



# MEN OF VISION

## A VICTORY VISION TOUR OF AMERICAN METTLE

by Gary Mraz

**VISION** - Noun: *an experience in which a person, thing, or event appears vividly or credibly to the mind, although not actually present, often under the influence of a divine or other agency.*

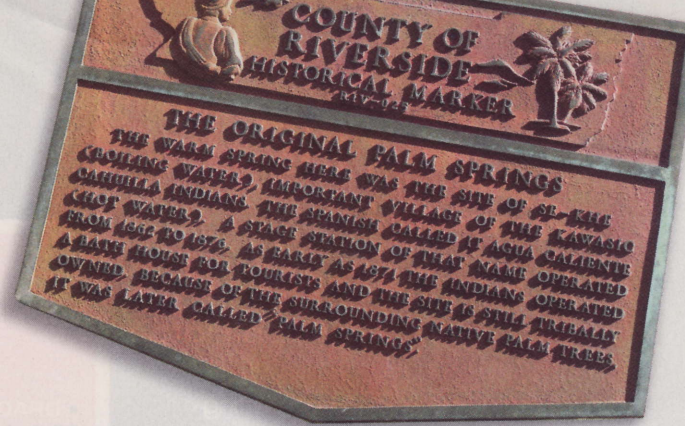
**V**ision and indomitable spirit forged American mettle. Travelling west, pioneers found an ocean paradise via the desolate desert heat. In honor of that spirit I rode to Laughlin, Nevada, on a new American legend, the Victory Vision motorcycle. Our journey will take us from Palm Springs to Slab City to Joshua Tree, through the Mojave Desert to Laughlin. Along the way we will better understand some of the visionaries that shaped today's badlands—Cabot Yerxa, who founded Desert Hot Springs, Leonard Knight's 25-year labor of faith on Salvation Mountain, Dr. Van Tassel's flying-saucer energy dome, and finally Laughlin, a city built up from a bankrupt bar by its namesake.

Traveling hundreds of miles through arid desert requires a token amount of creature comforts. Amenities that allow you to contemplate the grand expanse before you. Options

like XM radio or an iPod, whether the windshield should be an inch higher or lower. The variety of possible leg positions of cleverly designed floorboards. Should the heated seats and grips be activated to stave off this evening's chill? Of all the flavors of American touring motorcycles, in my opinion, only the 2009 Victory Vision offers such choices. Aerodynamically faultless and visually stunning, it's shocking how well a motorcycle this size actually handles. The additional torque and power of the new Freedom 106 powerplant is truly appreciated. Completely at ease at 85 miles an hour as the road unfolds, the Victory Vision is exhilarating.

### Men of Vision Ground Zero: The Shaman's Vision Quests

When traveling the amazing terrain of the west, first and foremost we must pay homage to the Cahuilla Indians who have lived here continuously for 3,000 years. Cahuilla shamans would procure their power from the natural mineral springs found in what we now know as Palm Springs. Before Palm Springs, this land was called *se-khe* (boiling water) in Uto-Aztec, then *Agua Caliente* (hot water) by the Spanish. Now this land takes its name from the surrounding native palm trees. Important shamans like Pedro Chino bathed here and through vision quests acquired knowledge about healing from the powerful beings who occupy the underworld to which these hot springs are connected. Chino was allegedly 126 years old when he died in 1939. Today these same hot springs are located in the Agua Caliente Casino on the corner of East Tahquitz Canyon and Indian Canyon Drive in downtown Palm Springs. This is ground zero for our own men-of-vision quest. The plan: stay the night here, get a good breakfast and



begin early. There really aren't any good places for lunch around here. Make sure to pack food and water; this journey is not for the faint of heart.

**Day 1:** Heading north on Indian Canyon Drive, pass the 10 freeway to Dillon road and turn right (east) to Desert Hot Springs. At Mountain View Road, turn left and follow until it ends and veers left again. In total, it should take about 15 minutes from Palm Springs to reach Cabot's Pueblo Museum. Cabot Yerxa homesteaded here on Miracle Hill in 1913 and cashed in on the now famous natural hot springs. Hand-made by Yerxa over 24 years entirely out of found materials, the 35-room Hopi-style pueblo museum itself is amazing. Inside you'll find Native American pottery, early 20th century photographs and artifacts from Yerxa's Alaskan adventures. The 40-foot Indian sculpture outside was hand carved by Peter

# SALVATION MOUNTAIN STANDS AS A MODERN AMERICAN MECCA.



**Top:** An abandoned marina resort at Salton Sea North Shore. **Above:** Mraz and company travel down south Amboy Road headed towards Roy's Café in Amboy.

Road. This is one of the most enjoyable rides through the desert yet; you're cruising through the heart of Joshua Tree National Park. The rocks take on a strange liquid-like form as if floating gravity free and armies of Joshua trees loom before you defending their arid empire. It's an absolutely beautiful drive with some serious twisties tossed in. Keys View is at 5,575 feet and the vista is staggering. You can see Mexico 300 miles away. Again, you will travel another 50 miles and may stop several times to appreciate the unique terrain. Quail Springs Road will deposit you onto Highway 62 in the city of Joshua Tree. Today's travels only total 230 miles but it's taken us about 10 hours. I recommend turning in for the night at the Joshua Tree Inn.

