

Member Spotlight – John Beckwith, N6JCB

John started his Ham Radio life as a radioman in the Coast Guard back in 1967. After only a month on board the USCGC Glacier (an Icebreaker no less) as a Radioman but only at the dock, he was fortunate enough to be selected for the AvCad program and went to flight school in Pensacola, Florida. For many years his only need was to be able to read the morse code identifiers for the nav aids while flying his helicopters around the country (and world. So much for the “shallow water sailor” bit....:-). He finally got back to radio and got his license in 2000, moving up to General almost immediately.

His intent when he got his license was to work packet and code. Didn't quite work out that way. He couldn't really get into packet – and had a problem with the code. With his background he could comfortably work in the 10-15 wpm range, but it turns out – all he could find was folks working at the low end (5 wpm) or the high range – 25-30 wpm (and above). Those latter folks sound like teletype (for those who remember what that sounds like.)

He eventually got connected with the Los Angeles County Disaster Communications Service (DCS) and ultimately took over as DCUL for the Marina station. Later he found out about the Los Angeles Fire Department Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS) and moved over to that organization where he is still active and is the Comm Unit Leader for the South Bureau.

Along the way he worked a couple Baker to Vegas runs. This is an annual event that pits different law enforcement agencies against each other in about a 24-hour relay race from Baker, California to Las Vegas, Nevada – through the desert and mountains of eastern California and western Nevada. While working one of the waypoints on this race a couple of guys rode up on their Goldwings with radio antennas mounted on the back. Needless to say, he needed to know more. Turns out these guys were with MARC. MARC worked the event for a couple of years as sort of “Marshals”, however, MARC dropped out when it was determined they were not being heeded in their reports and warnings. Nonetheless – the damage was done – John became a member 2000-01 (memory fades...)

As for motorcycles – he's been riding since about 1969 with his first bike being a 1965 Honda CL77 Street Scrambler while being stationed in San Diego. But don't ask his roommate at that time about that bike – John completely disassembled and reassembled that bike – down to every last nut and bolt – in their living room. Amazingly they're still good friends. He says he's not much of a mechanic, but that bike started on about the third kick after putting it all back together. He attributes luck as much as skill to that success.



From there he eventually bought a Suzuki GS-400, which, at one point, he rode from California to Florida – complete with backpack mounted on the rear rack and a CB Radio (remember, this is pre-ham days for John). That CB radio saved his butt during that trip. As he was crossing West Texas on an early Saturday evening, he had been talking to a motorist about a mile behind him. John was planning to stop at the next town for gas. Unfortunately, they had pretty much rolled up the sidewalks by then and nothing was open. Fortunately, the guy he'd been talking to stopped and they syphoned some gas from his car and John was able to make it to the next town.

A few years later John traded his Suzuki for a BMW 75-5 and that was his main steed for several years. Of course, anyone who knows those bikes know – it had a kick starter that kicked sideways – away from the bike. But, with a 750cc motor – you had to be ready for it to kick back. Which it could, with some ferocity.

During those Suzuki years, John left the Coast Guard and moved to LA where he's been ever since. And shortly after, he met Vickie, who loves to ride with him. He brings this up because in 1989, she agreed it was time to move up to a newer bike. John had his eyes on the Harley Davidson FXRT. This was one of the first generation of rubber mounted engines that Harley started building (the FXR series). He was all set to go up to Santa Barbara to pick up one of the few left around, when, literally the night before, he saw an ad in the paper (you remember newspapers don't you?) for a new Goldwing 1500 for under \$10k (several \$k below the Harley). Knowing the Goldwing's reputation, he had to check it out. And the rest, of course, as they say, is History. Once he rode the Wing it was all over.



He had that Wing for over 20 years and mounted several radios on it over the years – Yaesu FT-90, FT-8100, FT-8900, FTM-10 and even a Kenwood D700 for a while. He also wired it up using the Kennedy electronics so he could use the built-in intercom system on the Goldwing.

Eventually it became difficult to find mechanics who would work on the 1500, so he sold it (regretfully) and bought a 2003 GL1800 from a MARC member who had been advised by his Dr. to stop riding. John always remembers the “comfortable” ride of the 1500. A riding friend of his even called it his “Motobago”. The 1800 was certainly a higher performance bike – but just not as comfortable.

Along the way Vickie got stationed in Japan for several months and it turns out the Overseas Military Exchanges sell cars AND Harley Davidsons. Knowing John still wanted a Harley (don't we all – if we're willing to admit it?) – She bought him a new 2007 Heritage Softail. It was not shipped from Japan, but direct from the factory in York, Pennsylvania. (John and his kids got to visit Vickie in Japan for a couple of weeks – and he made sure to thank the salesman for the bike....:-)

So, John was riding both the Wing and the Harley. The latter was pretty much his around town bike. And Vickie loved to ride with him, especially on the Wing. Eventually, after John had upgraded to the 1800, they were both reaching retirement age and decided to buy an RV and a Jeep to tow behind it. It seemed like, at that point, having two bikes was a bit much. Since Vickie still liked riding with John and the Wing was far more comfortable, the obvious choice was to sell the Harley (painfully so, he relates.)

Unfortunately, within a few years the 1800 began to be a bit of burden to ride (probably emphasized by some front brake problems) so, away went the 1800 as well. As shared elsewhere – John went through a Kawasaki 900 and a Honda VTX 1800 before coming back to Harley and his current 2009 Heritage Softail. But, as also shared elsewhere – John recently discovered the newest 2018 Honda Goldwing – a full 100lbs lighter than the earlier 1800 and with a feel even lighter than that. So with Vickie's blessing in came the new Wing. Vickie even says it's the most comfortable back seat we've ever had, including several Russell Day-Long custom seats (and that's saying a lot.). So, today he's riding the 2009 Harley with a Yaesu FTM-10 mounted on it and the 2018 Goldwing with a Yaesu FTM-350 on it.



So, drop a line on the list and find out what John is up to. And, if you're from out of town and want to do some riding in the LA area – he does have a 2nd bike lying around, so.....

Got a story of your own to share with the rest of us MARC members? We're looking for folks to share their stories in the Newsletter – drop us a line and we'll work with you to get something going. Write it yourself or we'll write it for you. Just let us know. Send a note to – marcradiohq@gmail.com and we'll go from there.