

SEGA 750 On The Road





THE ROAD GOES ON FOREVER ... OR AT LEAST AMERICAN HIGHWAYS APPEAR SO. THE ONE ABOVE CROSSES THE NEVADA DESERT AND FINISHES AT THE FOOT OF CALIFORNIA'S YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK. DAVE CALDERWOOD TOOK YAMAHA'S HIGH-TECH 750cc SECA ON A LOW-PROFILE, ROUGH 'N' READY TOUR OF THE US SOUTH-WESTERN STATES IN SEARCH OF SOME OF 'REAL AMERICA'. DID HE FIND IT? DO YOU NEED A DOUBLE HEADLAMPED (TOP LEFT), DIGITAL CHECKLISTED (CENTRE), ANTI-DIVE EQUIPPED (BOTTOM) SOPHISTICATE TO ENJOY A TOURING HOLIDAY? PROMISE NOT TO MENTION JACK KEROUAC EVEN ONCE?

KINGMAN, ARIZONA IS A DAY'S RIDE from Los Angeles, California if you're taking it easy, as I was, and if your only objectives are to find a comfortable and safe bed for the night and somewhere to eat and refuel, as mine were. But

this small, truckstop of a town neatly encapsulated in a triangle of major highways — Interstate 40, Routes 93 and 66, plus the Sante Fe railroad running right through the centre — might as well be a million miles away in terms of

culture, life in general, and amenities. Los Angeles and its sprawling suburbs — the whole of Southern California in fact — appears to exist only further the hedonistic approach to life: You want it, we've got it. Any time, Any place, Just

SECA 750



sign here and pay the money. It's a great life only if you live it *hard* (plus you're white and middle-class). I'd hoped on this trip that I'd be able to get outta this dedicated to play environment and into a bit of The Rest Of America, find the stuff that the legends are made of, and see some spectacular scenery too.

My plan was simple: it should've been since I'd spent the preceding five months thinking about it, confirming dates, making arrangements with US-based colleagues in high-speed transatlantic telephone calls, and directing all spare loot into a personal slush fund. This was to be my reward for sitting out the whole of 1980's summer, autumn, winter and '81's spring with a slow-mending broken leg, copped, as you might've guessed, in a bike accident. When you've taken every summer holiday for the past ten years on a big bike it's more than merely frustrating to be stuck in a hot office, administrating and producing a motorcycle magazine almost by proxy, or behind the wheel of a sluggish automatic gearbox car when the best biking days are passing you by. So this summer was to be it, the Number Two trip (Number One obviously being saved for that sometime-in-the-future round the world epic).

So on September 23 I flew out to Los Angeles and the following day picked up a 750cc Yamaha Seca, a four cylinder shaft-drive model that has only just been announced for release in Europe but which has been available in the US for a year. It's quite unusual to look at even with an unpractised eye: the seat is low enough for anyone over five feet tall to plant both footies firmly on tarmac and the styling which allows the middle of the bike to be so low swoops in a continuous line round the curved tail light then back up front, gracefully rising to the twin headlamps. At first I thought the smaller lamp below the main rectangular beam was a kind of daylight riding lamp — in California, it's compulsory to ride with dip beam on during the day and modern bikes have no on-off lights switch — but no, it's a spotlamp operated by a separate switch on the right 'bar and sending a powerful concentrated beam 20 feet ahead. It seems a bit pointless to me and the only time it became of any use was when passing through some long unlit tunnels in the Canyonlands of south Utah, more of which later.

That first weekend was spent looking up a couple of friends and taking in the end of season speedway meet at Costa Mesa where over 10,000 spectators welcomed home new world champion Bruce Penhall. The circuit

The wrap around tail light is a good idea enabling fender-benders to spot you from the side, it looks good too. Note bullet holes in roadsign.

was so small and tight compared with English tracks that Penhall was having trouble staying with the local aces and when he did make a move to ride round the outside of a bunch — remember his startling tactics in that Wembley final? — the reminder came that US speedway is a rough 'n' tough affair and he was slammed into the trackside barrier, fortunately without injury. The main events are run similar to British races — four riders and a scratch start — but they also have handicap events with as many as 12 riders plus hilarious novice races. The handicap events are best forgotten as wild, incredibly dangerous, bloody gladiatorial battles where the fast guys start from the back and have to pass down-league riders who'd rather fall off than be beaten, and the novices... well, if you've ever tried to ride a speedway bike you'll know that they're totally unpredictable, capable of both sliding and wheelieing uncontrollably. A couple of riders spent their entire race trying to get round the first bend while an older guy, in fringed black leathers, somehow made it through to the evening's semi-final where he created havoc.

