

# New York Rider



**ROGER BERNARD'S**  
*Skull Bike*

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**PART ONE**  
*of Garrison's*  
*Motorcycle Trip*  
*Across Egypt*

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*Interview with artist*  
**MARG OSMUN**

November 2006  
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**THE GEICO BIKES**

## Egypt by Motorcycle, Part I

By Garrison Leykam

Special thanks to Dr. Hussein Nour El-Din



Discovering historic diners and seeking out the great American meal on the back of a motorcycle has been the delight of hosting and co-producing the TV pilot, DINERS. However, when I crave a tabak of babaghanoug, some borek, a side of fattoush and a bit of mahshi leading into a serving of fasoolyeh topped-off with asabeeh and muhabbak, there's only one destination: Cairo, Egypt.

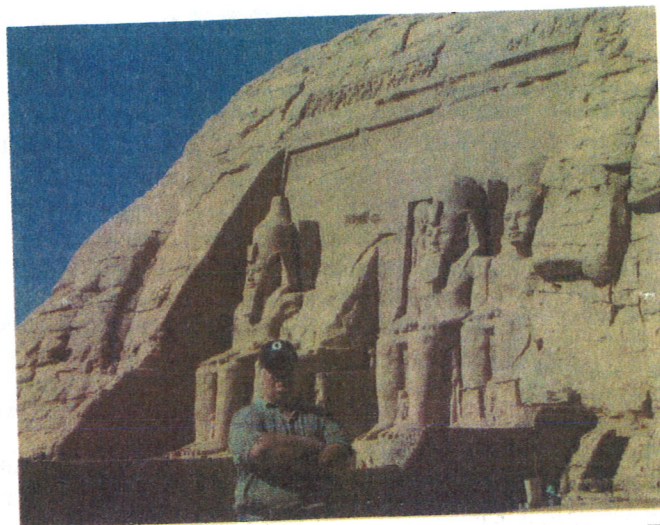
Post-911 travel jitters combined with non-stop TV news coverage of international conflicts and terrorism create the

understandable reaction of "Why are you going to Egypt?" from friends and colleagues. We, too, were influenced by the mass media pictures of terrorists in religious garb. However, what we found when we got there was quite different from our parochial American TV. The people were warm, friendly and welcoming. Cairo is a truly large city with an estimated 15 million residents. It has its very wealthy and a lot of really poor. As many as 2.5 million have found the only place to live is in the "City of the Dead", a large and ancient graveyard on the west side of the Nile in Cairo. The west is where the sun sets and in Egyptian history this is where the dead reside. That is why many of the exquisite sites and tombs are in the western part of the country. The poor live in the tombs and on the gravestones of people who lived centuries ago. Like most of Egypt, the paradoxes of Cairo are rampant. There are satellite dishes on top of some of the mausoleums in the City of the Dead.

Cairo is boisterous and full of life. You cannot walk anywhere without seeing crowds of people. Once you get used to the head scarves and galabiyyas you feel the Egyptian welcome. Of course, as anywhere, you need to respect the local customs and sensitivities. This includes modest dress. However, it should be noted that although Egyptian women wear

long skirts and sleeves and head scarves, they are attractive, alluring and exotic. They do not all wear black. Those that do often look out with eyes that are beyond description. They have a depth and a color that can be transfixing. We arrived during Ramadan. It is especially important when eating, drinking and smoking during daylight to be discreet, as Muslims are not permitted to do these things between 4:30 am and sunset. They are not permitted (assuming they are healthy adults) to have even a sip of water. The dedication to this tradition is significant considering

that while we were there the temperature was in the 100's (Fahrenheit). The other immediately notable sight in Cairo is the presence of innumerable white-uniformed Tourist Police (armed and unarmed) as well as dark-clad, heavily-armed police designed to add to reassurance about personal safety.

