

Piers of the West

C A B R I L L O P I E



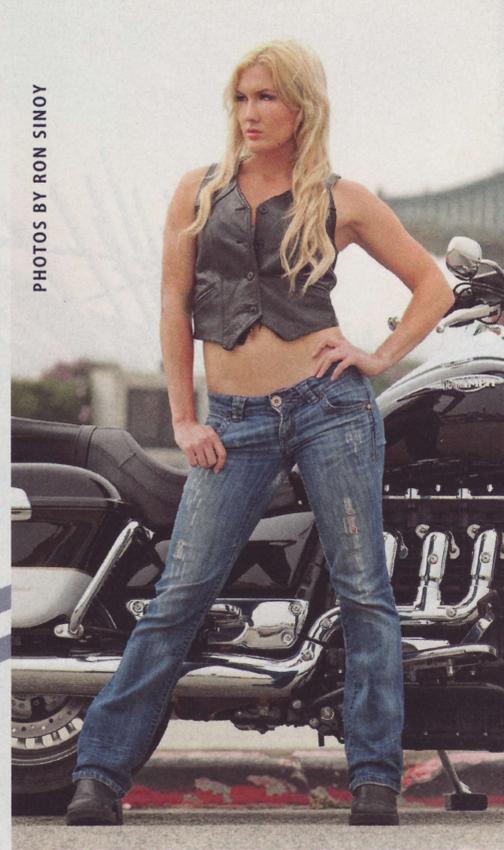
BY GARY MRAZ

Piers are always the perfect day-ride destination, cruising the coast consuming cool air and ocean vistas. Standing at the end of a pier the entire Pacific Ocean is racing toward me and I am riding on it. All the piers that jut along the coastline have unique stories: one in the past and the present. In the 1900s, the railroad replaced steam ships as a safer and faster method of travel. Some piers became attractions by real estate developers to lure customers and the Big Red Cars on the railroad stopped at many Southern California beach cities. The port of Long Beach/San Pedro combine





Coast



PHOTOS BY RON SINOY

R S A N P E D R O





as the world's second largest port and is rather industrial with some rough edges. I often eat breakfast at The World Famous Curly's Restaurant while oil wells pump crude in the front parking lot. There are in fact more than 500 working rigs still scattered about Long Beach.

The perfect ride through the LBC to Cabrillo Pier is the muscular Triumph Rocket III Touring. Launching with its 2,300 cc of pure adrenaline; with 140 horses and tire-shredding 147 lb-ft of torque, the world's largest production motorcycle is awe-inspiring. With pistons the size of a Dodge Viper this liquid-cooled inline triple is pyrotechnic. In 2004, the Rocket III set the world land-speed record for a production motorcycle over 2,000 cc reaching its electronically set limiter of 140.3 mph. Dynas, Softails, and even Road Kings look like runts of the litter next to this bad boy.

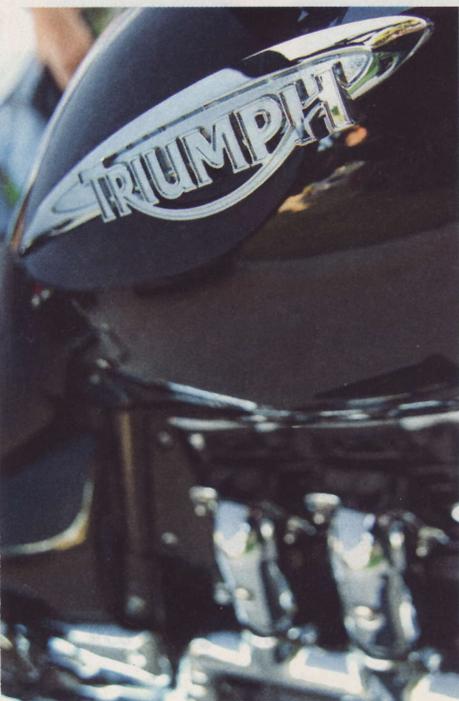
Cabrillo Pier is located in San Pedro (pronounced "san PEE dro") and is an empty 1,200-foot slab of concrete that was dedicated in 1969. Although a ringside seat to one of the world's largest seaports, it's simply a fishing pier with sinks and large metal cabanas shading the fisherman. It's what's near the pier that's well worth the visit. The surrounding beach and park area is bustling with family barbecues, beachgoers, and windsurfers but the pier remains solitary. The Cabrillo Marine Aquarium (cabrillomarineaquarium.org), located at the base of the pier, is an educational and recreational facility promoting knowledge and understanding of marine life that offers tours, classes, and hands-on learning exhibits. Its hours of operation are from 12 to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekends. Although admission is free, parking is not.

