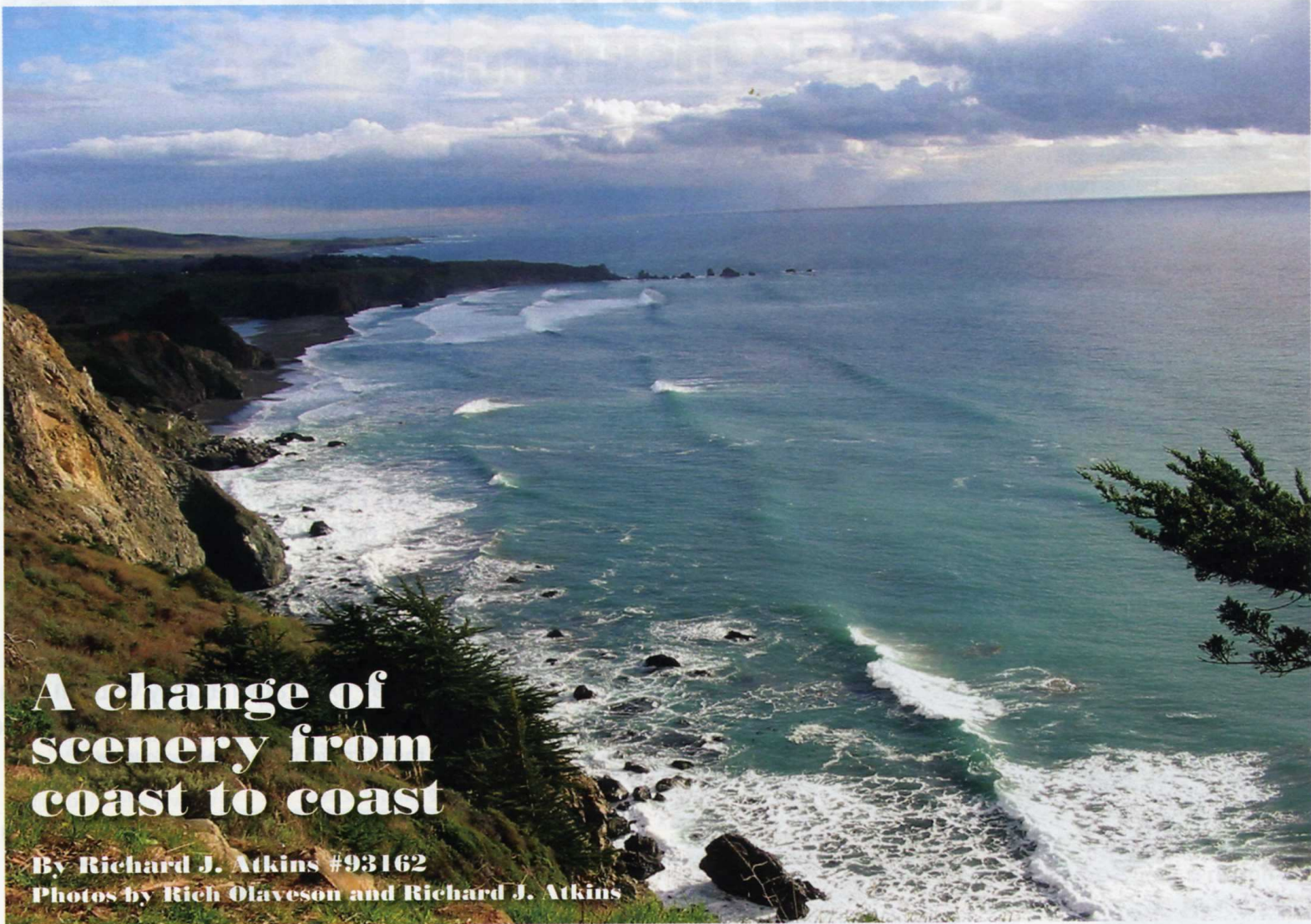


# Riding California's



## A change of scenery from coast to coast

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Photos by Rich Olaveson and Richard J. Atkins

Shortly after the April 2005 issue of *BMW ON* hit the newsstands, a Rush enthusiast contacted me regarding a contribution I had made for that issue. Via e-mail, we corresponded and he helped to arrange for my company to provide the Improving Customer Service class at his place of business. Plans were made, airline tickets were purchased, and a motorcycle rental was arranged. On a mild February afternoon in 2006, I made my way to JFK airport in New York, on my way to LAX.