Two days later and three hours after leaving LA on the San Bernardino freeway, I was on the western edge of the Mohave desert, sweltering in my Furygan leather jacket. Heat bounced off the road, the desert and the bike, stoking an inner furnace that sapped at my desire to keep moving. Interstate 40 stretched out in front, dead straight. There were still over 200 miles to go — I wanted to be within striking distance of the Grand Canyon for an early start the next day — but a stop for fuel and to drink an iced Coke dragged on as my Rand McNally atlas took on more interest than getting back into the saddle. Over here, or on the continent, I'd just get on with a 200 mile trip and enjoy it but I could see what it was going to be like: a steady 55-60mph, throttle barely open, top gear all the way, no bends just gentle curves and unrelenting scrubland that just went on and on to the distance.

'Gottagetagrip,' I thought, downing the Coke. 'There must be something to occupy my mind with on these boring stretches.' Then I began to notice signs of the desert ecology — a lizard on a rock or a couple of birds wheeling high above. Old roads — such as much of Route 66 — that'd been replaced by the Interstate and were now disused being reclaimed by the desert as weeds got a hold in cracks produced by extremes of temperature. Those first few days in LA, when advertising hoardings, electric neon signs and Californian girls distract all the time from the roadside, had made me immune to the subtler attractions around now. At this point, the Seca was just *there* doing its job efficiently and unobtrusively, with only the check panel providing the occasional interest.

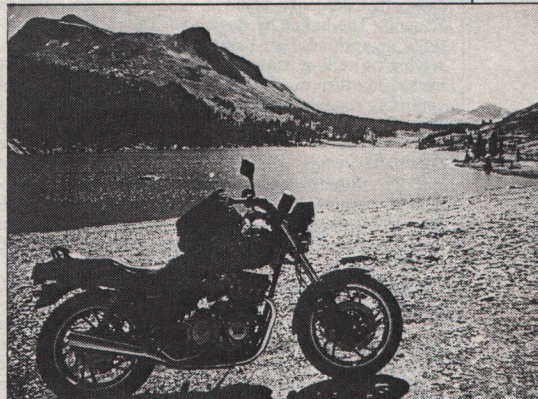
This device has a grey face rather like a digital watch with six blanks each containing the name of the component to be checked. When you turn the ignition on, the list runs down forming each word: (side) (STND), (levels) (BRK), (OIL), (BATT), (lamp) (HEAD), (TAIL), then finally (FUEL). If there's anything wrong, the word stays up and a red light flashes. You can repeat the check on the move or at any time with the ignition on by pushing a button. There's also a novel fuel gauge with no needle but instead four blocks each representing about a gallon. When full, all four display but as the tank empties they disappear, one by one. It's a fair size tank, too, taking just over four US gallons or 3.3 Imperial (or 15 litres, metrication working its insidious way into US garages as well as British ones). As I swung the Seca down of I-40 and into Kingman, looking forward to a shower and several beers to replace all the fluid sweated out crossing the desert, I was startled by a klaxon that did a good job of telling me there was a thundering great locomotive around but was so all-enveloping in noise that I couldn't guess where. Convinced I was doing something wrong, I rolled off the throttle and coasted along, still in top gear but ready for evasive action. The rails ran right alongside the town's through road and a ragged, spread-out station indicated that this had once been an important stop. Nowadays, the glory is limited to a huge black coal-converted-to-oil fired steam engine donated to Kingman town council by the Sante Fe railroad as a monument. The town is divided into two sections, the 'normal' high street businesses and a totally separate area further up the road which I didn't discover until an hour later when searching for food.