## **Giant Rock, the Integratron and Historic Route 66**

**Day 2:** About 10 minutes away from the Inn, try the hearty Roadkill breakfast at Route 62 Old Timer Diner, where there are also vintage motorcycles on display. Again, lunch may not show up on any map soon. Take Route 62 to Old Woman Springs Road all the way to Landers, home of Giant Rock and the Integratron. A large sign stating "Welcome to Landers" is the cue to your next right turn. About a mile down is another sign heralding the Integratron. Dr. George Van Tassel was one of the leaders in the UFO movement in the 1950s and held annual "Spacecraft Conventions" at Giant Rock for 20 years. He built the Integratron, a 38-foot-high, 55-foot-diameter, all-wood structure originally designed as a rejuvenation and time machine, but it never actually got turned on. Although George died before it was finished and his original plans are lost, it's his big plans that bring us to his structure on our voyage of American mettle. Giant Rock is thought to be the world's largest freestanding boulder, but the road there is nothing but soft sand. Unless you're on a dual-sport or something with four wheels, fuggetaaboutit.

Again backtrack 13 miles on Old Woman Springs Road to continue north on Route 62 (Twenty-Nine Palms Highway) to South Amboy Road towards Amboy. Amboy Road will dead

end into Historic Route 66 (this section is also known as National Trails Highway). Here you will find the historic Roy's Motel Café. Built in 1938, Roy's served as a desert oasis to travelers on this desolate section of Route 66 for years. Roy's vision of a travelers' Mecca was dashed when the 15 freeway was built, virtually bypassing Route 66. The station, motel and café that served thousands over the years now stands virtually deserted along that stretch connecting Route 66 to the 40.

Forging east on Route 66 (also known at this point as Needles Highway) into Laughlin is where cruise control comes in handy. The Victory Vision is well laid out aesthetically and ergonomically. Recall those cleverly designed floorboards I mentioned? They have enough real estate to do the two-step. I was even able to wedge my heel into the front cowl and tip-over pad for a comfortable full-forward leg extension. The incredibly cushy seat coupled with smooth suspension left me daydreaming. Take a second to reflect—other American motorcycle manufacturers like Indian and Harley-Davidson have had over a century to define and refine their product. Victory's mere decade is very, very impressive. Taking advantage of a century of evolution, fusing it with modern technology and visionary designers like Arlen Ness, Victory embodies that true American spirit. The soft bags provided with the Vision, packed appropriately, the glovebox, and the hidden area under the trunk are very useful.

### Laughlin, Nevada: Paradise Found

From Joshua Tree, it's about 200 miles until we reach Don Laughlin's Riverside Resort Casino. This 40-story hotel overlooking the Colorado River began as a bankrupt bar on an unpaved road. Another lone wolf in the desert, this man of vision now inhabits a city that bears his name. The Laughlin River Run began in 1983 and is now billed as the West Coast's Largest Motorcycle Event on the Banks of the Colorado River, with thousands of avid motorcyclists attending each spring. The Riverside Resort Casino also hosts their Run to Fun rally in mid-October.

Sitting in Don's auto museum is an EZRyder, the bike that inspired generations of custom builders and riders. (The original *Easy Rider* bike was stolen shortly after filming was finished and



Now abandoned, for years Roy's served as a desert oasis to Route 66 travelers.

never recovered.) Replicated again and again, this one's the real deal; it even leaks oil.

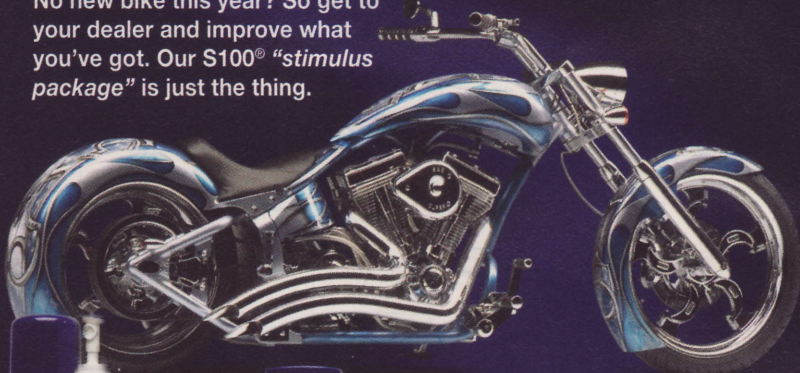
Also Emilio and Monica Scotto's motorcycle is on display. In his 10-year motorcycle odyssey Emilio traveled 485,000 miles, visited 232 countries, and crossed six continents, while receiving 15 tickets (13 in California). This epic excursion earned him a place in the Guinness World Book of Records.

On the final day of our trip, I take

time to ruminate over the experiences of the past several days. Questful visions; one man's mountain of faith revealed; another's cosmic secrets lie yet undiscovered. Visions can be vivid shimmering desert mirages that evaporate before your eyes or they can become tangible manifestations of motorcycles, hotels or highways. As these men along our voyage have shown us, if you can conceive it, truly believe it, you might achieve it. Ride safe. ☺

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