

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY

By Tony Baker

Everybody's been to a birthday party...right? But how often have you celebrated a 105<sup>th</sup> birthday? Well, Lucy and I got to experience such a celebration over the Labor Day weekend when Harley-Davidson decided to invite the world to the party. To compound the fun, the Harley coincidentally celebrated its place except Milwaukee for such a shindig, so the city hundreds of thousands of the best wishes. Before taking arrangements at the August to meet up with Randy because he and Cathy were planning on making the trip too.



Owners Group (HOG) 25<sup>th</sup> year at the same time. No would be an appropriate venue rolled out the red carpet for faithful who came to send their off on our trek, I made East Coast HOG chapter meeting Lichtenfels in Milwaukee

Now getting to Milwaukee from Oakton, Virginia isn't exactly an afternoon trip on beautiful country roads. Because my time off from work was limited, (yes, some of us do have to work), Lucy and I had to spend our time on interstates for two somewhat long days in the saddle to get to Milwaukee in time for the party. We overnighted just west of Cleveland Tuesday evening after our first day of travel that took us on the Beltway, out 270 to 70 and then on the Pennsylvania turnpike to Ohio where we picked up 80 to Cleveland. At the hotel, I discovered I had forgotten the camera. (I guess I was so focused (no pun intended) on being sure I packed the 10 things you should have when traveling on a motorcycle that Kurt recommended – a camera was not on his list – it slipped my mind!!!) Consequently, I found myself at Best Buy after we checked into our hotel, buying a new camera. Before sun up the next day we were on the road again with Milwaukee in our sights. Back on interstate 80 again until it turned into 90 through Ohio and Indiana into Illinois. We stayed on 90 through Chicago then on 94 into Milwaukee. After 15-16 hours riding time over two days, we had arrived.

All along the way, as we closed in on the party locale, we encountered more and more Harley relatives at the service stops. License tags showed brotherhood and sisterhood from New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Florida, Maryland, and Texas. Not all couples were riding two-up like Lucy and me. It was great to see many of the ladies riding their own hogs. It was obvious that our Harleys and the trip were what we all had in common, and the asphalt was the glue that bound us all together. Even though we didn't know each other, we were all related, living the same adventure, the same purpose.

We arrived at the party destination Wednesday just after noontime. We were fortunate enough to be in a hotel with some of the other HOG regional representatives because one of them – Dan Mattias, northeast regional HOG representative – is a friend of ours and he got us a room close to all the action. (We met Dan at the 2007 Maine state rally, but that's another story.) Sometimes it pays to "know someone," especially since we had already heard from others we met on the way who told us they were staying in rooms as far away as Chicago because they could find nothing closer. As it turned out, Rick Colbert, another East Coast HOG member, was also staying at our hotel. Randy and

Cathy got to stay out in the farm country somewhere, but that's their story and I'll let them tell you about that.

Our schedule was tight upon arrival since we had 3:30 tickets for the new Harley-Davidson Museum. You see, in anticipation of the homecoming crowd, the museum was only open to those randomly selected to see the new digs. Our arrival at the museum was our first encounter with the masses of bikers that would become the norm for the remainder of the celebrations. The old museum that was at the York assembly plant truly pales in comparison to the new setting. Lucy and I were looking forward to seeing the new museum since we helped contribute to its completion by purchasing a rivet engraved with an inscription we provided. A museum employee told us where to find our rivet, as there is a reference there that tells the location of each rivet.

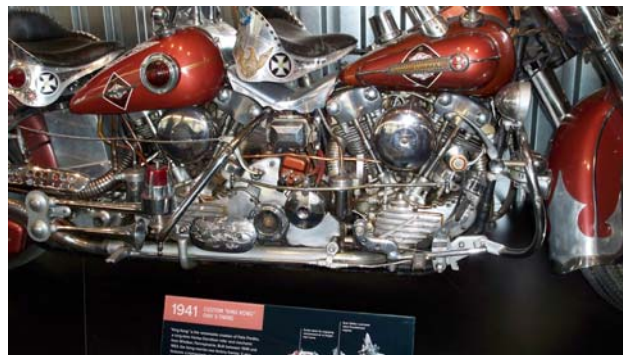
The new museum is two floors of everything you ever wanted to know about Harley-Davidson, along with examples of motorcycles from practically every year, including the Harley-Davidson motorcycle bearing the number "1". There is some mystery about this first

bike, but I'm not going to reveal it here. You'll have to go to the museum for yourself and find out. the process you'll go through everything from the motors (including those that never went into production). You'll also see displays of forms transportation motorcycles that other than



Harley manufactured, and some history regarding the formation of HOG. There's a display about Elvis and the original bill of sale for a Harley he purchased. Many of the displays are interactive, so you can become part of the glorious history yourself. You can design your own bike and see the finished product, or hear what the first V-twin sounds like. You'll even get to

Kong! When you go, spend several hours. Of course you'll also want to allow sufficient time to shop at the museum Harley-available nowhere else, (not even online), not to mention sampling the food at the restaurant there. For this celebration, the grounds of the museum were set up with vendors, and a band stage, a sight that would become



not going to reveal it here. You'll have to go for yourself and the process you'll go through everything from motorcycles, to all Harley ever made, those that never went into production). You'll also see displays of forms transportation motorcycles that

see King plan to course you'll sufficient museum Harley-available online), not comfort-there. For grounds of

familiar at all the party venues. While at the museum, Randy called. He and Cathy had arrived safe and sound and we agreed to meet the next day. Lucy and I made it back to our hotel and spent the rest of the evening closing down the bar and getting to know our fellow HOG relatives from Texas to Germany.

