

## **The ABC Obsession December, 2005**

It all seemed innocent and easy enough. Buy a Harley, do the ABC's of Touring. This will be fun. Since I bought the bike in July 2004, I wanted to wait until early 2005 to start this little project, to take full advantage of the calendar year time limit. When 2005 rolled around, I tucked the latest copy of HOG Tales and a camera into the tail bag on my 883C and headed out early on an overcast Saturday morning to collect my first letters. I had already been making mental notes every time I went out in the car or on the bike, noticing where the town and county line markers were.

On this first hunt, heading down 288 to Highway 6, I easily bagged three county letters and eight town letters by making a giant loop of the area between Houston and Galveston before rain forced me to turn around and start heading toward home. Undeterred, however, I decided to go for just one more letter as I headed up the other direction on Highway 6. Okay, maybe I won't get that letter, after all. A U-turn in near-blinding rain is not the safest thing to do, but no point trying to set up the photo shoot on the side of a highway in that mess. Besides, I wasn't sure the copy of HOG Tales would survive the soaking, and it was the first issue for 2005. I'd have to wait a couple more months for the next issue before I could continue my quest.

A foray one week later netted six more town letters, including an elusive "Q." This outing made me realize that the cherry-picking was just about over as far as letters go. I will need to do some serious route planning to efficiently gather the rest of the town alphabet. The counties were going to be more difficult for obvious and not so obvious reasons. Texas is a big state. That's the obvious reason. It also has a preponderance of counties that start with the letters W and H and a dearth of counties that start with some of the other letters. This leads me to my next adventure.

One of those "dearth" letters is the letter "I." I started carrying a slip of paper with me in the map pocket of my tank bag every time I went out on Sporty. This paper listed all of the remaining letters – town and county – and I'd refer to it before I'd head out on day rides or weekend trips, scratching them off the list as I photographed them. One such opportunity came on a trip to Arkansas in May. A friend and I trailered the bikes behind his RV, and we camped north of Mountain View in an RV park on the White River. While there, we rode some terrific routes in north-central Arkansas and I was passing up lots of "ABC" opportunities for the sake of peace-keeping. However, as we came back near the end of the day, and were riding across the bridge that spans the White River, I saw the holy grail of county signs. Izard County. I pulled over onto the non-existent shoulder of this bridge to get a photograph of my Sporty and this sign. My friend pulled up along side me, rolled his eyes, and signaled that he would see me back at camp.

Having gotten that shot, I noticed that the county headed in the other direction was Stone County. It's a good thing my friend decided to leave me alone to my obsessions, because he'd have done more than just roll his eyes at my making a U-turn on that bridge to get that photograph. But I was pretty pleased at having bagged that letter "I" and was content to leave the copy of HOG Tales tucked in the tail bag for the rest of that trip.

In August I was down to the last four attainable town letters and about half the counties. A ride to meet a friend in Blessing for lunch was taking me in the general direction of three of those town letters and a handful of needed county letters. I hope you realize that I use the term "general direction" very loosely here. A few minutes spent with Microsoft Streets & Trips to plan a route, and I was out the door and on my way. I snagged Van Vleck and Matagorda County on the way to Blessing, and after lunch I headed up 71 to 111 with Yoakum in my sights. In a not too round-about way, this 350 mile lunch ride netted a total of seven letters. Did I say, "Obsession??"

Now to chase after that pesky letter "U."