A stone's throw away is Point Fermin Park and the Historic Point Fermin Lighthouse ([## C A B R I L L O P I E R S A N P E D R O](http://pointferminlight-</p></div><div data-bbox=)





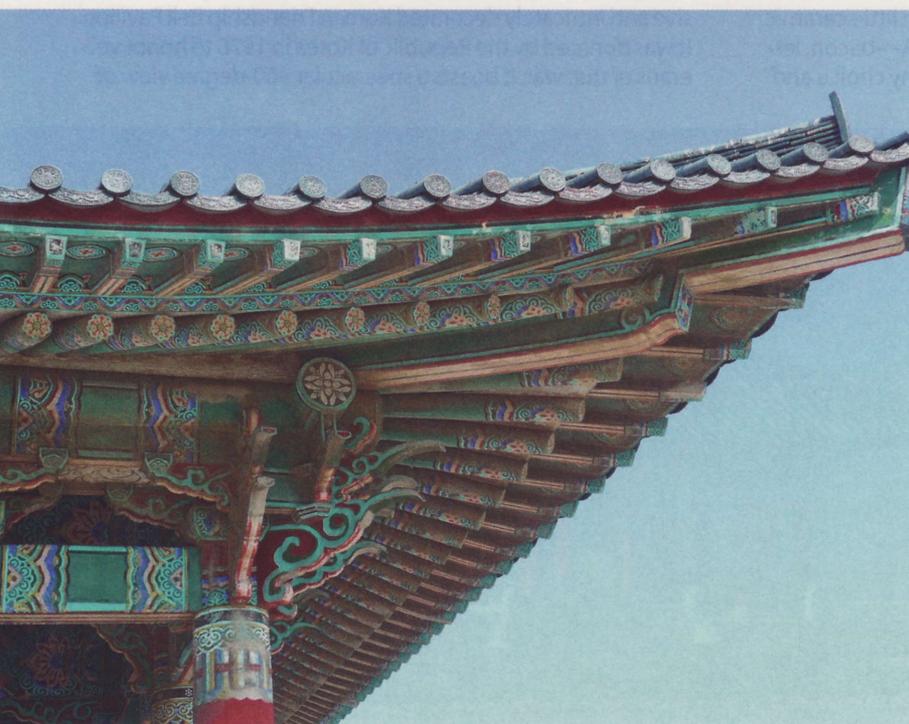
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the ocean, Catalina Island, and the San Gabriel mountains from the pavilion.

If burgers and fries aren't your cup of tea and you are feeling adventurous, you'll pass the Babouch Moroccan restaurant (babouchrestaurant.com) on Gaffey Street during your visit. Open for more than 30 years, it's the real deal and has belly dancing on the weekends. The food is out of this world, at least out of this country, and truly a unique experience.



