

# Charlie 'n' Me

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## The beginning

In 2007 we were on our second sidecar rig, a 1987 BMW K75 with a Hannigan Astro Sport sidecar. The first one was a 1994 BMW K1100LT with leading link front suspension and car tires. After an all-too-short relationship I wrecked it on my way home from the bodyshop where they painted it to match the color of the bike.

That summer Mary and I attended a motorcycle event called Americade in Lake George, New York, about 30 miles from our house. We naturally visited the Hannigan display all the way in a back corner. As we were walking toward the site a sidecar rig came into focus. It was a new Kawasaki Ninja with a sidecar, an all-black rig. As we walked closer, an invisible force was pulling us closer. That rig looked like it was going a hundred miles an hour. It was instant love. After a short talk

with David Hannigan Mary and I agreed that we will have one of these built for us. Instead of the Ninja however we wanted the Concours model (chain vs shaft drive) and instead of the small, low sidecar we wanted the much larger 2+2 model with a much larger trunk as well. We planned to make this sidecar rig our present to each other, our fortieth wedding anniversary and my fiftieth of being in the country.



A man from Texas picked up the K75 rig for his wife. The Kawasaki was ordered and was in hand soon after that. It made a wonderful solo bike, powerful, comfortable and I almost didn't want it converted to a rig but soon I looked forward to being the first in the universe to own and drive this unique rig. In setting a date for the conversion with Hannigan Motorsports I found out that I was not number one, that there was

another guy from Vermont who butted in front of me. I instantly disliked that person and never wanted to meet him.

A trip to Kentucky, the home of Hannigan Motorsports was scheduled and Mary and I set off on the trip, she in her Honda S2000 and I on the Concours. During half of the trip it rained cats and dogs, then after it cleared up, while Mary was trying to keep up with me, she was pulled over and given a subsequent speeding ticket. We finally got to our destination, dropped off the Concours and set off on a week-long vacation, at the end of which we picked up the finished rig.

On the way home Mary's nose was more than a little out of joint: here she was in a yellow convertible with the top down and everybody was waving at me!

## First impressions

Mary and I were in the vicinity of the Tail of the Dragon some time in 2008 looking forward to attend the national COG (Concours Owners Group) rally. The weather was awful as we neared our destination for the night, the headquarters of the rally in Fontana Village Resort in North Carolina. It was raining very hard as we pulled into the resort seeking refuge under the awning of the front entrance. There were quite a few bikers milling around and as soon as they saw us they all converged around the rig. Instead of the usual sidecar questions they wanted to know if I was Charlie. It didn't take too long before I became quite annoyed with Charlie and I didn't even know him yet! Apparently he was there before and had already made a few friends.

I got wind of a sidecar meeting during the Americade in 2008. When we pulled into the parking lot there were already about 20 rigs there. I was driving toward the back when I saw this guy running toward me. It was Charlie Nassau, the “bahstuhd”, who butted ahead of me in the cue and became HP sidecar owner NUMBER ONE! As I was driving toward a parking space I kept yelling: “Mine’s nicer! Mine’s nicer!” I parked the rig and he caught up to me and introduced himself and I immediately knew that he wasn’t a “bahstuhd”. We looked at each other’s rigs, pointing out differences, liking them or not. A bond developed between us in minutes.

## Friendship

That afternoon went be all too fast and I don’t remember when we met again. Suffice to say that since then we have been constant companions. He persuaded me to join the BMWMOV motorcycle club. He invited us to stay at their house for each and every monthly Sunday morning breakfasts held by the club. I always enjoyed following him during those brisk mornings on the way to Tozier’s. He was an excellent pilot and I quickly found out that our riding styles were very similar. For those uninitiated to group riding (a group of two is still a group), to find someone like that is to be cherished because I venture to say that there are many motorcycle rides who are never happy riding with someone else leading or following. I have been extremely lucky to have found two of these in my lifetime.

Charlie has many stories. He has led an interesting life and is very rich in motorcycling experiences. He has much more riding time in the saddle of sidecars owned in the past. The one he favored the most (I think) is a K100 with a EML rig. He and wife Peggy shared many trip on and in it and managed to rack up over two hundred thousand miles on it. He proudly displays a picture of his rig in his study, which, by the way, is filled with other pictures of motorcycles, along with awards from his career, as a motel owner and operator. He was on the board of directors for Travel Lodge, which further added to Charlie and Peggy’s list of places visited. That list is richer than anyone else I now or have known. This comes in very handy when planning a trip, another of Charlie’s strong suits.