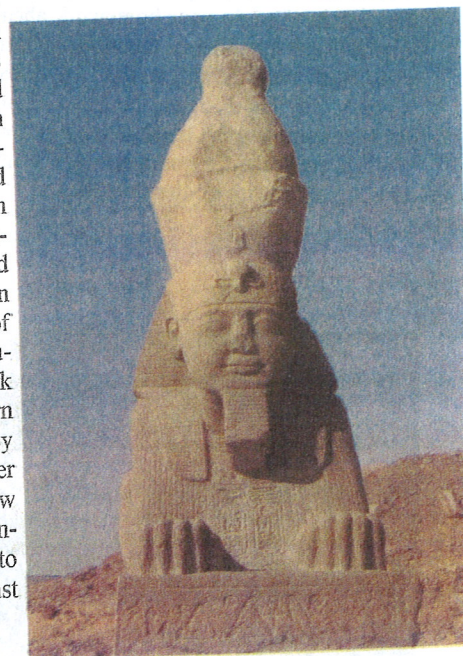


Motorcycling is an ideal means of transportation around Egypt. There is no better way to take-in the awe-inspiring sites than from the seat of a motorcycle. Super (tisa'een) petrol is readily available in Cairo and wonderfully priced at \$.55 US per gallon. Lead-free pumps are not as plentiful in the city and even less so outside of Cairo making motorcycle fuel economy a distinct advantage. Be sure to fill-up before heading to the outskirts.

The above said, there is one rule of the road in Cairo: there is NO rule. Traffic is in perpetual rush-hour mode, even during the daylight hours of Ramadan. There are no traffic lights (at least none that are followed). Highway lines have nothing to do with lane separation which is in practice defined by how many cars can fit parallel to one another curb-to-curb and still maintain forward momentum. Brakes take a back seat to horns and pedestrians seem accustomed to their roles as moving targets. Drivers do not use their headlights after sundown for fear of draining their batteries. Pedestrians walk across major highways and thoroughfares in the midst of the traffic. Cars can often be seen driving in reverse on the highway to get to the exit they just passed. Even more interesting are the drivers who routinely decide to travel the wrong way on a one way road to get someplace they want to go causing tie-ups and rousing "discussions" in Arabic which, although you can not understand the language, are presumably the same as on I-95 in New York. Some things just remind you of home. Many Cairoians use motorcycles as their everyday mode of transportation. The motorcycles we saw were, let us say, well used and in sympathy with a country that worships and preserves its ancient history. We did not spot even one Harley-Davidson. It is

common to see head-of-household riders with their veiled wives sitting side-saddle behind them and several children squeezed in between their parents and with parcels making them look like an over-packed mechanized dromedary camel. Within the congested streets of Cairo are ancient monuments standing in stark contrast to their modern counterparts. Donkey carts and traders meander through the maze of new and old Cairo like hundreds of spiders trying to weave a web of the past with the present.

*Continued on page 7*





It is worth the effort to negotiate the city traffic and motorcycle over to Khan El-Khalili, the grand market of Cairo. You can practice the age-old art of bargaining for gold, spices and perfumes. Choosing not to bargain is considered rude in Egypt so just start at a third of the asking price and go from there. Even if you choose not to buy, the palette of colors make Khan El-Khalili one of Cairo's most photographed attractions. Before leaving downtown Cairo for the outskirts, be sure to bring plenty of bottled water to avoid the "Pharaoh's Revenge." The temperatures can soar far above 100-degrees F in the summer months making sufficient supplies of water a necessity. Make sure you're carrying your passport and visa (both are required) as checkpoints are common. Public toilets are bad news. Familiar toilet paper is non-existent. Most commodocs (especially in the men's rooms) come with a water squirter for washing yourself when you're finished. Most women's bathrooms also come with attendants (some official and some seeming entrepreneurs) who expect payment for providing small squares of thinly sliced cardboard for toilet paper. Bring your own or wipes and some cash when you use the "necessary" room. Also, for you women motorcyclists, there are sitters (western) and squatters (eastern) toilets. I will leave you to imagine what each is. Hope for a sitter!

It is a 34 km ride along Pyramids Street and Saqqara Way to reach Memphis. Green farm lands border both sides of the roads and the ride will take you past donkey carts, farmers and waving children with big smiles which are warm, welcoming and just a bit impish. Memphis was the capital of Egypt for most of the pharaonic period and built by the pharaoh Namer (aka Menes) who is credited with unifying Upper and Lower Egypt around 3100 BC. Once filled with grand palaces, lush gardens and ornate temples, the site now bears little resemblance to Memphis' former greatness. The small museum wraps around a fallen statue of Ramses II that can be viewed from ground level as well as from a 2nd floor balcony. Weaving one's way past sleeping stray



dogs and ubiquitous merchant shops, an additional statue of Ramses II can be found as well as an alabaster sphinx of the New Kingdom. About 10 km from Memphis via Saqqara Way and Pyramids Hill is the Great Step Pyramid, a true superstar of Egyptian monuments.



Built in 2630 BC for the Pharaoh Horus Netjerikhet (aka Djoser) by Imhotep, the most famous architect of Egypt (eventually he was deified), the Step Pyramid is a milestone in the evolution of monumental stone architecture that led to the polished, smooth-faced pyramids of later builders. Prior to the Step Pyramid, sun-dried mud brick was the material used for most large buildings.

