

Jeff Poole

The lure of the Hoka Hey is something that no true motorcycle enthusiast can ignore. It's the chance to go out and do something that you love, with the added opportunity to rank yourself against others and potentially win a very lucrative prize. In the beginning, I think it's the money that pulls most people in. After all, it's a huge time and financial commitment, which most of us don't have the luxury to spare, so there needs to be some justification for why you would let someone else call the shots, instead of planning your own trip and making your own rules.

During registration in Key West, I remember everyone (including myself) standing around sizing up the competition, trying to figure out who would be a true competitor. Most everyone was thinking about the money, and very few believed Jim Red Cloud when he mocked us and told us that we would all be challenged. A day into the competition, however, all had changed. The roundabout path to a destination and heavy rainstorms were just the beginning. Seeing fellow bikers just ahead of you go down on the pavement was a vivid reminder that this wasn't all fun and games.

Eventually though, we would learn that the organizers had done us great favors in designing a route like no other. It was as if they had gone out and talked to people all over the country and asked them where they go on a Sunday afternoon if they only have an hour to ride, and then they had taken all of these backwards routes that only a local would know, and strung them all together for a 9,000-mile route that's as pleasurable and relaxing as your Sunday afternoon getaway. For those of us that made it long enough to forget about the cash, the route turned out to be worth more than all of the gold in Alaska.

The other thing that exceeded my expectations was the camaraderie. It felt like a continuous line of motorcycles stretched out over 9,000 miles. At every stop and every gas station, you'd see another Hoka Hey rider, and you knew that no matter where they were from, they were just like you. In meeting them, there was already a mutual respect for them, knowing how far they had just come. People that we had viewed as competitors just a few days before were now buddies whom you could turn to and say, "This is awesome." If you had time, you could stand there for hours and elaborate. More frequently, however, you'd both just grin like young children playing with their friends because you knew you didn't have to explain. Then, you'd get back on your bike and ride.

~ Jeff Poole