



THE TALE OF THE DRAGON, TRUTH OR FICTION?

by Durwood Foote

Three hundred eighteen curves in eleven miles, **The Dragon** is not for the faint of heart. You can start in Tennessee or North Carolina, the Dragon is an eleven mile section of U.S. Highway 129. On the North Carolina end, you will find the world famous watering hole called Deal's Gap and The Tree of Shame (<http://www.dealsgap.com/>). Here you can buy the ever present souvenir T-shirt, but most important, you can purchase the Dragon decal pictured above and only those who have traversed the 11 miles of hell have earned the right to display the Dragon on their bike or helmet.



Through some of the most beautiful scenery in the Great Smoky Mountains, this stretch of two-lane highway attracts bikers from all over the world in much the same way that the California surf attracts surf boarders. What is

the attraction? Is it curiosity? Is it the challenge? Or is it simply for bragging rights. The truth is it is probably all of the above. Certainly, I have ridden more challenging stretches of asphalt. But then again, I have never before ridden an 11 mile stretch of road where you are never vertical; a left turn rolls into a right turn, only to roll back into a left and so on. And “roll” is the correct phraseology! The curves are banked and it’s like riding a camel or something similar, you’re continually “rolling to and fro,” so just relax and go with the flow.

Deal’s Gap reminds me of Cheyenne’s Crossing at the end of Spearfish Canyon South Dakota (aka. Sturgis). It’s a place where bikers gather either before or after their trek through the obstacle course. The Gap is at the bottom of a long steep hill and just over the top of the hill you will experience the first of the 318 curves. While I was swigging down the last of my diet Pepsi, a “kid” blazed out of the parking area on the back wheel of his “crotch rocket” and was still doing a “wheelie” when he disappeared over the hill top. Moments later, we heard the siren of an ambulance headed for The Dragon. Nope, it wasn’t “the kid,” someone else had tried to “straighten out a curve” on a “Harley want-to-be” and didn’t make it.....they got lucky, they only received a broken leg. Practically every one of the 318 curves shows signs of crisis, i.e., skid marks, trees with no bark, or both. My advice, take it easy your first time through (if not every time through). The Dragon is fun, but not to be taken lightly and I would recommend that one never drink and ride, or ride when one is physically and mentally exhausted. To ride The Dragon you will need all your skills and complete concentration upon the road ahead. Just Do It.