Mastabas," the first tombs of the pharaohs, were large box-like structures with burial chambers dug into the ground and connected to the entrances by a patchwork of shafts. The Step Pyramid began as a mastaba but was then extended by adding one mastaba on top of another until it consisted of six terraces reaching 197 feet high. Originally, the surface was encased in smooth, white Tura limestone which caught the sunlight and reflected its rays. The exterior is quite demolished now, but the imagination soars at the thought of it reflecting the morning sun and the beginning of the new day swathed in such brilliance.

Perhaps the most disorienting experience of all is the difference between bustling Cairo on both sides of the Nile and the desolateness of the desert as you turn the winding road and see the Pyramids come into view. The ochre of the Giza sand is everywhere and continues until it reaches the blue hazed sky. It is as if the sun has been sucked into the sand itself. The desert and the monuments have stood for 5000 years. It makes you understand that America is only a few hundred years old and the awe involuntarily invades your mind. You have to take a breath to believe you are really there witnessing these wonders.

On to the Giza Plateau...



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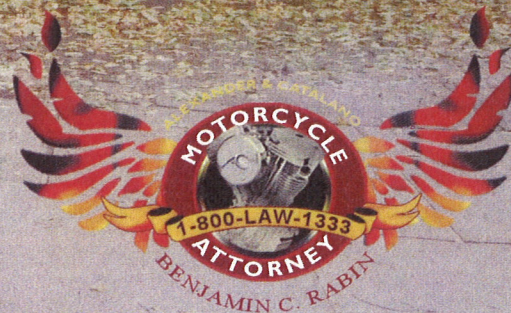
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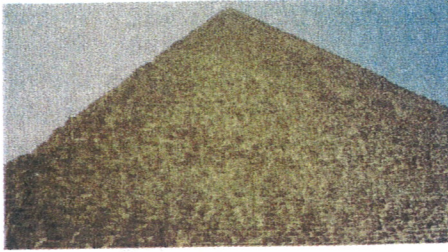


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## Egypt by Motorcycle, Part 2

By Garrison Leykam

Special thanks to Dr. Hussein Nour El-Din



The Great Pyramid of Giza is less than 3 km from the Step Pyramid and a memorable ride along Saqqara Way and Pyramids Hill. You'll find the parking areas at the Giza plateau filled with air-conditioned motor coaches and tourist



In Arabic, the Great Sphinx is referred to as Abu al Hol, father of terror. The sphinx may have originated in Egypt in the form of a sun god with the head of a king in royal headdress atop the body of a lion. There are many other sphinx all over Egypt but this is the largest by far.

The Great Sphinx has long been a national symbol of Egypt. Luckily it was buried in the sand for centuries and was, therefore, saved from the ravages of nature. Unfortunately, Cairo's wind, smog and humidity are causing the Great Sphinx to deteriorate. A number of well-intentioned efforts at restoring the Sphinx over the years have only added to its demise. Newer restoration methods are being evaluated in an effort to save this wonder.

As you walk from the Pyramids down to the Sphinx, the true size and beauty of it overwhelm you. Unfortunately, you cannot get too close anymore to see the remaining detail. However, it is hard not to wonder the spirit that imagined the Sphinx and gave it life. You can almost feel that it will rise up, stretch its stiff legs, turn to look at you and then bored with so puny a creature, set back down again for another millennia until someone more interesting comes by. When you depart Giza, motorcycle down Pyramids Road, turn right at the Maryutia Canal and follow the road for about 5 km to the village of Kerdassa. Many of the scarves, galabiyas and rugs found in the markets of Cairo originate here. 4 km south of Pyramids Road is the Wassef Art Center, a well-known source of tapestries, batiks and ceramics that will charm you with their beauty and amaze you with the intricacy of their craft. You can buy something to suit any budget but if you really want the crème d le crème of Egyptian craft, get a tapestry woven with silk. The detail is mind-boggling. Each square inch has so many knots that it is hard to count them. They are all hand done and depict typical ancient Egyptian designs and scenes in vibrant colors. The advantages of a sidecar become readily apparent when browsing the local wares. Keep in mind that the larger crafts centers are designed for the tourist: they take credit cards and will ship your purchases home. As always, keep your receipts for reconciling your statements. Always keep in mind the exchange ratio. While we were there it was 1 \$US = E£5.7 (Egyptian pounds) and always negotiate (it's expected and considered rude not to). Also remember that the Egyptian monetary scheme has no coins so if someone hands you a coin you know you are being scammed. The denomination of Egyptian currency below the pound is the pilasters. Pilasters are worthwhile as souvenirs but have such little value that they are basically worthless. Unfortunately, they come in similar denominations to pounds and but for the fact they are smaller, they look a lot alike. Be careful not to confuse the two. Most places will also take American cash but not American currency dated before 1992.

