

Seduction of the south



“We arrived at London Heathrow late last night after 36 hours of travelling,” says Graham Beker when I introduce myself. His cheerful and energetic demeanour certainly isn’t indicative of a man who has just spent a day and a half in transit, and his wife Donna greets me with similar fervour.

As the newest inductees into the prestigious Harley-Davidson® Authorized Tours programme, and the first from the Asia Pacific region, the Bekers made the Harley® headquarters in Oxford their first port of call on their recent trip to Europe. “We wanted to come and meet Trevor [Barton, Harley-Davidson Authorized Tours manager], as he’s been instrumental in helping us join the programme,” Donna enthuses. >

When New Zealanders Donna and Graham Beker first met 38 years ago, they were united by a love of motorcycles; this year, they have finally fulfilled a long-held ambition to join the Harley-Davidson® Authorized Tours programme

Words: Matt Colley





And Trevor is thrilled to welcome Beker's into the Authorized Tours fold: "I'm delighted to bring a company like Beker's, who are passionate Harley-Davidson fans and dedicated H.O.G. members, into our network. The entire business has lived the Harley® lifestyle, attitude and ethos since it was established, so riders will be guaranteed the true Harley-Davidson experience when booking an Authorized Tour through Beker's."

Graham and Donna are dedicated to delivering a personalised, 100-per-cent family-run and high-quality riding experience. The palpable enthusiasm the couple exudes is both the cause and effect of a lifetime spent chasing dreams and passions; over the course of the afternoon we spend together, the anecdotes rarely stop.

"I was only 16 when we first met," recalls Donna. "Graham had a motorcycle, and that was something that really appealed

to me. On our first date, I asked him if I could ride his bike, and when he accepted I was completely hooked."

"On the riding, that is, not on me," quips Graham. "That took a little longer!"

The American dream

"I know it's a big cliché," says Graham, "but watching *Easy Rider* was where the fascination with Harley-Davidson® came from. Originally I wanted to buy a Triumph when I was older, but after seeing the movie while I was at school, everything changed on the spot. I'd only ever seen one Harley before – a Sportster® on New Zealand's south island – but I knew from that moment that a Harley-Davidson was the bike for me."

Soon after Graham and Donna became an item, a plan was hatched to travel to the US and buy a Harley. It took nearly two years of hard work and saving up, but in 1978 the Bekers took their savings to the land of the free. After buying a car and driving around California for a few months, their four-wheeler made a cross-country voyage to Wisconsin, where the

Bekers made their dream purchase.

"It was a brand-new black Low Rider," Graham reminisces. "We both had full licences, and within a few days Donna was desperate to get her hands on the handlebars. We'd share riding duties, as we still do today when we only have one bike."

After living the American dream for a while, Graham and Donna had the Low Rider shipped to the UK, where they lived for two years in Ripon, North Yorkshire. Following some extensive riding around

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Europe, the couple moved back to New Zealand with a dream of opening up the world of motorcycle touring to others.

Tour de force

During the 1980s the Bekers organised a number of overseas tours from their base in Queenstown on New Zealand's south island. In 1991, the couple decided to make their 'labour of love' into a commercial venture. In those 23 years, both Graham and Donna have been on every single tour they have organised. "Every tour we've done, whether it's day rides or two-day rides, right up to six-week tours, we've always been on them together," says Graham. "We don't see the point in going through all the organisation but not being there with the riders."

"We have a policy that if there are more than eight riders we have crew, so there is more individual attention for each person," adds Donna. "We keep our tours fairly small, we're not into promoting big numbers."

If you've never been to New Zealand, Donna is very keen to espouse the virtues of her homeland. "Our home town of Queenstown is one of the most popular locations in New Zealand; even New Zealanders generally agree with that.

It's just stunningly beautiful. We probably take it a little bit for granted, but every direction you can travel from Queenstown offers something different.

"There are amazing lakes and mountains, but you can be on the coast incredibly quickly as well; there's such a variety of scenery. You've got the high country, you've got the plains, you've got the ocean and on the west coast there's the rainforest, which is quite incredible. And, a short drive from Queenstown, is the Fox Glacier, which >



Harley-Davidson® Authorized Tours

is quite spectacular. It actually runs all the way down to the rainforest!”

Graham then chips in to add an important point. “The roads on the south island are just fantastic. The tarmac is superb, and there is just so little traffic; it’s truly riding heaven.” For further information about the Beker’s motorcycle tour of the south island, see page 45.

A lifetime of H.O.G.®

When the Bekers heard about an owners’ group being started in the US in 1983, they signed up straight away. “Obviously the postal service was the only way of receiving information in those days,” says Graham, “so it took a couple of months for our membership materials to be delivered to us in New Zealand.”

“I’m the first ever H.O.G.® member from New Zealand!” remarks Donna. “As you know, every member has a number, and mine is the first one that comes up in New Zealand. We’ve still got a copy of the very first edition of *Hog Tales* that was published in 1983.”

After a few years of annual membership, the Bekers decided to take the plunge and sign up for life membership. Donna remembers deliberating with Graham over whether it was worth the financial outlay: “It was, I think, around 250 US dollars for life membership, possibly more. That was a lot of money for us back then, but after

careful consideration we decided to do it. It was a great decision; it’s been an amazing journey and it’s well worth it not to have to pay out year on year. We truly feel like we’re part of something great.”

Firm favourites

Graham and Donna estimate that they have owned around 30 Harley-Davidson® motorcycles through the years; but of all the ones they’ve ridden, which is their absolute favourite?

