, do we stop long enough to take stock of the emotional baggage we've been dragging behind us like a caravan of dented Samsonite, filled with souvenirs of all our poor decisions and failed carburetor rebuilds? Probably never. Self-reflection, like good manners and new spark plugs, is a thing most of us run without. If America is indeed the land of opportunity, it's also a theme park of adversity; every cowboy elbowing for the last piece of pie, smiling while he steals your boots. Motorcycle clubs, being microcosms of humanity, attract all the same rogues, only now they've got patches and opinions about oil viscosity. And yet, if pain and pleasure

are the yin and yang of existence, why are we so terrified of the first half? We wake each morning, lungs full of air and dread, terrified that someone's about to con us, short us, or crash into our sidecar. Someone once told me, "You can't pay too much for a motorcycle: you can only pay too soon." A phrase clearly written by someone who had paid too soon, and needed the solace of philosophy to keep from crying in his pint. Because here's the thing: fear makes fools of us all. Fear of losing, fear of missing out, fear that your 1956 Venom will never quite idle properly again. We make choices, and we call them decisions to make them sound more deliberate. But the truth is, they're impulses with receipts. And for the record, you can't collect motorcycles. Don't delude yourself. You can hoard them, polish them, park them in barns and pose in front of them, but "collection" im-

plies control, and control is an illusion. If you think old bikes are an investment, then whatever's in your tap water is stronger than the single malt that's in my glass. This isn't portfolio management: it's masochism in leather gloves. What we are, those of us foolish and fortunate enough, is custodians. Temporary caretakers of time machines that somebody else built, somebody else broke, and somebody else will curse long after we're gone. We don't own them, we borrow them. On paper, yes, they're ours. But paper's for taxmen and toilet rolls. Ownership only begins when the damn thing runs.

And when it runs, it costs. Time, knuckles, money, dignity, all none refundable. No one cares how much you paid. No one wants your tragic saga over diner coffee. Save your receipts for the IRS. What people do want to hear is what you learned: how you coaxed it back to life, how it handled on California's back roads, how the magneto finally gave up and became a paperweight. That's the real currency. That's the conversation. Because if you're still bitter about the price, you're in the wrong congregation. This isn't commerce; it's confession. As Adam Cecchinin once said, after overpaying for one relic only to land another: "You win some, you lose some." Which is the most elegant sermon ever delivered from behind a grease-stained work-bench. Earlier this year, the motorcycle market gave us a parable in blood and depreciation. Paul Adams' immaculate collection. Every nut, bolt, and obsessive restoration went under the hammer at Mecum. What followed was not an auction but a massacre. Values plummeted to prelapsarian levels, back before the 2008 crash, back to when British bikes were worth less than their owners' hangovers.

When I spoke to Paul, he was unbothered. "I'm getting old," he said. "Didn't want to leave the mess to my family." Sensible. There's no dignity in dying and leaving your loved ones a warehouse of broken dreams and oil stains. Death, like maintenance, is best handled in advance.

So, let the joy flow while you can. Before you shake a seller's hand, make sure you actually want the bloody thing. Tire kickers are the mosquitoes of the mechanical world, buzzing around, wasting your daylight. There are no warranties in relationships, mechanical or human. But sometimes, if you're lucky, the person you buy from, or sell to, becomes a friend.

And when they ring you up to say they've taken your old bike to the hills, scared themselves witless, and that the magneto died but they don't mind because the ride was glorious, that's when you know you've done the right thing.

Because that's what custodianship is. Not ownership. Not pride. Just service.

And when the reaper finally shows up with his invoice of life, you can hand him your oily rag, nod, and say: "Ran fine, that one. Mostly."



