

(continued from website link)

... first had to fly to Newark, NJ. This resulted in us being on a rather small plane.

This is one of the planes that is so small that you typically have to check your larger carry on at the gate, rather than take it on the plane with you. In this case, the gate agent let us know that to keep the plane properly balanced, we were going to have to try to fit our larger carry ons in the overhead bins first, before immediately checking them to be stored below. Well apparently we did not do a good enough job, because after everyone was boarded, the gate agent came on the plane looking frazzled. She took one quick look at the (half empty) bins and said “all of you people with smaller items up here need to take them down so we can put bigger bags up here. If you don’t help me, I’m going to take you off of the flight.” First of all, she didn’t need to threaten anyone. She could have kindly asked if people could remove their smaller items until we got the plane balanced, at which point we could put our bags back up there if there was room left. The most annoying part about this is that there were numerous bins that weren’t anywhere close to full, meaning she could fit a larger size carryon up there before anyone had to move anything. She disappeared for a few seconds and returned with some of the carryon size suitcases from below.

She started jamming them into bins they weren’t designed to fit into. She was basically on a rampage. I saw her come up with my bag, which she really had to shove in order to get it to fit in the bin (and let me make a note here that this is only the second time I have carried on a suitcase on a flight in all my years of travel, because baggage fees were getting out of hand). I only mention that because I have spent the last few years really getting frustrated with all the people that bring oversized bags on flights (although I can happily say that my suitcase is well within the size allowances for a carryon). Anyway, it got to the point that the flight attendant wouldn’t even help the gate agent shove anymore bags up top. I heard her at the front of the plane saying, “No, you already tried that one, it didn’t fit. No, I’m not going to take it.” The flight attendant eventually just gave up arguing with the gate agent and watched her continue on with her rampage. At one point she was trying to shove a bag into the bin above me, and she yelled, “Whose bag is this? What do you have in here?” He responded by telling her he had cleats in there.

Then she muttered (somewhat under her breath, although due to her tension level it came out at the volume of a normal speaking voice) “Size 14 cleats. It’s bullshit.

Can’t he hold them?” Seriously, the dude never said anything about what size the cleats were, and quite frankly, that’s not for her to comment on anyway. So then when she couldn’t get the cleats in the overhead bin, she made some other passenger put it at his feet. The owner of the cleats (who was in the front row and had no under seat storage) tried to be courteous and offered to switch seats with the other guy. Finally, the lady came up with one last bag that was luggage that was

checked AT THE TICKET COUNTER. Meaning this guy paid at least \$15 to check his bag, and now she was bringing onto the plane. Then, to top it off, she pulled the luggage tag off of it. So, I wonder what this guy was supposed to do if he had a layover...first, how was he supposed to get it to the luggage handlers that would transport it to his next flight. And without a luggage tag, how was he supposed to tell them where to take it anyway? After ripping his luggage tag off, she then realized something important and asked him "do you have any liquids in here?" to which he replied "no." Then she said, "Well, how do I know that?" and took his bag back down below. It was bad. This woman was out of control. She even made the airline employees shift their bags around in the coat closet area to add more luggage. I suggested putting a bag in the bathroom and Shawn suggested making the pilot wear the cleats to make room, but I don't think she heard us... Then, when we arrived in Newark, the flight attendant was trying to help me remove my bag, but it was getting stuck on the latch of the overhead bin, so she asked the young pilot to help. He was pulling and pulling, then it suddenly came out, flew bag (along with the pilot), and I heard what I thought was the suitcase hitting the bin on the other side of the plane. Nope, that was the pilot's head. After the thump he started rubbing his head saying "Ow..." I knew that it wasn't my fault, but I still felt really bad.

Sheesh...I just wrote two pages about my first flight...I hope you are ready for a looong blog.

The second flight went on without a hitch, so I'll spare you any boring details about that one.

After Rob picked Shawn and I up at the lovely Birmingham airport, we headed directly to Barber Motorsports Park to set up our display. When we arrived at our booth location, we noticed that there were no sides on our tent (we rent the tents along with the booth space). After contacting vendor services at the track we were told that we didn't get tent sides because we "didn't request them." Oddly enough, every previous year when we paid for and requested tents, the sides were there. This year I was supposed to know to make a special request for the tents. Silly me. I felt better when I realized that numerous other vendors were also asking for sides that they expected to be there when they requested a tent. So that was all straightened out without too much trouble.

Friday turned out to be a good day for us. Friday is traditionally the slowest day at any race since it is a practice day with no racing. Also, most people work on Fridays so attendance is almost expected to be lower. Although we didn't see the usual line

of people waiting to come in and set up their campers, there was still a half decent turnout for a Friday. The weather was beautiful, which certainly helped. Overall it was a pretty uneventful day. Steady through the morning and early afternoon, then it died off for the rest of the day. After work, we stopped to have dinner, and then headed back to the hotel. We were all feeling pretty exhausted – Shawn and I still recovering from a few hours of sleep and two flights, Rob recovering from driving almost all night to get to the track in time.

That night Rob and I somehow ended up on You Tube watching newscaster's freak-outs and bloopers. Here are links to two of my favorites (please keep in mind that if you are offended by swearing, you may not want to watch these):
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkX6OBnelxw>
And <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tJjNVVwRCY>

Rob and I were laughing so hard at some of the clips we came across that we actually woke Shawn up, though he had no recollection of it the next day.

