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## **One Night From Hell**

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One Saturday last summer Topeka's Yamaha/Kawasaki shop was having a dinner ride at 4:00 when the store closed. I was going to go to St. Joe, Missouri, about an 1½ drive. It was a beautiful day, around 80 and hardly a cloud in the sky. I decided to do a little shopping in town before we headed over to the store. I happened to see a storm chaser vehicle parked outside of Kinko's and I asked him where the bad weather was. He said our area was the hot spot and storm chasers were even coming up from Oklahoma. Well, that wasn't very comforting to hear. But continued what I was doing and headed over to the store around 2 o'clock.

I went inside and told the owner and his wife what I had heard. They said several people had called and asked if we were still going. At this point it was still beautiful outside. They kept checking the Internet for storms and didn't find any and we even thought about staying closer to home. When everyone arrived we decided to go ahead and go with our original plans and if it started to look bad we would have dinner half way. It was a great ride but when we pulled into St. Joe it was getting pretty ominous looking. I thought that for sure it would be raining before we left.

The dinner was great. There were about 15 of us. A couple of people left a little earlier who weren't going back to Topeka. It had cooled off so I donned my leathers and we headed to get gas for the trip home. It was 8 o'clock. Just about dark. We headed towards Atchison and it started getting extremely hot and looking like it was going to rain at any moment. It was getting so hot and humid that I was wondering why I put my leather coat on in the first place. I was trying to unzip the vents as much as I could. Then all of a sudden it cooled down and started to rain and I was trying to get everything zipped back closed.

We pulled into the nearest gas station and put on our rain gear. Earlier in the day I had a malfunction with my face shield on my helmet so I left it at the store. So I had goggles on under my helmet and those kept fogging up. It wasn't raining too hard yet so we took off out of town and then hell broke loose. It was lightning and pouring down rain and the wind gusts were horrible. I rode my cruiser as if it were a crotch rocket leaning down behind my windshield because I had to keep the rain off my face and eyes and to get some protection from the elements. There were limbs being blown across the road and we were probably only going about 30 mph if that. But every time there was a lightning flash or a car would go by you couldn't see the road and even when that wasn't happening you couldn't see the lines because of the wet pavement. There wasn't anywhere to pull off or get under so we braved it until we saw an upcoming school. Our fearless leader turned in even though we weren't for sure where the drive was. We saw 2 other bikes already there.

We all jumped off our bikes and headed for the front door way. The 2 people already there were from our group who left earlier and they weren't wet. They said somebody flagged them down and told them to turn around because the weather was so bad. We made phone calls to see where the storm was and where it was heading. Everybody

said we were right where it was the worst and there was another storm headed our way. The only things we were missing was hail and a tornado. I guess I felt a little lucky.

Maybe 30-45 minutes went by and it was still raining but not as torrentially. We decided to try to make Topeka. It rained the whole time but we could at least see the road, mostly. I was going to leave my bike at the store if it was still pretty bad when we got back and get a lift from the owner home because they live down near me but it wasn't too bad so I continued on. It started raining harder when I got about a mile away and I second guessed my judgment but the more I continued it pretty much quit raining. I turned on the road to my house and it wasn't even wet. It was starting to sprinkle. I opened the garage, pulled the bike in and it started to pour. I proceeded to pull off the wet gear to dry in the garage except for boots, gloves, and helmet I brought them into the house to dry. It was around midnight. A 1½ hour drive took 4 to get home.

It was an interesting learning experience. I had only been riding and owning my bike for about 6 months. I got both night and rain riding experience that same night. I either was too naïve to be scared or just concentrating on the road too hard. I really don't ever want to do that again but at least I know I can. Since that time we did other dinner and breakfast rides and decided if there is ever a question of weather not to chance it and stay closer to home. But we all know what that means, the weather will stay nice. By the way, I was the only woman driver in the bunch so everyone has a new found respect for my abilities and I can keep up with men.