This other bit was like most of the towns I came across during my ride: motels, gas stations, fast food joints. I'd chosen the first motel I'd seen simply because it had a vacancy sign.

After a hot day on the road, and once you've decided which hamburger to eat that night, a couple beers definitely seem the right thing. On my last trip to the States I'd had a nasty confrontation in a Mexican bar so I was a bit leery this time, hanging around outside for a while looking very suspicious. Finally, I plunged past the blue Budweiser sign and found myself surrounded by cowboy-hatted farmhands talking about the latest four-wheel drive pick-ups, sinking beer, shooting pool and playing Merle Haggard on the juke. Apart from the C&W, it was a real friendly place to relax, sup an iced Coors and listen to the twang of their accents, while my bones slowly began to lose their aches.

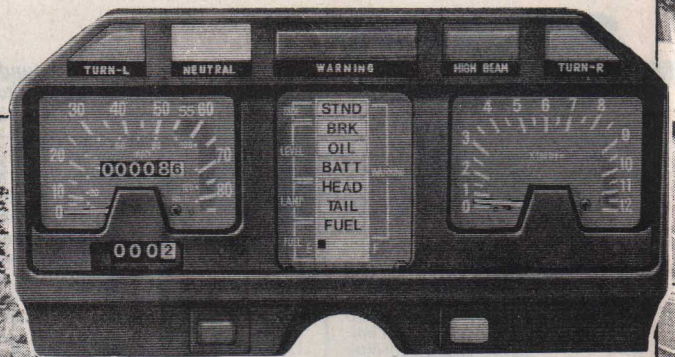
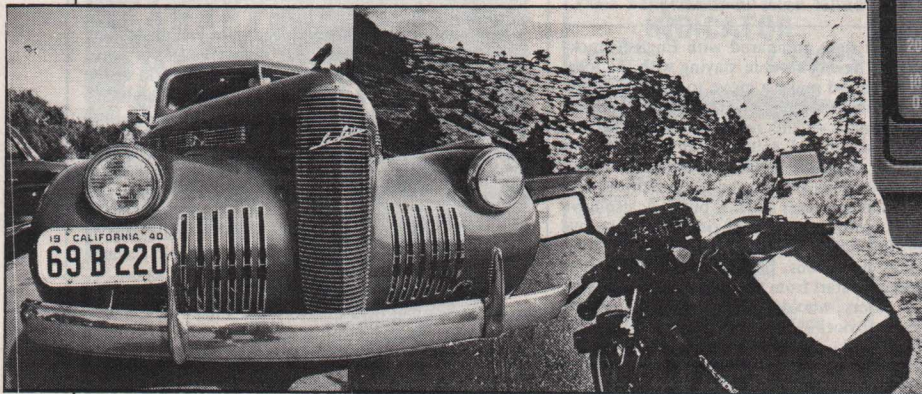
That my butt felt sore, my kidneys as though they'd been pummeled by a quarter-back's head, and shoulders stretched had little to do with the Seca's riding position and more to do with my lack of long rides in the past 18 months. The Seca was proving to be ideal for me and this trip: I hate fairings and with average speeds being around the legal 55-65mph mark one just wasn't necessary. More than anything I had wanted to avoid the typical full-dress US-style tourer. Yamaha have managed a neat blend of sporting feel and touring comfort though it remains to be seen in what form we'll get the bike over here next year. Those squared off handlebars are normal tubes covered with soft impact absorbing material, more to fit in with the Seca's look than pure safety. The story goes that US dealers insisted upon tubed 'bars because they could be straightened or more easily replaced after a crash than expensive die-castings, a la CBX/900F Honda.

There's about four inches raise on the 'bars but with the seat so low, you've got the mass of the tank, headlamps and control panel — plus, in my case, a tank bag — taking the bulk of the windblast. It's really neat the way Yamaha have styled the Seca with the tank swooping down from being quite bulbous at the steering head to the width of the four carbs at your knees.