Saturday was an interested day at the track. It rained off and on pretty much all day long. I'm sure this can be annoying to spectators who are trying to stay dry, but it is also really frustrating as a vendor. Every time it started raining, we had to pull in merchandise, pull in our whole countertop (which was getting soaked), and close up part of the tent. Everything that got rained on had to get wiped down, then you are constantly on alert making sure nothing else is getting wet. You are also dealing with mud, which is known for being bad at this track. It was definitely a weird day for us. We didn't talk to many people that day, and sales seemed to be weak for all the vendors that day. The races started fairly late. First they were waiting for the track to dry. Then there was synthetic oil on the track and it seemed to take forever to get that cleaned up. Finally the races began and went off pretty smoothly. I wasn't able to watch the races, but I did have a lovely radio that was loaned to me so I could at least hear the announcer.

Saturday night we were all still feeling pretty tired. Again we had some dinner and headed back to the hotel. When we got to the hotel there was a very loud siren going off for an extended amount of time. Rob had known from a previous drive through this region that the siren indicated severe weather. Sure enough, when we got up to the room there was a note from the manager under our door indicating a severe weather alert. I can honestly say this is the first time I have ever received a note from a hotel manager warning us of the impending weather. It was all over the news, and I was preparing for some pretty bad storms, and even a

tornado. Honestly, I'm not even sure it rained at the hotel that night. I certainly didn't hear any rain, thunder, or strong winds, and when I woke up it looked pretty dry outside.

Sunday we were again greeted with "severe weather." It rained throughout the morning, pretty hard at times. It was getting fairly muddy through the vendor and food area, despite the facilities efforts to bring in woodchips and other materials to help soak up some of the mud (though none of this was placed in or around our vendor row).

The bad weather again seemed to prevent much consumer traffic at our booth. As business started to pick up, we started to hear the sirens that we heard on Saturday night. Before we knew it, the race announcer was telling everyone to go to their cars for safety. Track staff came to our booth and told us to go to a concrete building and close our booth. Would you believe that as we were trying to close our booth, this is when people wanted to shop? It wasn't just our booth either. I looked across the row and saw people trying on full leather suits. Next to us, people were trying on gloves. I am guessing that for locals, tornadoes are much like the boy who cried wolf. There are all kinds of warnings and no tornadoes. I could be way off with that, but that was the only explanation I could come up with for people starting to shop after being told to seek shelter.

After closing the booth we headed up to our truck to wait out the storm. Honestly, it never even felt windy. It thundered and rained hard for a bit, and that was it. I have since been told that there was a funnel cloud spotted, but I certainly didn't see, feel, or hear anything. After a while we started seeing people emerging from their cars. I had expected that most people would have left, but there were a good amount of spectators that stuck around. We went back down to our booth and reopened, but there was really no one walking around. Since these people waiting through a tornado and a few hours delay to see some racing, they weren't about to walk away from the track to go shopping.

So we started to close our booth. As we were closing we did get a few more customers, but that was it. The whole day just felt really strange. We took our time packing up as we had to deal with lots of rain, moisture, and mud. We were packing up as the races were on, which is something we have never done in all the years I have been doing this. Just as the Superbike race was coming to an end, we finished packing up. This time, I was able to sneak away to watch the whole race, which was nice. I witnessed the Blake Young crash. All I saw was a bike flipping over behind the

wall, then him running towards the ambulance. In his frustration and anger he took his glove off and threw it. This is something I have seen a number of racers do, but this was the first time I saw someone throw their glove onto the track. Not a good move, though I'm not sure that it was intentional. My guess is that he didn't expect it to land quite that far from where he threw it, but who knows. After he was in the ambulance, they had to bring the safety car out to slow down all the bikes – in order to allow the ambulance to exit the track. This was interesting to see, as the safety car is one of the new additions to AMA racing this year. I can see advantages and disadvantages to this, so I'm not really sure where I stand on it yet.

So that was Barber. Shawn and I weren't flying out until Monday afternoon, so Rob, Shawn, and I visited the Barber Museum on Monday. It is a pretty neat place. I don't know nearly as much about motorcycles as Rob and Shawn, so I did what I usually do around lots of bikes, and based my interest on how pretty they were...haha. There were definitely lots of unique bikes there that I have never seen before. Then there were bikes I have seen come into our service shop in PA. Then there were bikes that I have seen at IMS shows, and even a bike that Rob has in his personal collection.

After the museum, Rob dropped us off at the airport. From the minute we stepped into the airport until the minute we were at our gate, I would say only 5 minutes passed. It was super quick and super easy. Of course, you know it couldn't stay that way, right? It was just too easy. So, when we got to the gate it said "flight delayed." There was no airline staff around to ask about the delay, so I borrowed Shawn's computer to try to find out. The airline's website said the flight was on time...big help. Anyway, it ended up that the flight was only running ten minutes late. Once we were boarding, we were encouraged to be quick so that we didn't have to wait on the runway for a while. Having waited on the Philadelphia runway for 90% of the flights I take out of there, I know it's something to be avoided. However, the Birmingham airport is really small to begin with, and of the 6 gates in our terminal, there was only 1 other flight that looked like it was taking off around the same time as us. I don't think the other terminal is much bigger, so how long could we really end up waiting? Strange... So then we took off right away, and I was happy that we were only running 10 minutes late since I was already not going to get home until after 9am, and had to work the next day. Well, as we neared Philly we were put into a holding pattern for a while, and ended up landing an hour late. So a 2 hour flight turned into a 3 hour flight. I got home after 10pm, unpacked, tried to unwind, and collapsed into bed.

So that's it! That was the weekend. Next weekend we will be at Infineon Raceway in Sonoma, CA. Although this event doesn't usually have the greatest attendance, I really like the area. I have a strong preference for Northern California (over SoCal), so I am excited to go. Also, it's Rob's birthday next Thursday (May 14th)! So if anyone happens to read this and is going to Infineon next weekend, wish him a Happy Birthday!

I hope everyone is having a great spring, and I hope you all get out to some races this season!

Bye for now....