

(continued from website link)

...The food is just incredible. In fact, it is so good that we went back the next evening with Bruce Porter from Arai.

We also updated and improved our display again for this year's show series. We now have all of the Arai parts and accessories at eye level, and available for consumers to actually touch and hold the accessories. The parts are much more visible than on our previous set up in which the parts could only be seen hovering 7 feet up in the air! We have also added a digital picture frame that showcases new and upcoming helmet designs. We eventually plan to include a shield changing video as well as some other interesting information on the frame (and yes, it does play videos).

In Dallas we also stay at one of my favorite hotel chains, Hotel Indigo. The rooms are so beautiful. Hardwood floors, beautiful shades of blues and yellows everywhere. It is a really great hotel chain if you are ever looking for a place to stay.

The following weekend we went to the San Mateo, CA show. As usual, we were greeted by chilly air. It's funny how those of us on the East Coast always expect every part of California to be warm all the time. I have traveled there enough times to know better, but it's always fun to see the look on the faces of our coworkers who are going there for the first time, when we tell them it's going to be 55 degrees in California. Our flight there was fun because we were on one of the big planes with 9 seats in each row (2 left, 5 center, 2 right). The movie on that flight was "500 Days of Summer", which I loved. Emma sat in the row directly in front of me so even though we didn't sit next to each other we still talked (when she wasn't sleeping). We got into San Francisco late that evening and headed back to the hotel for some much needed rest. The San Mateo show was a decent show. The show has shrunk in size, as all the shows seem to have done this year, but this was still a decent sized show. Oddly enough, consumers were being filtered through the lobby of the building we were in, and forced into a coat check area that was it's own separate room. It was a kind of weird layout and a little frustrating for us as a vendor. We had to stand there and watch hundreds of consumers walking through the lobby that was 50 feet away from our booth, and watch them walk away into a room we couldn't even see. Strange, but I'm sure there were reasons for it.

At this show, Robert, Emma, and I worked together. Those of you who are regular customers have probably seen Emma with us at some point. She is one of the "TSP girls" that is at the Indy GP with us each year. She is also a great asset to our team of helmet specialists. I always enjoy traveling and working with her as she is just as fun and goofy as I am.

The San Mateo County Event Center definitely wins in my book as the convention center with some of the best food. Most convention centers have hamburgers, chicken fingers, pizza, etc. It is usually subpar and way overpriced. The San Mateo Center, however, has a pasta bar where you fill out a little slip, customizing your order of pasta. I highly recommend the penne with marinara sauce, sausage, and garlic. DELICIOUS.

On Saturday evening after a nice dinner, we went back to the room - and as usual, I turned on Saturday Night Live. I have watched this show for as long as I can remember. Over the years it has had its ups and downs. For the past few years it has not be nearly as funny as years past, but it's slowly starting to come around again. I actually love the current cast, I just think the writing could use some work. However, on this particular Saturday, one of my favorite skits was on. I am referring to the "What's up with that?" skit, which is set up as a talk show on the BET network. Anyone who has seen this skit

knows that very little talking actually gets done as the host of the show just constantly sings the show's theme song, with his own lyrics mixed in. It is so stupid, and yet so hysterical. For whatever reason, on this particular evening, Emma and I thought it was extremely funny. As a result, we ended up singing "Oooooohhh Eeeee, What up with that? What up with that?" for the rest of the weekend. Emma made it her goal to have a complete stranger recognize what we were singing and respond to us, but no one did. She even got so desperate that she asked a man in his mid-sixties (who was sitting next to her on the flight home) if he had seen the skit (he didn't).

