

A Rookie's Tale of the Tail.... continued

(thanks to my new Racing Beat headers and muffler), the sound of the wind, and the mottled roadway caused by the sun filtering through the trees. Then it changed. Going from black to gray and from racetrack smooth to well-worn rough and dropped about an inch at the transition. Just before the next turn, a sign welcomed us to North Carolina. We zipped past a large group of motorcycles gathered around a small gas station with a huge sign that said something like "Welcome to Deal's Gap - Home of the Tail of the Dragon". About a mile past Deal's Gap we caught up to a big SUV lumbering along. As we approached, he slowed to a crawl and waved to us to pass. There was no way that I was going to pass on a blind curve just because this dude said it was safe, as he couldn't see any better than we could. He started to speed up to about 10 mph at which point, there right in front of us, was the Tapoco Lodge sign. We had made it.

The lodge is a nifty place, rustic and quaint. We had reserved a cabin which was simple and comfortable. It was high up overlooking the lodge and had no TV or phone. Perfect for a getaway weekend.

The next morning, after breakfast at the Lodge, we drove south on US129 to the Cherohala Skyway. It is a beautiful, high altitude, fantastic driving highway with many photo vistas placed liberally along the road as it winds its way to Tellico Plains, Tennessee. We had lunch at Garvin's, a barbecue restaurant at Tellico Resort, just outside Tellico Plains on the river. Then it was back in the car for the drive back over the mountains.

After driving back to the Lodge, we relaxed, took a walk, showered and went to dinner at the Lodge restaurant. Much to our surprise, there was not only a wine list but there was also a beer list. A server told us that Tapoco Lodge was the only place in Graham County that wine and beer could be served; they even had a package store! We bought a bottle of wine and had a pleasant evening drinking it on our screened porch.

We awoke the next morning to a dreadful sound: rain. This was not supposed to happen. We were looking forward to driving the Dragon at the beginning of the day. As we checked out the fellow told us that a bunch of Z3s were coming the following weekend; the week after that they were expecting a Mini Cooper rally.

We left for home in a light drizzle which kept our enthusiasm dampened as well as the road. Once again, the road was virtually empty. At least now we knew where the Tail of the Dragon started and stopped.



Linda and Gary Marconi became Dragon Slayers in July

Reflecting on the trip, we agreed that it exceeded all of our expectations. What we thought would be a long tedious drive turned out to be no problem at all. The lack of commercialism around the Dragon itself was a pleasant surprise; we can only hope that something doesn't happen to ruin it. Driving the Dragon as we did with virtually no traffic was an exhilarating experience. The Cherohala Skyway was almost worth the trip all by itself. Much of what the area has to offer had to be saved for another time: Santeetlah dam, Joyce Kilmer forest, and the Smoky Mountain National Park (though this last may be crawling with *touristas*). We would go back in a minute. I think going down for Miatas at the Gap would be an experience of a lifetime. If, however, we do another solo trip we will once again go in the middle of the week since the roads were essentially empty.

So we finally drove the Tail of the Dragon; we did it on a dry road in full sunshine and we did it in the rain. A comment from Linda got me to thinking about a whole new challenge: what would it be like to drive it at night?



New Members

"We're new members and we're not afraid of doing the toughest rally for our first event!" These brave souls attended the Fussin' N Cussin' and all survived! Please welcome: (Back row L-R) Stan and Carol Dziacko, Roger McAllister, Tom Cummins. (Front row L-R) Denny and Darlene Pitman, Karen McAllister, Beth Cummins.

Also joining the Indy Miata Club are Bruce Hedden, Jay and Jeanne Quinn, and Steve and Cathy Randall. Welcome and we hope to see you at our next event!