Since our meeting we have attended every national rally held by the USCA (United Sidecar Club). Charlie always planned our trips, taking great care to have the proper mix of interesting sights and good back roads. I would offer to put my two cents in, which he always willingly accepted. He would pore over maps with his favorite lighted magnifier glass and after a few days an itinerary would emerge. It was a printed document occupying multiple pages, containing data spelled out for each day, with starting and ending points total mileage, hotel name at the end with price, address, telephone number and confirmation number. The route number for the day were spelled out, complete with mileage. These documents were a work of art and I saved most of them.

It is impossible to talk about Charlie and not do the same about his wife of forever, Peggy. Together they make a perfect example of what marriage should be like for every married couple. Charlie drives to the local McDonald’s every morning to buy Peggy a cup of coffee because she prefers it to the coffee he makes and drinks when he comes home. This tradition is observed even when it’s during one of our trips. Peggy is short, so she sits on a special comfortable pillow in the sidecar. She will sit, hour after hour, reading or solving crossword puzzles. The answer is always “Fine” to the question “How are you doing?” There is only one thing that she asks, that we go to church on Sunday. Or Saturday, if Sunday is not possible. We always comply without question.

## The trips

A few more words about riding with Charlie. His eyes are not as strong as they used to be, so I was elected to be the leader from the beginning. It’s a responsibility I don’t take lightly. I like to go at least five miles over the speed limit on four-lane highways with an occasional burst to hyperspace to get by those hogging the left lane. I must lead okay most of the time, as Charlie never complained to me. He is a very good follower.

While on a trip I would take his legendary itinerary and turn the page to the current day’s riding instructions and put it under the clear window of my tankbag. Charlie has these routes in his head, while I don’t and have to look and look and look for the next turn and I must admit that sometimes I miss the turn. I like to experience the terrain while traveling. When

I look in the mirror and I don't see Charlie, beads of sweat appear under the helmet and I feverishly look for a place to turn around. Our rigs are wonderful and superior to most other sidecars, except the turning radius is close to that of a tractor trailer. Once I turn around I see Charlie and I feel the disappointment in his eyes and see his foot tapping impatiently on the footpeg. All this is, of course, only in my imagination.

## The Three-wheeler Rally

A few years back we made plans to attend a rally in Massachusetts, a three-wheeler and Moto Guzzi rally. We met in the parking lot of McDermott's Harley Davidson. The route took us over mostly two-lane roads. The weather was perfect and we were having fun with some of the curves. I slowed down as we were coming into a little town. I spied a Stewart's and pulled in. I jumped off the bike and went into the store to use the restroom. When I came out I saw a man looking at my rig. We experience this on a regular basis, so I was prepped to answer the usual sidecar questions. The man pointed to a puddle of antifreeze under the engine. It must be from another vehicle, I protested but looking closer I saw a stream coming out of the radiator. After summoning a tow-truck we asked to be driven to a Kawasaki dealer in Bennington,



Vermont. The service manager came out and as soon as he saw the sidecar, he announced that he couldn't help us. We ended up taking the rig back to where we bought it, where it was repaired in a few days.

Granddaughter came to pick us up and with Charlie and Peggy in tow, without a word, we drove to my house. They stayed over and in the morning the four of us took off in three vehicles: Charlie on his rig, Mary and Peggy in Mary's yellow Honda S2000 and I took my Moto Guzzi Norge. All was fine until we encountered some meandering traffic on the Mass Turnpike. I decided to turn up the wick trying to get by an older Maserati, who didn't see things my way. The red mist was palpable so I decided to curtail my speed of over a hundred. When I raised

my head I saw Charlie close behind me but no yellow Honda. I slowed down, allowing the Maserati to go by, waiting for Mary to catch up. We arrived at the exit for the rally, pulled over and waited. They finally showed up, telling us that they were pulled over by a policeman by the side of the road and was given a speeding ticket. Neither Charlie nor I saw the police block.

At the rally Mary and I got two awards. One was for the Norge: first place among Moto Guzzis. The other was an award for a hard-luck story I related to those present about our trip to the rally. It turned out to be a rather expensive weekend. The radiator was over 600 bucks, the ticket another 265 (clocked at 93), plus higher insurance costs for the next three years. Are these young kids EVER gonna learn?

## Charlie

It seems to me that I've known Charlie all my life, even though it's been less than eight years. I am actually jealous of those who have had the pleasure of being around him for longer. I feel very comfortable around Charlie and I always know that he has my back, as I have his. He has been my idol ever since we met and when/if I ever grow up, I want to be just like him.



*Charlie and Peggy at the Conklinville Dam.*



*Charlie 'n' Me in the House on the Rock in Wisconsin in 2015 on the way back from Sturgis*