“The nicest one I’ve ridden is without doubt the new RUSHMORE,” says Graham. “In terms of comfort and functionality, it’s unsurpassed. It’s just perfect for touring. However, the ones that evoke the most passion are those early Low Riders, from 1977 to 1980.” Donna nods emphatically in agreement. “It’s the Low Rider for me. Those new Low Riders look great, very similar to the original design. I’d love to ride one of those...”

When I ask Graham and Donna where their favourite place to ride is, there’s some discussion. “We love riding in Europe,” enthuses Graham. “When it’s the middle of winter in Queenstown, we can come to Europe and ride in the Alps or Tuscany – that’s just ideal. A New Zealand summer, then a European summer, then back to New Zealand for another summer – perfect!”

“But that’s not to say we’re not hooked on New Zealand, of course,” says Donna.



Left: the Bekers have H.O.G.® membership patches dating back to 1984

Bottom: Graham astride the Low Rider in the UK, 1978





And while Graham and Donna are undoubtedly part of something special in the wider Harley-Davidson and H.O.G. family, they are also responsible for creating something truly remarkable through their own unquenchable passion and hard work. “We can’t wait to welcome new riders and continue to deliver exciting, unforgettable Harley-Davidson touring experiences,” concludes Graham. “We find it so exhilarating to see the smiles on people’s faces at the end of a day’s riding and hear their positive comments. We aim for everyone to enjoy our tours as much as we enjoy running them!” ■

“Even though it’s so familiar to us, we never lose sight of its beauty. The ride from Queenstown to Fox Glacier, that’s still the most beautiful ride for me. Through lakes, glaciers, mountain passes, rainforests and beaches, all in a day’s riding – I don’t know if there’s anywhere else on the planet where you could do that.”

And where else would they like to ride that they haven’t ridden already? For once, both Graham and Donna are plunged into pensive silence. “Oh man, that’s difficult,” Graham offers after a considered pause. “I guess because we’re always running tours, we stick to the tried and tested – we have to consider satisfaction and safety first and foremost. But if we had some time, maybe other parts of Europe that we’ve not visited – Romania, Hungary, Croatia. And we’ve not been to the Far East either, that would be great.”

“We’re hopefully heading to the Caribbean in September,” Donna interjects. “There’s another Authorized Tours operator in the Dominican Republic, and we’re hoping to go out there and visit them. Riding in the Caribbean would be something really different.”

Finally, I ask Graham and Donna about the single most mind-blowing moment in their riding lives. Graham is quick to reply: “In 1982, when we first went to Sturgis. We’d never seen more than a couple of thousand bikes together before, so to turn up there among 70,000 motorcycles... that was just amazing.”

“And don’t forget the Colosseum last year!” adds Donna. “All that history – not only the ancient architecture, but also the 110 years of Harley-Davidson, the blessing by the Pope... it really brought it home to us that we were part of something special.”



TAKE A TOUR: NEW ZEALAND

H-D® SOUTH ISLAND ADVENTURE TOUR

February 10-22, 2015
(13 days, 12 nights)

DAY 1

Riders are picked up from the airport and transferred to their hotel. They have the afternoon to relax before a welcome dinner in the evening.

DAY 2

A breakfast meeting, followed by a ride from Queenstown to Te Anau. 176km

DAY 3

A return trip from Te Anau to Milford Sound. This trip has some of the most stunning scenery in the country. 234km

DAY 4

Te Anau to Invercargill. Ride through the eastern Southland and along the southern coastline. Visit the home of Burt Munro, otherwise known as ‘The World’s Fastest Indian’. 187km

DAY 5

Invercargill to Dunedin; experience New Zealand’s beautiful south-eastern coast. Visit McIver & Veitch Harley-Davidson dealership in Dunedin. 263km

DAY 6

Dunedin to Lake Tekapo – take the road inland from the east coast to incredible glacier lakes. 309km

DAY 7

Lake Tekapo to Hanmer Springs. We follow the scenic Route 72, before turning inland towards the mountains. There’s a chance to enjoy the thermal hot pools, so bring your swimsuits! 381km

DAY 8

Hanmer Springs to Nelson. We take the inland route and then head back to the coast, with some more stunning coastline to admire. 372km

DAY 9

A free day to either ride or explore the wonderful city of Nelson, which is famed for its arts scene.

DAY 10

Nelson to Punakaiki. From Nelson we head west, reaching the coast at Punakaiki. This is our first foray into New Zealand’s legendary wine region! 337km

DAY 11

Punakaiki to Fox Glacier. We will spend most of the day riding along the west coast – it really doesn’t get much better than this. The Fox Glacier is a phenomenal spectacle not to be missed! 240km

DAY 12

Fox Glacier to Queenstown. Another day riding the west coast, then over the Haast Pass, through Cardrona and back to Queenstown for the farewell dinner. 329km

DAY 13

Departure from Queenstown, although there is the option of staying additional days if you’re reluctant to go home (and who could blame you?).

WHAT’S INCLUDED IN THE TOUR

- Welcome and farewell dinners
- Late-model Harley-Davidson motorcycles with saddlebags and windscreens
- Two breakfasts
- Backup and luggage van
- Two guides on two bikes (when there are more than eight couples)
- Tour book

For more information about the tour, including pricing and booking details, visit bekersmct.co.nz, or email Donna or Graham at donna@bekersmct.com or graham@bekersmct.com. For more information on H-D Authorized Tours, visit authorizedtours.harley-davidson.com