



The storms appear with little warning because you are riding through a mountain range. I hadn't even seen the grey clouds of the one that caught me out – they were all to my right – so, as I rode around a left-hand bend, I literally rode into a wall of water. I managed to get my Buff up to cover the majority of my face for some protection.

The storm started prior to Mono Lake but by the time I got there you could hardly make out where the road went because of the amount of water, which was turning to foam. There were also thunder and the lightning blasts touching down all around me, which was, to say the least, a little disconcerting. The storm lasted until I reached the Mammoth Lakes turn off, which I had intended taking, but the sky was jet black in that direction so I took an alternative route. As I rode towards Crowley Lake a lightning strike caused a bushfire and the California Highway Patrol (CHP) were debating whether to close the road. I chatted to the officer and he told me it would be at least a 100-mile detour. As I only had enough fuel to get to Bishop, I asked if they would let me through before the road shut. They did, but stopped all traffic on both sides and I had to have my hazard and running lights on etc as I headed down the centre of the road, following markings that were only just visible.

By the time I arrived at Bishop the heat had dried me out and after a quick fuel stop I called in at a Subway diner for a quick snack. When I saw my reflection in a mirror I decided that a quick wash was in order as the smoke had mixed with the rain and my glasses and facemask left white patches and

made me look like a coalminer. I then rode the last stretch towards Big Pine with those ominous clouds still behind me.

I booked into the motel (the Starlight) which was the same one I stayed at last year. It is family run motel and thoroughly recommended. I had a quick shower and headed to Rossi's for the evening meal I had been looking forward to it since I was there last year. It didn't disappoint – a nice fillet mignon steak served with salad and spaghetti bolognese and the most gorgeous home-baked bread and a couple of Michelobs to wash it all down. What more can you ask for?

I walked back to the motel and watched the lightning storms over the mountains before retiring early.

Daily mileage – 217 miles.

Running total – 795 miles.

Big Pine to Las Vegas – "Today's sunburn time is two minutes!"

I awoke at 5am to make sure I got through Death Valley before it was too hot. At Lone Pine I stopped and enjoyed a good breakfast. A good pointer is to look for a diner with police and fire trucks parked outside. These places always have good food and this one was no exception.

After a leisurely breakfast I headed for Death Valley. When I set off I made sure I had plenty of water but stopped at Stovepipe Wells for even more. After a nice cool down it was back on the road and on towards Badwater Basin, which at 282 feet below sea level, is the lowest altitude

point in the US.

I did a quick fuel stop in Shoestone and went down the 178 Charles Brown Highway to Pahrump where I stopped at another Subway. Then it was back onto the 160 for Vegas. As I rode I saw what looked like a dust storm in front of me but it was actually a flash storm – dust on the outside, rain and phenomenal lightning in the middle. I didn't bother with waterproofs because I knew that I would steam dry once I was through it. Great, except that I was white all over – the dust dries like cement powder.

I must have looked a right mess when I arrived at Circus-Circus to book into my room. There was an almighty crack of thunder overhead as yet another storm vented its fury.

Later, I rode down to Parts-Direct to see what shiny bits they did for my Ultra, which was back in Blighty. What is it with the weather here? On my way there it rained on me again and this time there was no warning, just a crack of thunder and someone tipped tons of water over me. At least the guys in the shop took pity on the bedraggled Brit that wandered in and helped me dry off. They also told me to go to the Harley Café that night for a meal, as there would be quite a few H.O.G. guys there and I would be welcome to join them.

When I arrived at seven that night there were about 30 Harleys parked outside, ranging from near stock to awesome chops. I then realised I had left my camera back at the hotel. We all sat and talked and had a brilliant night. The meal portions were huge and I had the best meatloaf, mash and gravy



Mile long freight trains, vast dried up lakes, the Hoover dam – just a few of the fantastic sites Lionel encountered on his 1700 mile trip. Lionel's journey continues in the next issue of *H.O.G. News UK*

I've ever tasted. Also, I arranged to meet a couple of the guys the next day to sort out a new helmet because mine was dropping to bits after the storms.

The motto for the day? Always remember to take a camera with you wherever you go!
Daily mileage – 345 miles.
Running total – 1,140 miles.

Las Vegas – a huge rest day – "Viva Las Vegas..."

I had a nice lay-in in the biggest bed I have ever seen, and then rang home to let them know that I was still alive and hadn't spent everything.

I went to Carrows for a cracking sausage and bacon skillet and as much juice and coffee as I could drink. At Henderson H-D I met the guys from last night and got me a helmet – a nice anniversary chrome number with flames.

Together, we rode to the Hoover Dam and I don't care how many times I see it, it always takes my breath away. The thing is just huge and this time I did the "discovery tour" and saw the generator rooms, which (as you might imagine) are also, er, huge.

Then I had a steady ride back to Las Vegas H-D (which is huge) to get my mileage sheet stamped. After returning to the hotel I went to the Stratosphere and up to the top where there are the most breathtaking views. I decided against going on the roller coaster as the elevator ride was exciting enough for me.

That night I cruised down the strip to the Hard Rock Café for another huge meal. Oh well, bang goes

the diet. I cruised back up the strip, had a look around the hotel and watched the circus acts. I suppose if you want to blow your life's savings in Vegas there are plenty of ways for you to do it.
Daily mileage – a huge 79 miles.
Running total — 1,219 miles.

Las Vegas to Kingman – "Get your kicks on Route 66..."

Another nice run to Kingman, then back down the strip to Las Vegas H-D to pick up a few pressies for the folks back home. Left the dealership with a guy from LA who was going to look at the Hoover Dam.

Once across the dam you are in Arizona where there is no helmet law so it was on with the bandanna and fasten the helmet to the luggage. Called in at Mother Road H-D (just off Route 66) and got the verification signed. After booking into a motel I went to the Route 66 museum, had a look around and watched an interesting video on the Route 66 Preservation Society and the work it does. I went to CJ's Diner and had its All-American meal. Considering the size of the portions I think it was for all Americans.

Daily mileage – 139 miles.
Running total – 1,358 miles.

Kingman to Ridgecrest – "It stretches from Chicago to LA..."

Well, I set off reasonably early with the intention of heading towards Laughlin then on past Searchlight so that I could see the giant thermometer at Baker. When I stopped at a roadside diner for breakfast I

got talking to two Aussies who were going to Chicago on Route 66. They had detoured through Laughlin and said it was a bit of a let down when Bike Week wasn't on. So it was back to the map and the quickest route to the 66. I ended up joining it at Needles and then stuck to the famous old road all the way to Barstow. Along the way you could see the difference the freeway had made because there are a lot of derelict buildings on the roadside. The road runs beside the railway and boy are those trains big. I managed to measure a parked one and it was one mile in length. I thought I had made a mistake so I rode back and checked it again. It had four enormous diesel engines to haul it along.

Another advantage to not seeing a lot of traffic is that you can do some strange things – no, not ride naked – and I didn't see another vehicle for over 40 miles. I set the cruise control to 55 mph, and knowing that the bike was well balanced and stable, I decided to see how comfy the pillion seat was. After a mile or so I was suddenly running parallel with the freeway and could see people looking across, so I just waved. They probably thought I was mad – but I just had to give it a go.

After a quick visit to the Route 66 museum in Barstow I pressed on to Ridgecrest where a visit to Sizzlers was on the cards for a steak wrapped in bacon, covered in garlic mushrooms and served with a jacket potato. Ridgecrest was the place I was working in February and where the journey became a seed in my imagination.
Daily mileage – 361 miles.
Running total – 1,719 miles