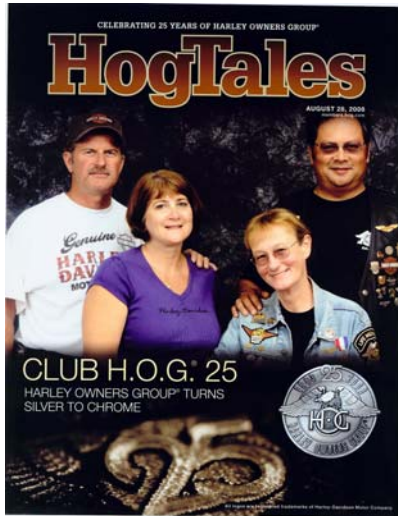
Thursday was the primary day designated for celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of HOG, with the festivities centered at Miller Park, (the MLB stadium). Although the gates weren't scheduled to open until 11:00 AM, when we arrived at 9:15, thousands of our fellow swine brethren were already there to greet us. By the end of the day, hundreds of thousands more would also arrive. We were scheduled to meet Dan at Gate A, and Lucy and I looked forward to seeing him and thanking him for all he'd done to get us a room in town. We had a few small gifts to give him, and were eager for conversation since the last time we saw him was at the 2007 York Open House. We queued up in line by 9:45 and were already stretched back a short way into the parking lot. Randy and I exchanged a few phone calls, before he and Cathy were able to pin down our location, and they eventually joined us in line as we talked and patiently waited for the gates to open so we could get the coveted HOG 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary event pin. While waiting in line we saw a couple we had met at the 2007 National HOG Rally in Knoxville, TN – Tom and Kathy Silkett, long-time HOG members from the Seattle, WA HOG chapter. We had had a great time socializing with them in Knoxville, (not to mention making the bartender richer), and were happy to see old friends again. Tom noticed another familiar face in the crowd – Wille G. – who made his way through the crowd just ahead of us. He was greeted with a round of applause and a roar of approval, even above the roar of V-twins that were arriving by the dozens every minute. By this time, the line waiting to get in snaked through the massive parking lot, growing by the second as we watched the spectacular unfold in front of us. I imagined that if this was the line at our entrance, it must be the same at Gate B too, the only other way to get in.

Finally, the gates opened. Now the line was out of the parking lot and onto the road that led to the access ramp for the interstate, and bikes were still rolling in. Dan was manning the gate with other factory reps, but it was obvious he had no time to talk with the press of the crowd. I agreed to come back in a few hours when the stampede let up. We all got our pins, and Tom and Kathy decided to go their own way once inside. We agreed to get together again later over the weekend partying. Little did we realize that this would be the last time we would see Tom and Kathy during the event as they got lost wallowing in the revelry with the thousands and thousands of “family members” who had come together for their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. Meanwhile, Randy, Cathy, Lucy and I started our journey through the private pigpen set up for us HOGs, that continued to arrive by the thousands. I would find out from Dan later in the weekend that Harley had made up 70,000 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary HOG Event pins, and that every one of them was gone by 2:00 PM.

For any of you that have ever



been to a national HOG Rally in recent years, a lot of the standard proceedings were evident: ride-in bike show, motorcycle stunt riders, motorcycle drill teams, two stages –



one with bands playing continuously back-to-back with the other featuring different comedians, MDA auctions, and of course, vendors. Among the new things was the ECHO chainsaw carving team. Harley so had some things that were a little different from other rallies I've been to as well. Rather than the normal service seminars, they were one-on-one. This allowed you to speak to a Harley service representative one-on-one about your specific issue. Also, the tattoo contest was not live. Entrants sent in pictures of their tattoos before the rally. Harley posted the pictures on a wall, and rally attendees voted for their favorite. As usual there was stuff for kids to do, and a Lego model of Miller Park. There was a HOG Tales Hangout too. Randy, Cathy, Lucy, and I were lucky enough to get our picture on the

cover of a special August 28, 2008 issue available only at Miller Park.

If it hadn't become obvious to HOG management by now, it was obvious to us that there were way more partiers than had been anticipated. Waiting in a food or drink line was a minimum of a half-hour. (Cathy may be able to tell you what the heck cheese curds are. To tell you the truth, I wasn't up to trying something new.) We decided to leave Miller Park and head for the Lakefront area where the 105<sup>th</sup> celebrations were centered.