Las Vegas
January 27-31, 2026
www.mecum.com

Classifieds



OEM Thruxton Fairing Brand New, never used and offered by original owner. Clear plexi headlight bubble and windscreen are still in their original bags! Go on, you know you need it...

info@velocette.org



1967 Velocette MSS 500

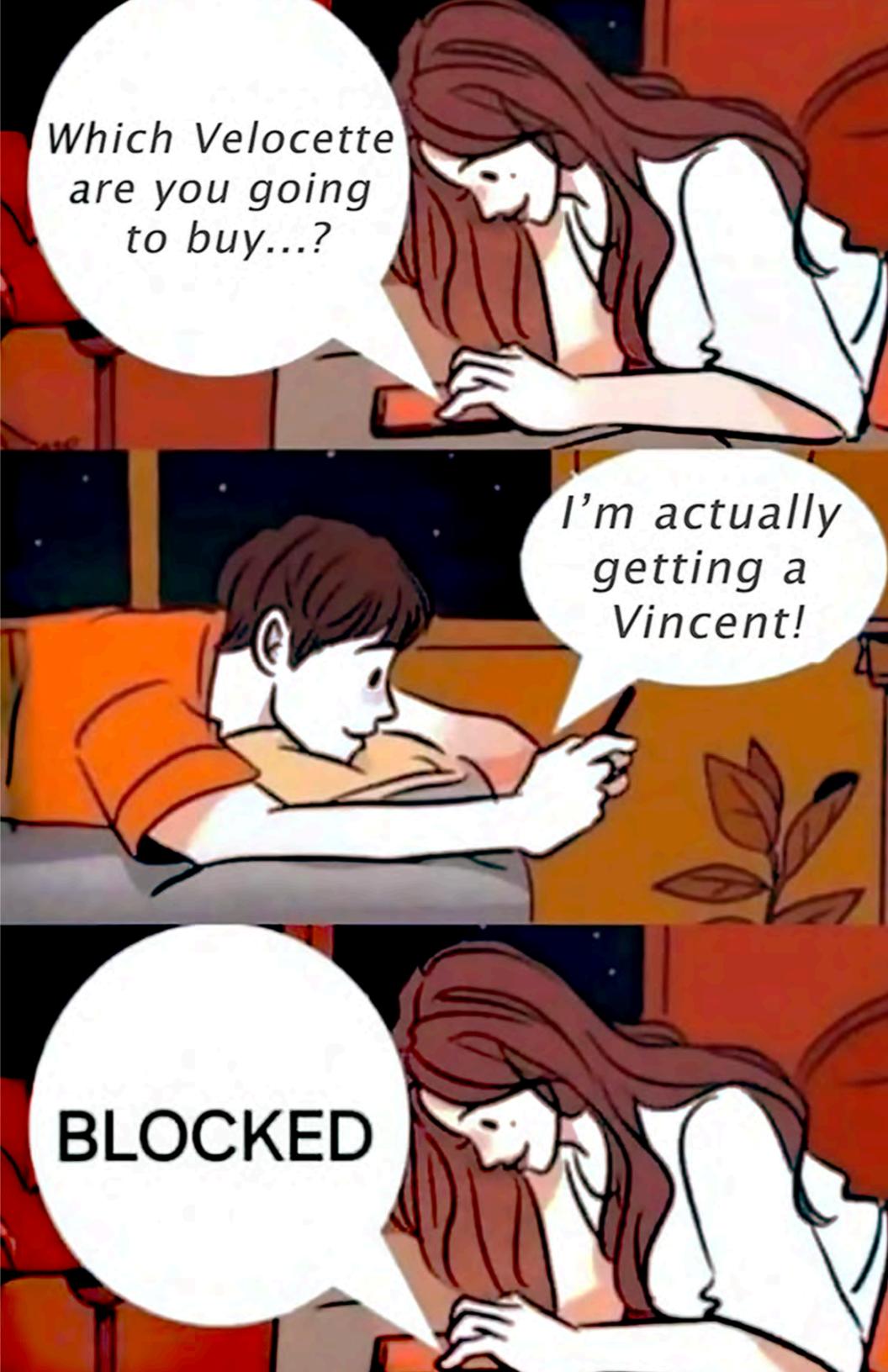
In excellent condition, and offered with a sidecar no less! Serious enquires only on this one. Bike is in Massachusetts

info@velocette.org



1952 Original Velocette MAC 350
Offered in excellent condition. A motorcycle with provenance, this rigid MAC belonged to "Big Ron" for

quite some time, and was one of his favorites from his collection. Bike is currently in Nevada
info@velocette.org



Which Velocette
are you going
to buy...?

I'm actually
getting a
Vincent!



BLOCKED



THE CALIFORNIAN BIG 'CAP DAY!

MARCH 7TH, 2026
SANTA ANITA PARK - ARCADIA, CA