Footrests are surprisingly well back so it's a kind of 'sporty armchair' riding position. The signs are that the Japs are taking ergonomics as seriously as they've always considered engines and the Seca never delivered anything less than a pure silky ride, disturbed only slightly by a clanky transmission in first and second gears. Around LA I noticed a self-centring castor effect on the steering which made some tight turns a bit, well, different, but out on the open road the reason became obvious. For touring in the States you're mostly going to be on straight roads where turns are little more than gentle sweeps. Certainly in the south-west, which has vast areas of desert, farmland, mountains and canyonlands, the roads need to be straight if you're to cover the great distances in any reasonable time. Unlike Europe where most roads have developed from centuries old tracks, the motor car has been thought of in the construction of most routes and they're consequently wider. It's when you spend all day crossing an area of desert in Nevada and make only about five or six turns — excluding stops for fuel and food — that you realise this really is The Big Country.

My tankbag was a Bagman that I'd bought on arrival in LA. My old one was just about splitting at the seams and faced with odd bits of luggage — riding gear, cameras, ordinary clothes — to carry through airports and motels I'd opted for the burden of yet another bit of luggage one way only. Plus I read that this was



Left: Rare '40s La Salle saloon and the road through Zion Canyon.

Above: Seca's check panel has a micro-computer checking basic functions. Note the block fuel indicator which combines with a red warning light.

supposed to be the best bag in the Universe which it patently isn't since there's an obvious misunderstanding by the designer about securing it from the front. Not only did the straps pass right over the Yamaha's offset and locked fuel cap but they allowed the bag to slowly slide rearwards into your lap.

My other luggage was a simple leather carry-all bungeed to the pillion seat and which, as I rode out of Kingman the next day into the early morn chill, made a good backrest. This day was to be the first sight-seeing bit: the road started climbing immediately, though there'd been the Hualapai Mountains in view ever since crossing the state line into Arizona 62 miles before Kingman. Similar Indian inspired names were to follow as the road left behind the harsh dry Mohave and moved into lush green farmland of the sort we expect The Virginian and Cartwrights to rule. The high plateau that I-40 crosses includes the Grand Canyon in the north and a vast area of National Forestlands — Prescott, Coconino, Tonto — reaching as far south as Phoenix. The Indian heritage is all around with reservations signposted but they mostly seem very poor, relying on selling trinkets to passing tourists. I almost missed my turn north towards the Canyon because of confusing roadworks at that very junction but it didn't take long to realise the single-carriageway road was the right one to the Canyon's South Rim. Even in late September, when autumn is starting to chill the air at such an altitude, the road was a procession of overloaded campers, caravans and huge limos packed with the whole family. I just had to overtake them all. Damn people, it's only one of the greatest sights in the world . . .

And it is. You approach the Grand Canyon on a flat, straight road with the Kaibab forest either side alternating between short trees and pleasant meadows. As a National Park, you pay \$2 admittance (there are 'Golden Eagle' passports available for \$10 which give multi-entry for a year to most Parks) and there's just no warning of the sight you're soon to see. It's all very well laid out with access roads on the south side of the Canyon and parking the Seca next to an air-conditioned, own toilet, own fast-food dispenser, own geriatric ward silver-blue building with wheels, I went off for a walk in the direction of the South Rim. Past the neat wooden signs leading the way for serious hikers down into the Canyon, past small bushes and out onto a promontory called Yavapai Point then . . . the North Rim of the Canyon swallowed all vision. I mean, there was just nothing else to look at. The Canyon stretches from east to west for as far as you can see and not a hint of it until this point. It's just so huge, so spectacular but with so many subtleties of colour, vegetation, rock, everything that the only thing to do is sit down and stare at it.

There are many amazing things about the Canyon but quite staggering for me was to discover that it's the result of perfectly natural erosion. There's been no horrendous land-slips or upheavals but simply the Colorado River, over a mile below me at this point, cutting into a gently sloping plain, itself laid by million years of rock formations and different periods of the Earth's history. What's laid bare by this eroding process is that history, in the form of fossils and rock stratas spanning two billion years from the oldest rocks on Earth, the black Vishnu Schist, to the youngest at the top, sand deposited by an encroaching sea a mere 280 million years ago. That's one story but the Canyon

is so deep that temperature and precipitation (rain) vary so much that it has the climate, wildlife and vegetation range of a whole continent. There's the low desert life forms at the very bottom such as spiny lizards, pink rattlesnakes and the rare Big Horn goats and at different levels you'll find mammals, birds, trees and bushes sticking more or less to their normal life zones.