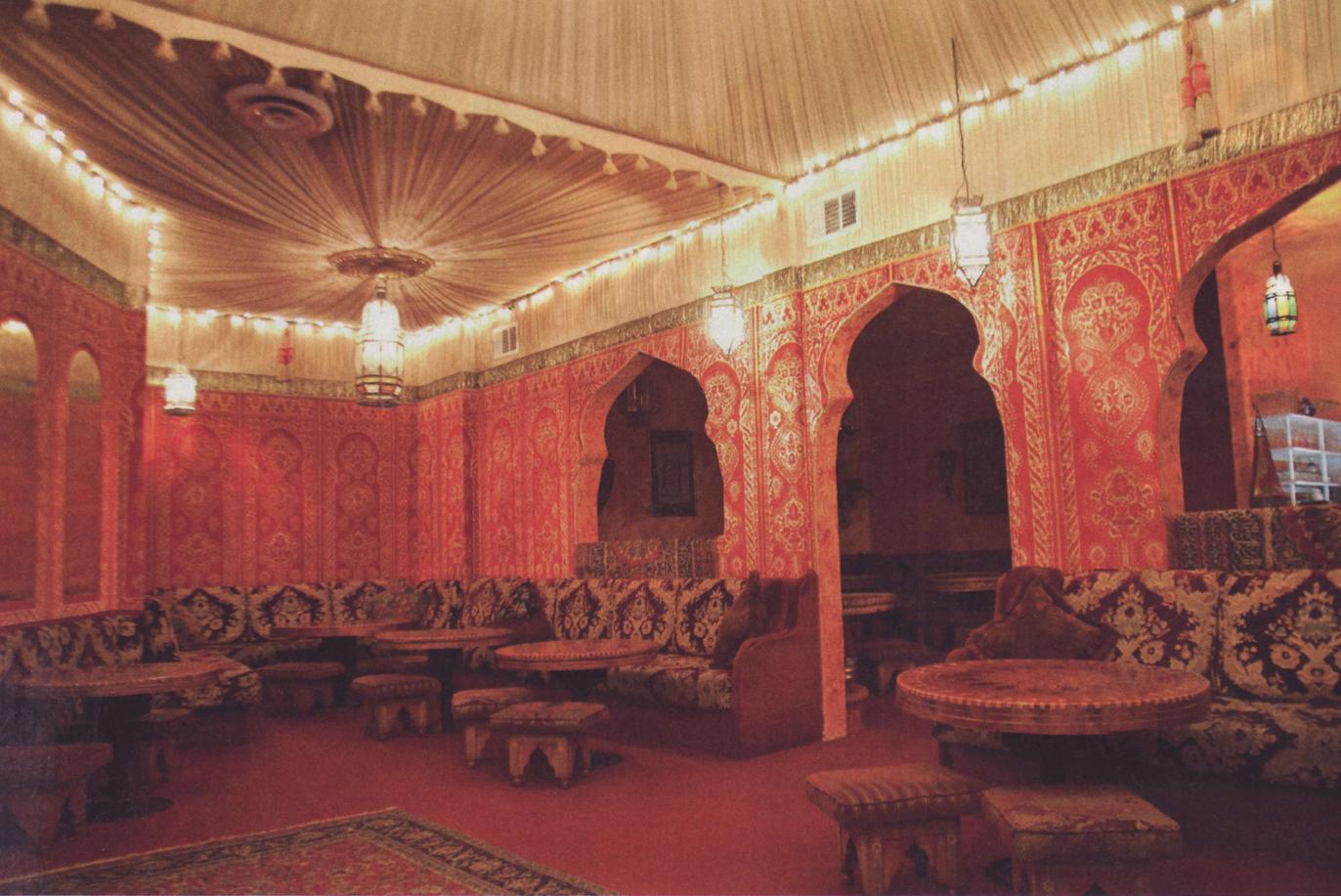
house.org). Built in 1874, it was a coastal beacon for decades. On December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was bombed and the West Coast was blacked out for fear of being a target to enemy ships and planes. Sadly, the light was never to be lit again. During WWII, the lighthouse served the US Navy as a lookout tower and signaling station for ships coming into the harbor. Lighthouse tours are held every Sunday afternoon from 1 to 4 p.m. with the last tour beginning at 3:30 p.m.

