



I'm taking my motorcycle (since it gets about 103 miles-to-the-gallon) through the great northwest on the last part of my book tour.

My fascination with all things two-wheeled began when my father brought home an old Indian Scout motorcycle which was distributed in fourteen peach baskets. He set about putting it all back together while my brother and I watched. We knew better than to ask how it had come apart, especially in front of our mother. I remember how we all stood on the safety of the porch in anticipation as Dad fired her up with one heroic kick, and then how we watched in horror as it took him up the hillside

behind our house and into a grove of saplings and weeds that forever after became known as the crash-pad.

Later, after adjusting the clutch and tempering a sticky carburetor linkage, the old man persuaded Mom to get on the back for a ride, but later that morning he returned at full throttle into the crash-pad without her. Without comment, he left the Indian laying on the hill, smoldering, and departed in the trusty Dodge. An hour later he returned with my mother, who was also not in a talkative mood. Evidently, the Indian had broken down and my mother had had to push-start my father who couldn't stop and had turned around at speed to yell that he'd be back later to pick her up.

That was not a happy day.

I don't think my wife would've gone for it, either.

My brother and I grew up on mini-bikes and motorcycles and used the crash-pad a few times ourselves. I remember my brother's helmet with the truck tire tracks from where some guy glanced off his head, and I'm not sure as to whether this might've been responsible for his actions since.

I eventually found an old two-stroke to ride around on here at the ranch and christened it with an attempt to climb one of the hills behind our house. I almost made it before I hit an ill-placed patch of grandfather sage and back-flipped down the hill. My wife said you could hear me laughing. I christened it crash-pad. She didn't see the humor.

My current steed is an 1100, dual-purpose, fuel-injected, shaft-driven monstrosity that I've given the name of Rosinante in honor of Don Quixote's horse and John Steinbeck's 61' GMC of Travels With Charlie

fame. I bought it with the best of intentions back in '96 but since then have only put about 8,000 miles on the odometer. When I take it in to get serviced, the mechanics move away from it like we might have a communicable, non-riding disease.

I guess I'm getting older, and the thought of straddling a motor with bugs in my teeth isn't as appealing as it used to be, but I'm heading out to confront those windmills and avoid the crash-pads. So, if you're driving in the next couple of weeks keep an eye out for motorcycles, the life you save might be mine.

All the best, Craig.