The Canyon obviously warrants time spent exploring it but I hadn't made an advance booking at the Park Lodges (\$35-\$70 a night). I could now understand why camper trucks are so popular; though you have to stick to agreed areas to camp overnight, you've no worries over rushing back to an hotel plus the security of having your equipment protected when you go exploring. Which is something that worried me for the whole trip plus the fact that luggage space was at such a premium I hadn't even taken elementary spares such as a puncture repair kit. The Seca's toolkit was okay for itty-bitty stuff but the thought of getting stuck with a puncture played havoc on my peace of mind and definitely influenced a few decisions — such as not diverting off the main roads onto dirt tracks to investigate Ghost towns.

I continued along the South Rim's access road, stopping at various viewpoints along the route including the supposed best of all: Desert View. This not only looks back from the western end of the Canyon but shows how the Canyon widens from two miles(!) across the Rims to encompass the Painted Desert, home of the Navajo Indians. It's a two day hike to cross the Canyon by foot but a 280 mile ride by road if you want to take in the view from the North Rim, which is slightly higher and less accessible. The chill in the air on the plateau started to ease as the road wound down and, my gosh, bends started to come up. Real bends, too, with a good surface requiring severe applications of throttle. Snapped back into attack mode, I couldn't quite shake off the feeling that I shouldn't really be riding at 80-90mph even though I'd left behind the Park's boundaries. Pushing the speed limit by 10mph or so is acceptable to most Americans, it seems, but start travelling at much more than that and they think you're a loony, an affliction shared by our own bureaucrats.

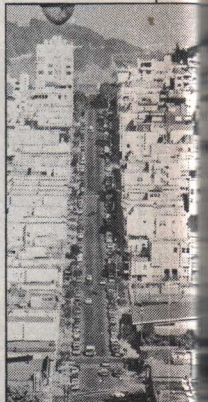
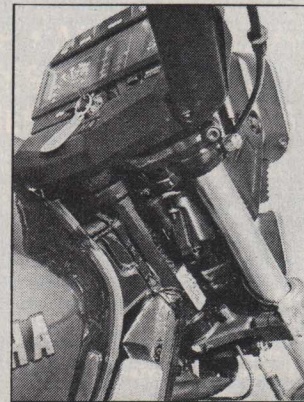
Still, it did give me a chance to work the Seca's motor a bit harder though I doubt that a State Trooper would approve my reasoning. Cruising along at steady speeds I hadn't noticed the Seca's lack of low rpm torque and the fact that it really wakes up at 6,000rpm. It'll pull top gear below that but there's no steam, no screaming urge, no kick in the chest until then. With such high revs being turned and pretty frantic gearchanging, you might think that, as with many shaft-drivers, there'd be an adverse torque reaction wagging the rear end. Yamaha managed to smooth this out of their 750cc triple (though the XS11 does rise and squat under throttle on-off) and the Seca is just as well-behaved. Stiff springs and four-position adjustable damping at the rear give a fairly hard ride that's good for control through twisty turns but pounds your butt on the freeways where joins between sections of concrete road slabs set up a high frequency thump.