I volunteered Randy to lead, a responsibility he took seriously as he carefully studied the maps we each had of the festivity locations. I had a feeling we were going to be taking a rather circuitous route when Randy missed the ramp for the interstate to downtown right out of the parking lot and we ended up making a U-street. The scenic picked out took us bridge over a Michigan with a city, but we the Lakefront area. recognized an exit told me we were a than we should have been, so I took over the lead. I knew the way to the Harley museum and I knew that was close to the Lakefront, so I led our duo to the museum. I figured someone there could direct us. When we arrived, we took advantage of the vendors and gave the museum store some more business. We found out how to get to the Lakefront, so once again I assured Randy he was the man for the lead. This time Randy's route was flawless and we ended up right in the middle of all the action and parked at Discovery World.



Discovery World is a hands-on, interactive museum-like learning place that had a special display devoted to Harley-Davidson that was only open to Harley 105<sup>th</sup>

anniversary ticket holders. The display focused on the development of four different Harley models: The Rocker, the Cross Bones, the XR 1200, and the V-Rod. The exhibit explained each stage of development, and there were actual full-size models there you could see up close and touch. Some of the prototypes still had the clay or plastic mock-up parts on them. It was really something to see.

From Discovery World, we decided to go our own ways and meet up the next day at HOG Island – one of the venues on the Lakefront. Randy and Cathy wanted to find out how to get to the ferry because that’s how they were going leave at the end of the weekend, and Lucy was tired and wanted to go back to the hotel. As for me, I was going to return to Miller Park, finally get to talk with Dan, see the HOG opening ceremony, and the Kid Rock concert.

After dropping off Lucy, I headed back to Miller Park. I fully expected to be able to take the roadway to the stadium that was closed to all but motorcycles. Instead, as I neared the stadium, and under police direction, I and the rest of the bikes converging to the same locale, where shunted off to overflow parking off the stadium grounds.

Although it was very crowded that morning, it was apparent that thousands more had arrived, and thousands more were still arriving. After about a 45-minute walk I was at Gate A. Dan and his crew were still “holding the fort” and receiving unbelievable grief from the celebrants when told there were no more event pins. This is when I found out from Dan that the 70,000 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary HOG event pins made for the festivities had run out at 2:00 PM. It was near 8:00 PM by now, and the gates were due to stay open until 10:30. Dan told me that at his gate they were averaging 10,000 entrants per hour. There were only two gates open to get in. If the other gate was as busy, my limited math skills tell me there were somewhere around 200,000 packed in for party.

At 8:00 PM, Dan let his team go home. Although the Kid Rock concert was only for HOG cardholders, there was no relief for Dan’s crew, and people came in and out as they pleased. Dan was supposed to drive a golf cart back to HOG headquarters on site, but the crowd was so enormous, you could barely walk, much less drive a golf cart, so we just talked and people-watched. We made arrangements to meet for dinner the next night and talked about past and future HOG rallies.



At 8:00 PM, Dan let his team go home. Although the Kid Rock concert was only for HOG cardholders, there was no relief for Dan’s crew, and people came in and out as they pleased. Dan was supposed to drive a golf cart back to HOG headquarters on site, but the crowd was so enormous, you could barely walk, much less drive a golf cart, so we just talked and people-watched. We made arrangements to meet for dinner the next night and talked about past and future HOG rallies.

Our conversation was interrupted by a call on Dan’s walkie-talkie. Some authority was telling him to re-man the gate and that help was on the way. By this time, we learned that the beer vendors had run out of cups and were not letting patrons’ re-use old cups. Finally, more cups had arrived, but they were smaller, and, you guessed it, the vendors were still charging the same price! Dan, me, and two other Harley employees valiantly did our best to restrict entrants to HOG members by checking HOG membership cards, but it was a losing battle. We were past critical mass as we started to receive reports that partiers near the stage were passing out because they were so packed in they couldn’t breath. We were now receiving reports that there could be a riot. Dan

strongly suggested I get out while the getting' was good. Under the conditions, I took his advice to heart, and we agreed we'd see each other at HOG Island the next day. Under the accompaniment of Kid Rock, it took me nearly an hour to work my way through the crowd. My route took me by Gate B where I found one lone HOG representative – Alan -- trying to control the entrance. I volunteered my services, which he gladly accepted, and for about 45 minutes we attempted to keep some semblance of order to an already beyond chaotic situation. These were not the conditions I envisioned for seeing Wille G. open the celebration, (which I ended up not being able to hear), or to see Kid Rock, but the revelers would not be denied. Finally, another person arrived to help Alan, and I bid them both good-bye and good luck. I finally made it back to the hotel a bit after midnight, wondering if the remaining two days of activities would be as “exciting.”

**TO BE CONTINUED**