More than a year earlier, I had made the same trip to conduct an interview with Neil Peart to be published in *ON*. That was one of the wettest Decembers California has had in many, many years. During my ride from Los Altos (about a

half hour south of San Francisco) to Los Angeles—and again on the way back—I encountered some of the most torrential rain in which I have ever ridden. Looking down at the pavement, as I rode down the 101 to Los Angeles, I could see my tires pushing approximately two inches of water away as they cut through the dense soup. Matt Scannell's lyrics to Vertical Horizon's "Finding Me" pounded in my brain:

*Don't tell me  
How to be  
'Cause I like some suffering  
Don't ask me  
What I need  
I'm just fine  
Here finding me  
Me.*

That is where I found myself—enjoying the challenge of suffering! I could only

describe it as "my soggy trip to LA." In all seriousness, this was the kind of driving rain to which I was unaccustomed to riding in for such a long duration.

For the return, I hoped for some clearing, but found no such luck. My trip back to Los Altos was peppered with rain that was just as heavy as it was on the way down. Above Oxnard, as I was trying to ride US-1 all the way up, the heavens unloaded their fury. I bailed and took the 101 for the rest of the journey. I said then, maybe my next visit to the Golden State will be somewhat less "humid." Certainly, it was a memorable and enjoyable trip, as well as extremely worthwhile. The messy weather made the preferred scenic drive down through the Santa Cruz Mountains and back up along the coast an un-reality.

With all that "baggage" from the last

# Coast and Mountains



trip on two wheels to LA, I looked to settle the score, riding-wise. For one thing, this recent February trip afforded me to be a few months away from the California rainy season. In New York, motorcycling gear was packed along with the laptop, Customer Service Manuals, and other travel necessities.

The plan was to conduct two days of classes (Thursday and Friday) and then motorcycle from Los Angeles, to Los Altos, and back. Same as last time, the itinerary included the Pacific Coast Highway on one leg of the trip, and the Santa Cruz Coastal Mountains drive on the way back. Early Saturday morning, I mounted the R1200GS and started to drive north from the City of Angels.

The Pacific Coast Highway, as known as US-1, runs along most of the West coast of the United States. My starting point

for the journey was where Lincoln Boulevard joins the shoreline in LA. That's right around the corner from the rental agency, Eagle cycles. I arranged the rental of an R1200GS as a sort of three-day "test drive." I drove the bike through the streets of the city and entered US-1.

All the descriptions of the PCH point to one clear enjoyable factor—strikingly beautiful ocean-side scenery. My new friend (the Rush enthusiast, mentioned earlier), and MOA member, joined me for much of the ride up the coast. Rich Olaveson—photographer and copilot—shadowed me as we rode north. Stopping for water breaks and gas refills, we chatted about the gorgeous clear sky and mild temperatures, as we decided on best choices for upcoming legs of the journey.

Family commitments called, so Rich turned back shortly before Big Sur. I

continued on, and as the sun was setting, exited the coastal road to make my way to Los Altos to visit and spend the night at my brother-in-law's house, the hacienda de Sobrino. Pete and the boys were waiting for me when I arrived. An exquisite tri-tip dinner and a cigar gave way to a well-earned night's sleep.

The next morning had me driving from Los Altos, back on Page Mill Road to start the Santa Cruz Mountains drive. I entered Route 35, turned right on Route 9 through Boulder Creek and Ben Lomond, driving south. Above Santa Cruz, Highway 1 took me toward Watsonville. A quick run on Riverside Road (129) and 101 South brought me to Highway 156 East toward Hollister. After a taco lunch and a tank refill, I took Union Road to Highway 25 south. This was a 60-mile run south, with very little

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else around. After the small towns of Pinnacles and Bitterwater, I made a right on 198, took Oasis Road and San Lucas Road to the G14. I encountered beautiful views throughout, passing by the towns of Jolon and Lockwood into Paso Robles. From there, the 101 South below Attascadero took me to Highway 58 East.

Finally, Route 33 was the last leg of the journey, ultimately going through Taft, Ojai, Los Padres National Forest (a must-see), and ending in Ventura. There, I caught the 101 for another 50 or so miles into Los Angeles. By now the sun had set. It was time to jump on the 405 and exit at Wilshire Boulevard. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to have a last Californian garlic-drenched meal at the Stinking Rose on La Cienega.

The next morning, I returned the bike, and went directly back to the airport. Flying back to my home in New York, and after two full 12-hour days in the saddle, I reflected back on some challenging and rewarding motorcycling. The Pacific Coast Highway ride took 496 miles to complete. The return trip, through the Santa Cruz Mountains, was a total of 525 miles. Both provided unique gifts. These were two days on a motorcycle that invited me to strive for a "personal best" at every turn. I'm thankful for the opportunities such as this—that provide me a chance to learn more about the art of motorcycling and to become a better rider. 

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