

Mount St. Helens Vmax Ride

For all of you VMOA members here in the Pacific Northwest, you know it's been a while, long while since our last member sponsored ride. With the help of our new regional director David Poulson #4366 (Max 05' Anniversary issue) and his devoted sidekick Donovan Brogan #3833 (92' Maxed OUT) planned our first ride. The ride was billed as a day trip around the Portland OR area. In reality, it turned out to be a trip north into the wilderness around Mount St. Helens. A far better ride than I had envisioned of stop and go traffic in the city being eyed by radar trigger happy city cops. After much email to current and past VMOA members and talking to anyone who might own a Max or know someone who does. In the end, 4 Max owners, one older crotch rocket and one nice Yamaha FJR1300 owner participated in the ride.



Of those, two were couples. Most of the riders except for me were from the Portland/Vancouver area. Coming from the Eugene OR area, for me the ride was about 2 3/4 hours away. With the ride scheduled to start at 9 am at a local truck stop in Portland, I decided to come up the night before and stay at a nearby hotel. No reason to start the day off with a sore backside.

After much inspection of each others bikes and the inevitable questions of "where did you get that" and "how much HP does that add", "is handling improved", by 10am, we all figured that whoever was going to show-up would have. The weather was in question. It was in the low 70's with overcast sky's and threatening to rain. Despite some slight drizzle, Mother Nature decided to give us a break and by noon the weather was great with bright blue skies and not a cloud to be found.

The plan was to cross over the Columbia river into Vancouver WA and top off the tanks in Battleground WA (a suburb of Vancouver) before heading into the great unknown. Once we got to the gas station, we all got a bit of a scare... no not the gas prices, but instead one of the Max's would not start after filling up. Weak battery issue, but with a good push the bike started, we all let out a sigh of relief and we were off.

Leaving Battleground, you quickly leave the burbs and end up in farm land. Now is it me, or do the cows and horses do a double take when a Vmax goes by compared to any other bike? Open for debate I think. Leaving the farmland, you quickly find yourself in deep dark forests paralleling some very pretty rivers and lakes. Tucked into secluded spots along these lakes and rivers are quaint little, and not so little, vacation homes, campgrounds and rustic lodges; rope swings hanging from trees towering over swimming holes, the smell of unseen campfires and an occasional chipmunk sunning itself on a rock just watching the world go by. This is the kind of place you expect to see Big Foot lurking behind a tree, it's very rugged countryside with a nice twisty two lane road running through it.

We were on Hwy.503 and with this being a very scenic area and on a weekend, we were not the only bikes around, there were many other types and styles of riders to be seen. By noon we were within the shadow of Mount St. Helens filling up our tanks again... we all know the distance limitations of our bikes, so I think we probably stopped at every gas station we came across just to be on the safe side. Of course, at every stop people would ask about the bikes, specifically the Max's. After more than 20 years of production, they still draw more attention than any other bike I know of. Also, I don't know where this rumor started, but the general public seems to think the Vmax has been discontinued. My standard answer to this question now is "no, but only a privileged few get to ride them". Anyway, after topping of the tanks, we proceeded to a lookout area that allowed an unobstructed view of the mountain.

Other than a few clouds hanging on the summit, the entire mountain was visible. We were on the south side so we could not see the North West side that was blown out by the 1980 eruption. There was another biker at the lookout who was from the area that told us that on some clear days, you can see wisps of ash ascending from the current pumice cone forming in the bottom of the previous 1980 eruption crater. We left the lookout area with the thought of food on our minds and decided to head to the nearest restaurant, hopefully one near a gas station.

For the most part, the ride was down hill literally speaking from here. It was nice to see that for the most part, all of our riding styles were the same. Crotch rockets would pull ahead a little on the corners, but we would catch them or pass them in the straightaways. No cops were seen except one forest service police officer who fortunately for us, at the time we passed him, we were stuck behind a logging truck going well below the posted speed limit. We all just pleasantly waved at him. On the way to this unknown restaurant, we all observed and smelled some very large creature dead in the road. None of us knew what it was... maybe a bear, but we all agreed that we were happy we were not the one to have hit it.

At the next gas station, we were given a recommendation to go to the Windham Inn for food. Small place obviously visited by the locals and not use to groups of more than 3 people. After pulling a couple of tables together, we sat down for a fairly decent lunch and discussed what we had seen so far that day. We talked about past rides and most importantly the future rides we want to do, such as a Crater Lake (second deepest lake in the world) rim ride.

From the restaurant we made our way back to the Columbia River where we crossed one of the few toll bridges over the river. For those who have phobia of bridges, this would not be a bridge you would want to cross, especially on a bike. It was an all metal bridge suspended several hundred feet in the air and the road surface was made up of metal, see through, grates. It was interesting to see the boat traffic way below, along with the sensation of the bike feeling like you were on roller skates or ice. Not sure if that is how the other riders felt, but I did.

Now back on the Oregon side, we followed the Columbia River Gorge Hwy. back towards Portland stopping to see Bridal Vail Falls and the Crown Point Vista House. This structure built on top of a 720 ft. rock pinnacle which gives panoramic views of the Columbia River gorge. It was built in 1918 to honor Oregon pioneers. After a short break here, three of the riders headed back to their respective homes. For the other two, Donovan and I, we were invited back to David's place where he and his wife Kim played the perfect hosts. Good food and drink were had which really topped off a great day.

We all agreed we would have to do this again and soon. Like, maybe this next weekend. For all of you VMOA members in the Pacific NW or any other members willing to make a trip to this part of the country, make sure to log into the VMOA web site and see what other rides are planned for our area. We would love to find more VMax owners to participate on these rides with and have them share their ideas for future ride locations.

Happy riding and make sure to keep the rubber side down.

Jason Carpenter #4557 (94" Max)