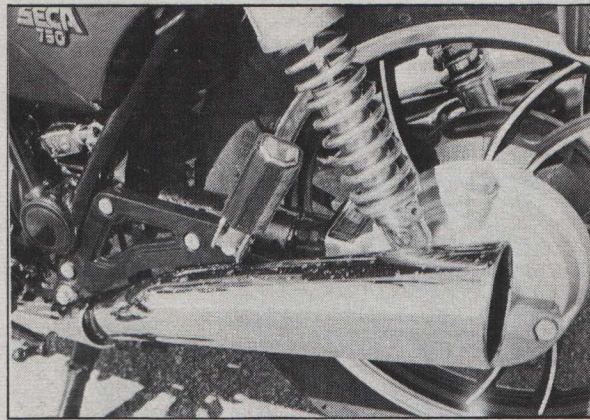
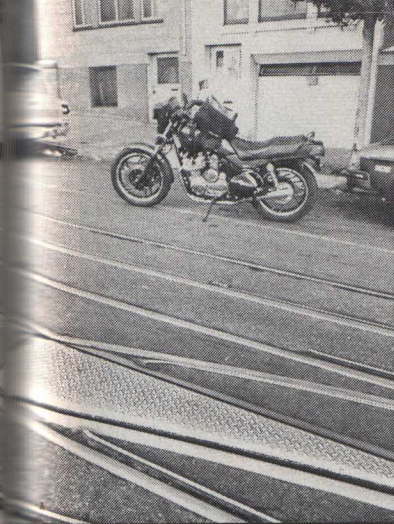
When I got back to LA I had a day to spare so took a trip up to the Angeles Crest Highway, a snaking, quite deserted in the week, stretch of smooth and sticky tarmac in the hills north of LA. It rises over four thousand feet with rock cliff faces giving way to forest adjacent to the road so you definitely don't want to err

as to the correct line. Along the straighter bits I tried a few emergency stops to evaluate the anti-dive equipped fork stanchions but found it hard, in this test at least, to discern any noticeable effect. What happens when you pull the front brake on is that hydraulic pressure taken off the brake hose at the caliper union activates a valve which restricts the flow of oil in the compression damping circuit and thus slows the rate at which the forks are depressing due to weight transfer. During these emergency stops the fork still dived — a tide mark of road dirt left on the exposed tube gave this away — but it's more controllable and less pronounced than on a similarly softly sprung fork, say, as on a BMW. But if this was all there was to anti-dive mechanisms the fork would effectively be locked solid under braking and any bumps encountered by the front wheel would probably bounce the wheel clear of the road and lock the brake. The real trick is the release mechanism plumbed into the system. The anti-dive valve has a spring-loaded seat and when the compression effort reaches a certain level — such as under braking plus a road bump — the anti-dive valve opens, normal damping resumes and the bump is absorbed. Setting this threshold accurately could be quite difficult and the Seca has a five-position adjuster underneath each fork leg's anti-dive unit.

The Seca is slung low and it's long — with a wheelbase of 57in — but I found it hard to touch any metal down on Racer Road unless I deliberately tried hanging off or made sharp, abrupt turns. Since I didn't know the road that well and prefer a neat, smooth style — plus I wanted to return the Seca in one piece, not to mention myself — I was content with a mere skimming of my cowboy boots to prove I'd at least tried. The castor effect of the 'slow' steering was easily felt here but proved a help rather than hindrance. As I said earlier, it's only in town on tight turns that this 'straight-on' feeling isn't good.

Back on Highway 80, heading north away from the Grand Canyon and towards Utah, the heat grew intense crossing the Painted Desert. Odd shapes of rock either side of the road reminded me of mining debris until I realised they were moraine deposits by the Colorado, now named to a consistent flow by the upriver Hoover dam but once a wild, erratic life-giver which varied from a trickle in the height of summer droughts to a raging, thoroughly out of control torrent





Left: Downtown traffic hazard in SF — rails and corner plates for the city's famed Cable Car service. Above: Shaft final drive is similar in appearance to BMW, except it's on the left. Note how neatly the exhaust tucks in.

bursting its banks and altering the landscape. Crossing the state line into Utah was less eventful than I thought. For most people, Utah conjures up visions of black-suited solemn-faced Mormons telling people that everything they enjoy is a sin with motorbikes, beer and music in pole position. In fact, though they do have odd licensing laws in that you have to buy liquor in designated areas, there's no overt religious guff and their slightly old-fashioned way of life is pleasant after the banal platitudes expressed elsewhere (if I hear another 'Have a nice day' I'll bite their ears off).

All through the trip I stayed at roadside motels which are plentiful, no fuss, and pretty cheap. In Utah they were cheaper and cleaner too. The air was fresh in Kanab, a small town near Coral Pink Sand Dunes which were just that, the water cold instead of LA's lukewarm and though I never found a bar playing Merl Haggard the people were just as friendly. Southern Utah is possibly more packed with incredible scenery than any other spot in the Universe (or those bits of it I've seen). There's national parks a-plenty: great spans of rock in Arches, the Canyonlands which is a miniature Grand Canyon where the Colorado again cuts a tortuous path, and the most famous two — Bryce and Zion.

