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PULP FRICTION

Motorbook Review

by Kate Edwards

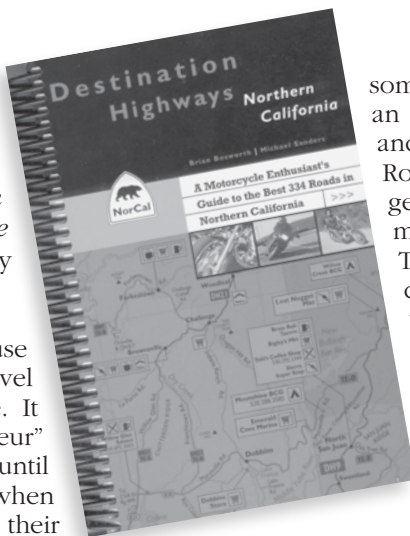
Destination Highways: Northern California—A Motorcycle Enthusiast's Guide to the Best 334 Roads in Northern California by Brian Bosworth and Michael Sanders; \$59.95

DUE TO EITHER NATURAL curiosity or because of my job as a motorcycle-based travel writer, I have become a map junkie. It would be nice to be able to say “connoisseur” rather than “junkie,” but unfortunately, up until relatively recently my only consideration when buying a map or atlas was whether or not their creators distinguished between paved and unpaved roads. To unabashedly steal (and bastardize) a line from Bette Midler, when it came to map purchases: “I had standards—they were low, but I had ‘em!”

The end result of all those years of pillaging gas station, book store, and national/state park gift shop map racks like a sugar addict loading up on Ho Hos is that I now have file drawers overflowing with maps—filed by geographic region—from every known cartography outfit in the lower 48 states. Every single item has some use to me as a motorcyclist in search of new terrain and roads to experience and write about, but as a whole, the collection has become a bit, erm, bulky.

Well, like the drawers of British Columbia and Washington maps before them, the drawer containing all those Northern California maps is about to get a thorough cleaning. At long last, after years of anticipation, Brian Bosworth and Michael Sanders have finally published *Destination Highways: Northern California, A Motorcycle Enthusiast's Guide to the Best 334 Roads in Northern California*, the third installment in their *Destination Highways* (DH) series of books covering the best motorcycling roads in the West. And like the volumes that preceded them (*DH British Columbia* and *DH Washington*), the arrival of *DH Northern California* immediately renders irrelevant, or at least redundant, whole tankbags full of road maps which cover California from the mid-state cities of Bishop, Fresno, and Santa Cruz, all the way north to the Oregon border.

As with previous DH books, a certain number of the top roads described by Bosworth and Sanders in *DH Northern California* gain the coveted “Destination Highway” label. This tag tells us that each one of these roads is “the kind of road you’d travel to, to journey on—it is the destination.” Bosworth and Sanders give each DH the star treatment, including an often funny (and



sometimes slightly strained) introductory overview, an almost foot-by-foot text description of the road, and then a rating via their TIRES (Total Integrated Road Evaluation System). Under the TIRES, each DH gets assigned numerical values for: twistiness, pavement quality, engineering, scenery, and remoteness. Those five values are then taken into account to determine each DH's character. Finally, all six values are added together to determine the overall rank of each DH. In essence, TIRES is simply a system Bosworth and Sanders have developed to try and bring some objectivity to what is really a very subjective topic—the relative attractiveness of certain roads to motorcyclists. (More about this later.)

Again, as with the first two DH books, this volume is much more than a description of good roads. Besides rating each one of the 74 Northern California roads that they deemed worthy of the DH label, Bosworth and Sanders briefly describe 250 or so other roads that they refer to as “Twisted Edges.” These roads, while not considered to be quite up to the standards of a DH designation, are roads in the vicinities of the DHs that are worthy of exploration—if one happens to be in the area. Additionally, these obsessive road scholars list every motorcycle dealer to be found in each one of the 11 geographic areas by which the book is organized, as well as all the dealers that exist in the Central Valley. And of course, each map that accompanies each DH write-up also lists every establishment in that particular area including gas stations, motels, campgrounds, watering holes, and markets. In other words, *DH Northern California's* 570 spiral-bound pages contain all the exhaustive detail that long-time fans of the DH series have come to expect. And although I quibble with the authors on two minor points as regards this particular volume, I count myself as one of those fans.

Because of the time, money, and effort Bosworth and Sanders have expended over the last decade—riding untold thousands of miles on their video camera-equipped Victor Foxtrot Rogers (which, according to the irreverent glossary is “military speak for the Honda VFR”) as well as converting all that footage to maps and text, I now have several invaluable and highly-detailed trip-planning resources. (Said glossary also defines “Alan Dershowitz” as the, “guy you hire when you really, really need to beat that ticket.”) Whenever I am heading out to ride in an area covered by the DH books, I always read what Messrs. Bosworth and Sanders have to say about the roads/terrain. The sheer volume of detail they include guarantees the time spent reading their books will not be wasted. (And, at a cover price

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of \$59.95, folks are going to want to get as much use as they can out of this book.)

Having said all of the above, I have found over the years that the DH books suffer from two flaws—neither of which is really the fault of the authors. First, roads are not static creations. The vagaries of traffic and weather affect these paths, with the result that sometimes the information in these books is incorrect even before they become available. (For example, California's Highway 140 between Mariposa and Yosemite (DH26) has been blocked by a massive landslide below Ferguson Ridge since the early spring of 2006. A detour consisting of a gravel road, as well as a single-lane bridge across

the Merced River, has been constructed, but no one knows if and when the original highway will be passable.) And second, no matter how objective one might try to be, determining the excellence of a particular stretch of pavement is always going to be an inherently subjective exercise. Riding is such a personal undertaking. Some riders prefer their wide open views and broad sweepers while others find bliss among the tight twisties through the trees. As a result, any attempt to rate roads is going to smack slightly of hubris—as well as start an argument. (*Monitor Pass* is the best road in Northern California?) Not that starting an argument about motorcycle roads is a *bad* thing, mind you... **FZ**