Speaking of the flights home, WOW. What a mess. On Monday morning, Emma and I woke up early to head to the San Francisco airport. We made sure to get there with plenty of time to spare as I have found that to be a pretty busy airport. Although our flight was with Continental airlines, we were supposed to check in at United airlines. I thought this strange, but since it was printed on my itinerary, I went ahead with it. So we stood in a very long line and then finally made it up to the check in counter. I went to one of the self serve kiosks (this was the only choice in that line) and proceeded to type in my confirmation number. The computer then said that I needed to see an agent. Well, apparently United has subcontracted another company to supply customer service agents at their counters, but these agents don't actually know anything about United or how to help with anything other than walking you through the prompts on the kiosks. I did not know this initially and started to ask the man behind the counter for help. At first he said "I don't know" and was about to say more when his supervisor came up to him. He immediately stopped talking to me and started talking to his supervisor about lunch breaks. Then he said "Okay, so I can go now?" and walked away from me! I actually yelled out to him "You're just walking away?! Does this mean you are done helping me?" I could not believe the complete lack of customer service. I then asked one of the other associates for help and was then told that he could not do anything for me and I would have to get in the "Special Services" line. Apparently with United airlines, anything that is not a super smooth and easy check in is considered a "special service". Nice. So we get in the other line and wait for 40 minutes until someone is able to help us. Plus, the way that United has set up the Special Services line is that you have to FIRST get in and wait in the regular check in line, then move over to the special services line. There is literally no way to just get in the special services line from the start. So, anyone who was sent down to special services from the check in area was just going to the front of the special services line, thinking they were the only ones who had already waited to check in. Since it appeared that no one else was going to say anything to these people, I decided to say something. While they didn't look impressed, no one argued with me about it (whew). After waiting 40 minutes to make it to the counter where someone can actually help us, we then had to wait another 30 minutes to get anywhere with our situation. The agent kept saying that our tickets weren't showing up in the system. He then had to call Continental Airlines to see what was going on. I knew it was a bad sign when he kept looking at his watch. I knew that at this point we were at the cutoff time for our bags to make the flight, and the security lines were not looking good. He made a few phone calls, and at one point had 3 other agents working on our issue. In other words, we were using EVERY agent at the special services counter at once. I'm sure the other people waiting in line were not impressed with us. So after a half hour of working on things, he told us that we had to go to Continental to get the tickets. So, we had to walk to the next terminal to get to Continental. Of course this was not all indoors, so we headed outside to walk the rest of the way to terminal one. Surprise, surprise, they were doing construction outside so we had to maneuver around that while lugging our purses, bookbags, suitcases, and a large cardboard box full of parts and accessories. Fun times. Finally, we get to Continental and there is no line (yay!) As we begin to enter their roped off lines, I lose my grip on my suitcase. The suitcase proceeds to fall, and after a delay of a few seconds, a tray of about 1000 luggage tags and stickers falls to the ground. At this point, I'm sure the Continental staff are already shaking their heads at us. After cleaning up the mess I made, we head to the counter. On the way to the

counter I see a sign that says “Any Continental flight numbered over 6000 must check in with United Airlines”, and I chuckle to myself. After explaining our situation to the agent, he goes into his computer to try to figure things out. He then says that we have to get the tickets from Delta, because they have control over the tickets. This seems odd, since Delta has nothing to do with any of this. But since we flew out to California on Delta, apparently it was their job to issue our return tickets. So, we head to Delta. At this point, we know we have missed our flight. I am starving, Emma needs her coffee, and we are getting really tired of lugging our bags around. The only thing keeping our spirits up is that we have been singing “What up with that?” all morning. We get to Delta and explain everything up to that point to the agent behind the counter. He seems to understand exactly what is going on, releases control of the tickets and says we have to go to Continental to get the tickets. So we head back to Continental. It’s a new agent, so we have to explain everything again. She says she can’t print the tickets and she released control to Delta. She even prints something out to prove that she has released control to them. We go back to Delta. The Delta agent (again a new agent, so we explained everything AGAIN) says that control has already been released to Continental and she cannot do anything with the tickets. I show her the printout from Continental and she counters with her own printout. I then say that Continental has already repeatedly told us to get the tickets from Delta. She offers to walk down to Continental with us and get this straightened out (very nice of her). She shows the Continental agent the printout and suddenly, they can help us. Thank goodness! So, we get our new tickets and amazingly, we are only getting home a half hour later than we originally should have. All in all, it took 2 and a half hours for us to get tickets in our hand. Wow. But in the end, we made it home safe and sound, which is all that really matters.

As the Thursday after the San Mateo show was Thanksgiving, we had one weekend off between shows. Thanksgiving Day was lots of fun – Rob and I spent the day together and visited family. On the Saturday following Thanksgiving, I went Christmas tree shopping. I found my tree, but thought it was much smaller when I chose it off the lot than when I brought it home and set it up in my living room. Oops. Either way, Henry Sr. (yes, I name my trees) looked great once decorated. That night, Robert held one of his open house/indoor pitbike rides (if you don’t know what I am talking about, there is a video of it on our website). As always we had a great time with lots of riding, lots of laughing, and great food. I even rode a few laps myself toward the end of the evening. I usually go pretty slow as the track feels so narrow to me. Plus, this was the first time I rode since last year’s ride, so I was a bit rusty.

On Sunday, Rob and I spent more time with my family (at a party for my neice), then decorated Henry that evening.

