

## Rockster at the 2003 Downeast Rally or Bugs on My Facefield

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My classic black 1982 R100T, factory-painted with red and white pinstripes, was tucked away in the shed for the winter behind a pile of crusty snow and ice when I registered for the 2003 Downeast Rally. The May 2003 Rally seemed a long time away.

I've been looking for a new bike for 20 years. The Grand Opening of Max BMW in 2002 presented an opportunity to ride an R1150R Roadster, along with an R1150RT. The ride on the 1150 Roadster made the R100 Airhead feel a little "old," and, come spring, I'd probably buy a Roadster in silver (my wife said "You are not going to own two black BMWs, are you?"). The front fender on the Roadster looked space-age ugly, but I'd live with it and be happy. Add a windscreen, bags, remove the catalytic converter and replace the stock exhaust system after a year or two.

During the cruel winter, I ruled out any Harley (too low a fun to work ratio and I don't live on the Great Plains), MotoGuzzi (too much vibration in the V11 that I rode), or a Ducati (too high strung and expensive valve adjustments). On a ride up to have my BMWMOA mileage contest form stamped for the first time ever (I want to be noted in *BMWON* as an "average rider"), I mentioned to Rusty Gill that I finally was thinking about a new BMW, in addition to the Airhead that I had purchased at Freeman's Cycle 21 years ago. Before I knew it, Max BMW had plates on a new 2004 Rockster, Citrus Metallic in color (think lime green.) I did not exactly fall in love with the color. The Rockster had a carbon fiber front fender, in place of the space-age front fender on the Roadsters. The Rockster also had the new, high tech, factory dual plugs that will become standard on BMWs. The seven-mile ride on the Rockster was sensational, and too short. While, except for the dual plugs, it is supposed to be the same as the R1150R Roadster, the Rockster felt more nimble and lighter, even though it is actually a few pounds heavier. BMW hard bags were available for it, but no windscreen yet. Needed to give the purchase a little thought, have a family aesthetic consult regarding the color, and can I live without a windscreen.

On May 1, 2003, a nicely prepared, Citrus Metallic Rockster, with 0002 miles on the odometer, was ready. I was warned for the third time by the BMW Service Manager in Arlington to be careful with the unscuffed new tires for the first 600 miles, and that it was important to bring the bike in for the 600-mile service. Mental math told me that I'd need to get the 600 miles on before the Downeast Rally, two weeks away, or I'd come back to the dealership with twice that. Riding mostly on weekends, it would be a squeeze, although I know for the 1000/24 crowd, this is a piece of cake. One suggestion the Service Manager offered was "Make time to ride." A couple of 5:30 AM rides to Gloucester and Cape Ann loops, and I had enough mileage for the service on May 15<sup>th</sup>. The 600 mile service cost \$318.34 for oil change, check valve adjustments and other items, parts and labor, including the installation of an accessory socket in the hole with a

plastic plug that BMW includes. (For \$11,000, no \$24 accessory socket is included the Rockster.)

On the cold May 16<sup>th</sup> ride to Hermit Island, I learned that the heated handgrips on the Rockster are wonderful, but put your gloves back on after the tollbooths. Put your electric vest on *under* all the layers, not over them, unless you just want to warm the layers. At least I had the foresight to add the accessory socket. And, it is “real motorcycling”, and, a lot more fun for me, riding without a big windscreen.

My 1982 R100 is understated, and garners little attention, apart from “nice bike”, and “it’s in great shape.” On the other hand, the Rockster, in metallic orange, had just been on the cover of the May 2003 *BMWON*. The Rockster was briefly reviewed in the June *Motorcyclist* – “A twin-plug Boxer to go with your nipple ring”. While I had come to love the Rockster, even in its Citrus lime color (the lime color on most of the bike is actually decals, although the oil cooler covers and wheel rims are painted the Citrus lime), I was not prepared for the welcoming reception that the bike received at the Kelp Shed. Under the gaze of the highly trained Beemerphile eyes, including those of Downeast President Lockhart, all the great BMW touches, like factory installed braided steel brake lines, accessible rebound damping and rear shock adjustments, (S-M-H for soft, medium and hard), carbon fiber front fender, and massive appearing 5½ rear tire, were fully noted.

The Rockster has great-looking flat, wider, handlebars, compared with the Roadster’s higher bars, said to be more comfortable on longer rides. What’s a little discomfort to look good? Consider Choppers, with bikers riding in great pain in the name of beauty. Besides, the flat bars are part of the Rockster’s “look.” The Telelever (or is it the Paralever) wishbone, headlight housing, front “fork” tubes and valve covers are a dark metallic blue, admired by some Rally goers. I had replaced the passenger seat with the aluminum luggage rack that comes with the bike, in order to pack for the Downeast Rally, but mainly because of the look of the “carrier”, as BMW calls it. Over all, the bike is striking in appearance. While this expert visual inspection is taking place in front of the Kelp Shed, I’m thinking -- “dump this bike at the Downeast Rally, and everyone will know who the fool is, because there is only one lime green 04 Rockster at this Rally and you can’t slink off unnoticed. To raise the ante, the Arlington dealership did not have the new-type cylinder head guards that are needed for the dual-plugged cylinders of the Rockster. I felt even more pressure not to drop it the bike.