Right across the park is Walker's Café. The café was originally an end station for the Big Red Car rail transit system bringing tourists from Los Angeles. The railway shut down in 1942 and Bessie Walker opened the café. A renowned biker hangout, you will be welcomed as one of the two-wheeled brethren here. This historic location has been featured in movies like *Chinatown* and *The Black Dahlia*. Inside, the decor looks like grandma's kitchen with little ceramic chatchky on the shelves. Its two-fisted BLTA—bacon, lettuce, tomato, and avocado—sandwich is my choice and

the Bessie Burger is considered one of the best burgers in Long Beach. Standing outside pondering the power of this ballistic missile, a passerby asks me what the gas mileage of the Rocket III is. I reply, "If you have to ask, you shouldn't own one." Being conservative is not in this Rocket's genetic make-up but moderately piloted, mileage is akin to a compact car. Although only equipped with a five-speed transmission, the bike never feels strained because this engine redlines at 6,259 rpm and with its copious amount of power, is geared tall. The incredibly smooth powerplant, endless torque, and acceleration of the Rocket III never ceases to amaze.

Forty feet away from Walker's at the end of the street is Sunken City. In the late '20s a large part of the city started slipping into the ocean. Huge blocks of concrete slabs, sidewalks and streets are still there. Just another block away is the massive and intricately decorated Korean Friendship Bell Pavilion. It was donated by the Republic of Korea in 1976 to honor veterans of that war. It boasts a spectacular 360-degree view of





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San Pedro is easily accessed; just take the Harbor Freeway (I-110) south until it ends and turns into Gaffey Street and follow that until it ends at the Point Fermin Lighthouse, Walker's, and the Korean Bell. To get to the pier, take Shepard Street till it ends, turn left and then right on Stephen White Drive to the entrance to the Cabrillo Park and Pier.

Riding the Rocket III Touring, several truths become self-evident. The first is its astounding power. Reaching freeway speeds from on-ramps is a rush. Glancing at the oncoming traffic, a window of opportunity appears, grabbing full throttle you become ballistic and within seconds own the fast lane. And, there's still head-snapping acceleration left! Traversing mountains? No grade is steep enough to allow gravity to tug at this big triple. Secondly, is engine braking, the thunderous compression allows



the Rocket III to literally growl down mountain descents without touching the brakes. Finally, the engine's low center of gravity makes this 869-pound bike surprisingly manageable, flipping through the twisties with relative ease. With an impressive lean angle before pavement finds the floorboards, a massive 150/80R16 front tire gnaws at the curves. The Rocket III Touring actually has a smaller rear tire (180/70R16) than the standard Rocket III (240/50R16) creating a noticeably nimbler motorcycle. The

seats are luxurious as is the cushy suspension. A quick-release windscreen and passenger backrest instantly transforms this muscular master of the highway into a muscular master of the street. Triumph released an even more powerful Rocket called the Rocket III Roadster, with torque upped 15 percent to 163 lb-ft and 146 hp! And to help haul down the Rocket, for the first time, ABS brakes come standard. Aesthetically, the Rocket III is impeccably British, commanding respect without demanding it. ●



Cabrillo Beach Pier

WHERE: 3730 Stephen White Drive, San Pedro, CA 90731

HOURS OF OPERATION: 12 to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekends. Admission is free.

PARKING: Cabrillo Park parking is free on weekdays. Motorcycles are \$5.50, cars \$7 on weekends, and \$9 for boat trailers and buses. A parking lot at the foot of Cabrillo Pier is available with all-day parking for \$2 and after 5 p.m. only \$1. Parking at Walker's, Point Fermin, and the Korean Friendship Bell is free.

Restaurants of interest: Walker's Café, Babouch Moroccan

FACILITIES: The pier has limited facilities with a few benches and fish-cleaning sinks but no lights. There are portable restrooms found near the front of the pier.

WHAT TO DO: Windsurfing, volleyball courts, picnic area, pier, barbeque grills, swimming, surfing, tide pools, restrooms, showers, bait-and-tackle shop, and fish-cleaning stations.

LODGING: For a night you won't soon forget, stay aboard the Queen Mary in Long Beach (queenmary.com) and be sure to take the haunted tour. The QM is just a short and spectacular ride over the port from San Pedro.