Later that week, we all headed out to Long Beach for the next show. Rob flew out on Wednesday, Emma and I flew out on Thursday. On Friday, we had some free time before the show started, so we stopped by one of my favorite stores; the Skechers outlet. Last year I went into this store and bought 4 pairs of shoes. This year, not one. We then headed out to have lunch with a friend from Yamaha. After lunch it was time to head back to the show and set up. Friday night at the show was pretty good, we stayed steady with business. The Hayden Brothers booth was also set up next to us, so we had fun talking with Rose and Kathleen Hayden all weekend.

On Saturday morning, we headed to Huntington Beach to have breakfast at The Sugar Shack. If you’ve never been there, you need to go. For all I know, I may have mentioned this place in a previous blog. They have the best French toast I have ever had in my life. Most of the seating is outdoors, the staff is always friendly, and the food is always delicious. When we were placing our breakfast order, Rob ordered a ham and cheese omelet with swiss cheese. As soon as he said that, the waitress said

“Mmmmm”. I actually think that maybe she didn’t mean to say it out loud, because when we started giggling, she explained that she was really hungry. She said that she was going to have “lettuce dipped in ranch”, but as the Swiss cheese omelet was her favorite, his order made her change her mind. So back to the lettuce dipped in ranch. Really? THAT would have been her breakfast? She didn’t even call it a salad. She was literally going to take pieces of lettuce and dip them in ranch dressing. Is that how people eat in California? ☺

After breakfast it was time to head to the show for our long day (9:30am-8pm). It was a good day, but pretty uneventful. It was a pretty typical show. Steady all day with the busiest hours being from 11-4. We spent time meeting a lot of new people, gaining new customers and hopefully future customers as well. It still amazes me that show after show after show, year after year, we are still meeting so many new people. We are also still finding that approximately 90% of people are wearing helmets that are too big for their heads. We still find at least a few people at every show who are wearing helmets AT LEAST 2 sizes too big! Crazy!

On Saturday evening after the show, we decided to find a nearby place to eat. Since the restaurants along the water (across from the convention center) were within walking distance, we headed that way. We saw a P.F. Changs, but then noticed another restaurant next to it, name Gladstone’s. As we approached and looked at the menu, I realized that it was primarily a seafood restaurant. Although I do not like ANY seafood at all, I do happen to love steak, and every seafood restaurant has steak somewhere on the menu. I had no idea what I was in for. I decided to order the filet mignon. Knowing that the restaurant specialized in seafood, I figured it would be a good but typical steak. Boy, was I wrong. I can honestly say that was the best steak I have ever had in my life. Not only was it the most tender steak I have ever had, but the flavor was delicious as well. It was so good that I actually found myself eating at about half the speed (if not slower) than I normally do, just to savor every morsel. If you live in or visit the Long Beach area and you like a good steak, please go to Gladstone’s. You will not regret it.

After dinner we headed back to the hotel. Again I watched Saturday Night Live. Emma watched part of it with me, but was glued to her Facebook account most of the time. She is of a younger generation than Rob and I, and that is clearly reflected in her love of Facebook. Rob and I actually met on Myspace, so we are big supporters of social networking, but we are not big fans of Facebook. I do like that it helps to satisfy my nosy side, but all in all, I find it to be pretty boring. I also get annoyed with people that update their status every hour, as if the whole world cares about what they are doing all the time. But Emma is a different story. She LOVES Facebook. Fortunately, she is not the type to tell people what she is doing every hour of every day. It is funny to see her at the hotel, however, as she is surrounded by electronics (laptop, phone, ipod). The times are definitely changing. I can remember when I first got a cell phone and it was for emergencies only. While I now use it for much more than emergencies, I still have a very basic phone with a very basic plan. Phones that do everything are just not for me. It is funny when teenagers 10 years younger than me laugh at my phone because it is so basic. Emma tells me that I am an old soul. Maybe she is right. ☺

On Sunday morning we headed to the Queen Mary for breakfast. It was a decent breakfast, although they changed their toast – and believe it or not, that used to be my favorite thing about the Queen Mary. I know, I’m a weirdo. After breakfast, we had a few minutes to actually walk around the ship. It was really neat and we took a bunch of pictures. They even had a room with original pieces that were used for communication/radio. It was definitely cool to explore and I would like to have spent more time there, as we did not even see half of the ship.

Sunday was just another day at the show. Sundays are traditionally the weirdest days at these shows. You never know what to expect. In Long Beach, Sunday started out fairly slow but ended up being steady through the afternoon. Again, nothing extraordinary to talk about, just another show.