By this time I'd been on the road for over a week and beginning to distrust my luck with the weather — every day since I'd arrived the skies were clear at breakfast and stayed that way all day. But at the high altitudes of these canyons — often between 6-9,000ft — it could easily turn bad overnight. I had only a lightweight overcoat so I must admit I hit Bryce and Zion pretty quick before making a break back to California where, as we all know, it never rains (ho). Of Bryce: it's a huge natural amphitheatre with multi-coloured limestone columns and weird shapes eroded by the elements. The Canyon's first white resident Ebenezer Bryce, is reported to have said: 'It's one hell of a place to lose a cow.' The only way to see it properly is get off the bike and walk; yet again I felt cheated that with my luggage secured by mere elastics, I daren't leave it out of sight for very long. If you ever take on a trip in the US — which I'd say has to be one of the best-value-for-money holidays ever, so Do It Soon — then get your security sorted out in advance.

Zion Canyon, just a few miles away (by US standards of distance), is much easier to see since an excellent road passes right through. This is part of what's called Color Country with huge sandstone cliffs towering over you. The road runs along the base of the Canyon rather than along the rims and twists, turns and tunnels through the rock. Here, plunging into a black abyss, sometimes dripping wet, from bright glaring sunshine I found a use for the auxiliary headlamp. Even I, not normally moved by spectacular scenery when there's a twisty road to be ridden, for once opted to cruise and stop, cruise and stop, to admire and breathe in the display of nature: pink, red and white sandstone rocks contrasting with delicate greens of cottonwood, ash and maple trees with an edge of silvery-grey added by the occasional cascading waterfall. This activity is normally

a total anathema to me resulting in a punchy temper within the hour but this time, alone, I even managed to overcome my paranoia about leaving the bike and walked off across rock slabs in search of a rattlesnake which, probably fortunately, I didn't find. It's very easy to get straight in with the local wildlife though and lizards, mice and birds don't seem to worry too much about you.

The guide books call Zion 'Yosemite Valley In Colour' and since that was my next destination I'd soon be able to make the comparison. First I had to cross a huge chunk of Nevada desert, the monotony broken only by a few small towns all proclaiming 'Slots, Eats, Gas'. I wasn't exactly worried — with a new bike, wads of plastic money and the most organised country in the world, you don't exactly need to worry about anything — but the prospect disturbed me slightly. It was an eerie ride at times with the road in either direction being totally deserted, only the occasional longhorn steer to add a bit of mammalian warmth. As the afternoon and miles wore on and the fading light brought down the temperature to a distinctly chilly level, I speeded up the rate of travel. After all, I had hardly seen a soul all day let alone a patrol car. This was a good time to make observations about fuel consumption and I could tell by the checkout panel's block indicator how much thirstier the motor got when held at 8,000rpm instead of 4-5,000. I can't give speedo readings because US-spec bikes have an 85mph max now with 55mph plus in red, just so's you don't forget you're a silly speeder. But I guess I cruised at 80-110mph and recorded a worst figure of 47.6mpg for this part of the trip. The Seca was extremely good on fuel and the Yamaha's mod to inlet tracts of their four cylinder bikes works well. YICS, as it's called, links each inlet port with a secondary, small bore tract and as each inlet valves opens the sudden depression of pressure sucks any residue of petrol vapour through from the other ports, improving the charge in quantity and turbulence. Anyway, the Seca amazed me on one trip with a best of 82.7mpg — a 750 doing over 80mpg? Yeah, well I was miles from anywhere, on reserve with a red flashing light telling me: 'You bum, why didn't you fill up thirty miles ago.' Overall, on my 2,725 miles ride, it averaged 62.5mpg and used no oil at all.

