



people and cars crawling around the streets. We booked into the Tropicana Hotel and Casino and went straight out to lose some money.

It took us a while to get our heads together after a couple of days in Vegas, but we did manage to ride through Death Valley, avoiding the hottest part of the day that would have been unbearable.

We got an early start, arriving at the top of the road that descended the 3000ft into the valley, at just past 8am. So, we cruised onto the valley floor, at a nice temperature, stopping to take pictures at the signs of, 'Furnace Creek – Altitude 200ft below sea level'.

After a night in Yosemite National Park, we left early for our final stretch westwards to San Francisco on the Pacific coast. We entered a more populated area and passed through vast expanses of Californian vineyards.

Most of the roads were straight and flat, until we got to the foot of the Diablo Range surrounding San Francisco. Rather than going north to the interstates, we opted for the single-track Route 130 that Scott had recommended. We could see why. With virtually no traffic apart from other bikes, the road twisted through the low-lying foothills for miles. This was one of the best roads of the trip, mileage-wise; it was like doing Manchester to Birmingham, but twisting all the way.

We really let the bikes go and although I couldn't quite keep up with Gareth, I was still taking the Burgman around bends at over 80 and topping it out on the straights at over 100mph.

The road got tighter as we climbed 4000ft to the summit. It was hilarious to overtake bigger bikes, getting curious looks as I lent the scooter over until the centre stand was sparking on the Tarmac.

Gareth was in his element. His experience really showed and it wasn't long before he'd got embroiled in an impromptu race with a Honda CBR. I kept up as long as I could but they soon disappeared.

Shortly afterwards, I reached the summit and rounded a bend to find my brother parked up with the CBR guy, both laughing and high five-ing each other. The guy was older, a San Fran who knew this road backwards. He couldn't believe Gareth had been able to keep up on his cumbersome Kawasaki touring bike, without the same intimate knowledge.

Finally, we got onto the four-lane interstate that took us through San Francisco, all the way into Bay City. We spent two nights in San Francisco doing all the touristy things such as taking a boat trip under the Golden Gate Bridge, touring Alcatraz, and hitching a ride on the trams.

As we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge and left the city behind, it was the beginning of the end of the trip, heading north on Route 1, the Pacific

coast road. After spending so much time inland on roads through mountains, deserts and canyons it was a real pleasure to have a sea view.

Route 1 closely follows the twists and curves of the coast for over 250 miles and made for a beautiful ride all the way, even though the cool air from the Pacific hitting the warm air of California meant much of the road was shrouded in a hanging mist.

We went past the giant redwoods and up to Oregon for our last riding day. It was a glorious afternoon when we finally re-entered the familiar surroundings of Bend we had left four weeks ago. We refilled our tanks and gave the bikes a thorough wash down.

Parking the bikes up for the last time at the Phoenix Inn, I felt almost tearful at leaving my travelling companion behind. I had fallen in love with the Suzuki Bergman, which was able to cruise comfortably at over 100mph, carve through the mountain roads and cope with stop-start city traffic.

That evening over a few beers, we all agreed that the trip had given us something we would never forget. After 4200 miles, seven states and 23 days and nights on the road, we'd fulfilled a dream. When we set out, we said this was going to be the holiday of a lifetime, and it was, but I can't help thinking that we'll do it again sometime... **MSL**