Saturday dawned bright, beautiful and warmer on Hermit Island. There were group rides planned, including one to Dave Percival’s collection of BMWs in Andover, Maine. At the 2002 Downeast Rally, a group of die-hard, rain-in-your-face riders made the trip to Andover, and returned in various stages of hypothermia (like illustrations in the A.M.C. Guidebook on mountain safety.) A set of soaked riding leathers from that 2002 ride continues to dry over the fireplace in the Kelp Shed, even now. A Lighthouse tour was cancelled because of few sign-ups (“You’ve seen one Maine lighthouse, and you’ve seen them all?”) Since I wanted to ride the Rockster as much as I possibly on this weekend off, (remember, “Make time to ride”), I’d ride over to Gorham, New Hampshire,

then down the Mt. Washington Valley. However, most roads in Maine seems to me to either run north and south, or north-northeast, and I generally get lost trying to cross Maine, to the New Hampshire border, starting with Route 196, around Lisbon Falls. My G.P.S. was packed safely in the saddlebags, where I keep it out of range of potentially damaging satellite signals. Since the latches work hard on the new BMW hard bags, plus I don't really know how to use the G.P.S., except for North and South and time of day, it's no help either. Thus, when I saw Buck Avant somewhere around Mechanic Falls on his R90, looking like he knew where he was going, I asked if he minded if I followed him, as it turns out, to Dave Percival's collection of BMW bikes.

I enjoyed the Rockster even more, simply following someone at a comfortable pace, not worrying about directions. The Rockster seems rock-stable and I like the gearing and shifting much better than on my Airhead. You could tell when you have actually engaged a higher or lower gear, while the Airhead's gearbox seems loose in comparison. There is also a difference between 85 h.p. and 65 h.p. In sixth gear, at 4,000 RPMs, the limit for the first 600-mile break in period for the Rockster, the bike ran about 73 mph. I kept wondering why I had all these bugs smashing on my faceshield, since I never had the experience before at the Downeast Rally. More bugs in Maine in 2003? Light dawns on Marblehead – the difference between a boxcar sized Plexifairing 2 on the Airhead, versus, a Metallic Citrus colored beret that sits atop the instrument pod on the Rockster. The little lime green cap directs all insects, large and small, into my faceshield. This hopefully answers a Member's question about whether the instrument pod cover directs the air over top the helmet.

Percival's collection was well worth the ride, and the ride itself through the beautiful Maine countryside itself was worth the ride, and a great choice by the Club. At Percival's, I greatly enjoyed seeing a Daytona orange R90 from the 1970's, when I had a young family and could only dream about riding BMWs. Another R90 with an oil-stained, billed cap bungeed onto the rear rack brought the bike to life as one that had been enjoyed, while a set of BMW hard saddlebags bungeed to the rear rack through the saddlebag handles on another Airhead reminded me that even German engineering is hardly flawless, and those bags do loosen, as they have on my own Airhead.

I skipped lunch for the moment, riding Route 2 West to Goshen. I stopped briefly to find out how much further to Goshen. Ten minutes later, my heart sunk when I saw an "Entering Maine" sign. At this hour of Saturday, with the lobster dinner at six, the better choice would have been to ride Route 113 leisurely through Evans Notch. Since my old AAA map was torn at the fold, I failed to see that Route 113 and the beautiful ride through Evans Notch were nearby. (The G.P.S. was still safely packed in the saddlebag. Fresh batteries too.) Back to New Hampshire, then North Conway, and loop back to Fryeburg, Maine (why don't I allow enough time to stop in this beautiful Maine town?) I returned via Bridgton, which looked nostalgically like a little bit of England's Lake District. I was, however, getting a little worried about missing my twin lobsters at the Rally, and Spinney's would not be the same thing. I encountered my usual Maine/East/West problem in Auburn, making a few loops around the city before I found Route 196 again. Back to Hermit Island at 6:40 PM, in time for lobsters, Rally awards

and the drawings (where is New Sweden, anyhow? Great T-shirt, but that rally was two years ago.) And close to 1,000 miles on the bike.

Sunday morning, and a Rally's end always comes too quickly (work at one and I'd think differently.) One club member spotted me taking photographs of the Rockster from every angle, with the Kelp Shed suitably in the background, commenting "New bike"? Great Rally, great club, and a great time. A once in a lifetime experience for me, having a bike like the 2004 Rockster at this Maine Rally in May 2003.

As a postscript, after returning home, a new AAA Maine/New Hampshire road map, along with a TripTik from Bath to Rangeley Lake, arrived in the mail. So why, as long as I was in Andover, Maine, didn't I ride the Rockster up Route 17 to Rangeley, and then back down on Route 4? AAA marks those roads as "scenic" with black dots. The country around Rangeley Lake is remembered from another ride as truly beautiful. Then again, I had a great ride once out to Bailey Island, to Pemaquid Point, and to Friendship, at another Downeast Rally. "Too many roads, too little time."

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