At last the desert was over and I made my only overnight stay in Nevada. This State has open gambling laws which is why Las Vegas or 'Glitter Gulch' has grown up the way it has. Before 1931 when the law was changed, Las Vegas had been just another dusty desert community with a railroad linking its broad, marshy fields to the outside world. I didn't stay in Vegas — miles to the south — but a small dusty desert community called Hawthorne which has only one restaurant open after 8pm in early October and that's also a gambling casino. Resisting the croupiers' beckoning to lose more dollars than I'd so far spent in petrol, I had a Prospector's steak and fended off the peroxide blonde selling bingo (under a fancy name) tickets. While supping a beer to the sound of one-armed bandits chinking away, viewing the baccarat table and ignoring a rouge-and-talc redhead who wasn't giving away anything, I reflected on the day's non-events. The most exciting part had been cresting a hill to see the road dip and stretch straight to the horizon across an empty tract of desert so huge, I almost succumbed to an attack of agoraphobia. I could see probably 40-50 miles in every direction and the only movement was a dust trail rising

into the darkening air, set up by a pick-up heading towards an isolated farm. How they grew or farmed anything out here was beyond me; shot up road signs, usually warning of cattle, indicated the farmhand's boredom.

Next morn, up early and away before breakfast, I caught more signs of the desert ecology: loads of straight-tailed mice (Pinon, I found out later) running across the lonesome road. An hour after leaving Hawthorne the grey mass of the Yosemite Mounts loomed ahead, seemingly straight up from the flat road. I stopped for a bit of America you can get nowhere else, the truly disgusting breakfast: waffles, hot maple syrup and fresh cream. Feeling much, er, refreshed, I zapped off past a housing estate masquerading as the motorhome, missed the road into the national park, did an illegal U-turn across double yellow lines and promptly got stuck behind the motorhome again as the climb up to California's highest pass began. Yosemite National Park is based around the Yosemite valley in the centre and I entered what's known as the North Country. The road was one created in 1883 for wagons to service a mine and not completely modernised until 1961 and leads you through the Most Stunningly Refreshing place ever (again): Tuolumne Meadows. The Tioga pass at 9,945 feet leads you through typical sub-alpine terrain similar to much found in the European Alps except that there's none of the overhead cables, railways and ski lodges that France and Italy are plagued with. On my visit the clear skies emphasised the freshness of the golden fields; stopping next to Tenaya Lake I had option of camping in available-for-hire tents or continuing on. A weather forecast that I'd heard the night before had me worried and, a day later in San Francisco, I saw reports of snow in Yosemite. Even in October, the ark was busy with trippers and I wouldn't want to go there in summer because of that but if there's one place in the States that I'd definitely like to see again, walking with a backpack, it'll be there.

The rest of the ride, to SF and down to LA, was just as filled with new sights and experiences as the bits that'd gone before. I was amazed that even a highly populated State such as California has so much open countryside to offer and that a busy city such as SF could be so cosmopolitan and yet so friendly. Careful wearing biker's black leather though: donning my Furygan one evening to take in *Palms*, a rock pub in Polk Street, it took me precisely five minutes to realise my mistake, rush back to the motel, tear off the jacket and stuff it into a wardrobe where it stayed until I left town. SF's leather boys are, er, a bit weird and it's for the best if you don't confuse people as to your, er, intentions.

Back in LA, I handed the Seca back to Yamaha Motors US with regret for it's been the right choice for my trip and when you get such a basic thing as your wheels, my only companion in fact, right then you're onto a winner. Sitting back in the bus to LAX airport I worked out how I'd do my next US ride: the US is too civilised these days to get away from it all by bike so it means riding to a destination, camping and then walking off. Just as I was planning an itinerary, conveniently ignoring the fact that I was broke with enough plastic money debts on their way via computer lines to the UK to keep me that way for months, the daydream faded as I struggled with two suitcases, a tank bag, a helmet and camera case with tripod bunged to it; my leather jacket and boots were too bulky to pack so in LA's sultry heat I was wearing layers of clothing thick enough to bring on hyper-ventilation. 'B—— motorbikes . . .'

Far left: Front brake's master cylinder is remote and hidden under top yoke. Filler has Allen bolt top and v. diff to reach. Left: Lombard Street, SF, shows off how hilly the city is. Remember 'Bullitt'?