On Sunday evening, we headed to a new hotel that was closer to the airport. Our hotel room actually had poolside access. Although I was absolutely exhausted by the time we got to the room and knew I had to get up in 5 hours for the flight, I took one look at the hot tub and knew I had to go in. I have an unhealthy obsession with hot tubs. I love them. I will own one when I own a house (I have had my dream hot tub picked out since I was 15). So I went in the hot tub for about 15 minutes and it was so relaxing. Just thinking about it right now makes me want to go back! All in all, it was a fun weekend. Working with Emma is always a good time, as she and I get along really, really well. Rob and I already laugh together so much, and with Emma there, it just multiplies.

The last show of the West Coast run was in Seattle, WA. I loved Seattle from the first time I visited. I just think it's a great city. This year, Robert flew Dennis and I in early so that we could spend some time in the city. On Thursday we set up for the show and relaxed in the evening. Rob and I ate at a great place on the water (Dennis was exhausted and opted to sleep instead) and had a lovely time. On Friday, we headed to the Public Market. I have visited the Public Market a few times before was always limited for time and never had the chance to explore the whole market. This year we had plenty of time. We went through the entire market, finding lots of cool stuff as well as gifts for others. We also had a great lunch at the Korean café that is located pretty close to the main entrance. Another highlight of the Public Market is that I found Kinder Surprise eggs there! I first had a Kinder Surprise egg when I went to Canada in 2000. I have been searching for them ever since, and never found them until now! I was so excited I bought a bunch of them. Rob had never seen them before and after seeing just one, he went back to the store and bought a whole tray of them! He gave them as fun gifts to a bunch of friends over the holiday. Everyone enjoyed them. I am not explaining them on purpose, because you just have to enjoy them for yourself. But good luck finding them. ☺

In Seattle this year, we also came across a driver that acted as our personal driver all weekend. Pricing wise, he was pretty much the same as a taxi. The difference was that he had a nice, clean vehicle, and took us EVERYWHERE we wanted to go all weekend at the drop of a hat. He was all SUPER nice. It also felt pretty cool to have our own driver take us everywhere...haha.

Before meeting our personal driver, we had an experience with a cab driver who called himself Ted Narcotic. We had a pretty good time with him. He is a left-wing Democrat, and Dennis and Rob are Republicans. He was going on and on about global warming, the legalization of marijuana, Obama being his favorite president, etc. It was hysterical to hear, but we all had a good time with it. He was definitely a character and ended up giving us a CD of his band. When we were leaving a restaurant a few evenings later, we actually spotted him picking up someone else. We yelled "Ted!" He didn't recognize us at first. Then Rob said "Remember, I'm the punk rock Republican that doesn't believe in global warming?" Then Ted said "Oh, yeah!!!" I thought it was funny that of all the cabs in the city, we came across the same driver twice.

The show in Seattle was okay. The show was much, much smaller this year than previous years. There were far fewer vendors there this year. The attendance of the show also seemed to be down. It had always been a very busy show, until last year when the snow kept many consumers from coming to the show. This year the weather was better, but people just weren't coming out. We still had a decent

show for the number of people that were there, with Friday being our busiest day (which is unusual). Sunday was a very strange day. The crowd was very, very thin with mostly window shoppers in attendance. A lot of vendors were walking around wondering what was going on because it is so strange for it to be that slow on a Sunday. Again, I think the threat of weather kept people from coming out on Sunday.

On Sunday night, Dennis and I had to head to the airport for our flight home. Oliver was actually done working for the evening but came out to the convention center to pick Dennis and I up to go to the airport (I told you he was nice!). The airport was very empty and many of the stores/eateries were closed, which seemed strange to me. I actually lucked out with my seat on the plane and ended up with a row to myself. I was thrilled since I knew I'd be sleeping overnight on the plane. We flew to Washington D.C., and then had a THREE HOUR LAYOVER. We ended up lucking out again because the seats in the airport didn't have armrests on them, which meant that we could each lay down and sleep. I was terribly paranoid about being in a deep sleep and missing our flight, so I woke up fairly often. However, it was still nice to get a few more hours of sleep. After our 3 hour layover it was finally time to take our 30 minute flight home. We got back to the Harrisburg Airport and headed to baggage claim. After watching all the bags come out, and watching everyone walk away with their bags, we realized that our bags were not showing up. That's right, our bags didn't make the flight. In case you forgot, we had a THREE HOUR LAYOVER. And our bags didn't make the flight. How is that even possible? Fortunately for me, I actually carried on my personal luggage so I had everything I needed. That was the first time I was glad that I carried on my bag (I only do it to save on baggage fees). The rest of our bags showed up a few hours later and was delivered that afternoon, so it wasn't too bad anyway. Dennis and I both headed home then and got some much needed rest for work the next day. And that was that. The first leg of the 2009-2010 IMS shows are over!