groups escorted with their own armed guards. We saw only a few motorcycles at the Plateau but the ride is one that is sufficiently close to Cairo to be a relatively easy ride on paved roads. Egypt has invested heavily in making its tourist spots accessible. Be careful if you do motorcycle because the number of buses and cars can be overwhelming. Also try to go early in the morning before the weather has a chance to come up to full throttle. I, for one, am enamored of the lure of air-conditioning when the temperature has reached into the 100 of degrees Fahrenheit. Those who are more intrepid, like Garrison, see more of the thrill braving the elements. It must come from his years doing Outward Bound expeditions.

Heat is a very real danger in Egypt. One guide agreed that it was hot but said: "its dry heat so you do not sweat." Our retort was: "You may not sweat but, we do." For a while I was convinced that most Egyptians have no sweat glands. There was not a sweat stain anywhere. Then I realized that this was October and autumn for them. We could not imagine what it was like in July and August. Contrary to our hosts, we sweat. Drinking bottled water while in Egypt is no small matter. You can dehydrate in a matter of minutes in the full sun at midday. Only the Great Pyramid of Khufu (aka Cheops), not all three pyramids at Giza, is one of the Seven Wonders List. Built over a 20-year period, the Great Pyramid consists of two million stone blocks, each weighing more than two tons. When first built, it reached over 481-feet high, earning its bragging rights as the tallest structure on earth for over 43 centuries. Although the adjacent tomb of Khufu's son, Khephren (aka Chephren, Khafre) appears to be as large, the illusion is produced by the smaller pyramid's steeper angle combined with the fact that it is built on higher ground. The third pyramid in the Giza trio, that of Khephren's son, Menkaure, is the smallest. Even though smaller, it too is impressive.

It is hard to describe the enormity and majesty of these Pyramids. They beckon you back to a long ago world and fill your head with innumerable questions, not the least of which is: "How did they do this?" The scale is enormous and the machinery primitive by today's standards but the esthetic and the technical detail are beyond belief. You shake your head in wonder at what it was like to be part of such an enormous undertaking. By the way, the Pyramids are now believed not to have been built by slave labor but rather by workers, mostly farmers, who during the annual Nile flood season could not tend the fields. Thousands of farmers with the guidance of ancient engineers and architects designed and built these glorious structures. A photograph cannot do them justice. Indeed, it is hard to imagine what words can be used to do them justice. The modern mind, a bit parochial, just cannot wrap itself around the obvious truth of what it sees. South of Khephren's pyramid is the most immense and well-known sculpture ever made by man: the Great Sphinx. Its face most likely portrays that of Kephren. Its humbling and intimidating appearance warrants the Greek derivative of its name meaning "strangler:" a creature with the head of a human, the body of a lion and the wings of a bird.

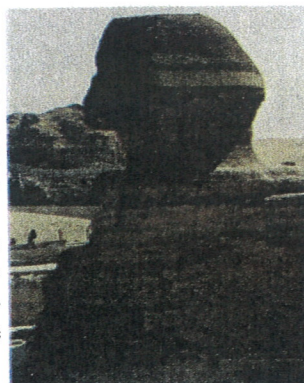
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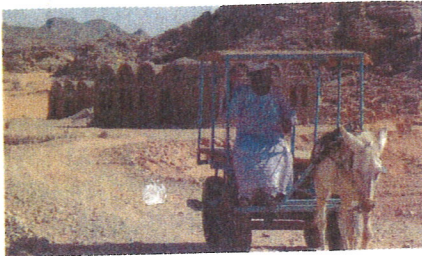




**Egypt (continued)**  
 After a day of visiting the historic outskirts of Cairo, you may want to call the States and share your experiences. Egypt's mobile

phone network works on the GSM system so if your device is compatible and you can roam, you're good to go. Keep in mind, though, that calls originating from within Egypt will incur international charges. E-mail is readily accessible in Cairo's many Internet cafes. While you're online you can check out the Cairo Times, the city's English language newspaper. If it's happening in Cairo, you'll find it here. ATMs are everywhere and bank hours at nights and weekends will delight you (although during Ramadan the posted hours are subject to change without notice as people take off at unexpected times). AMEX, MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted.

After-Eight on Sharia Qasr el Nil is known to serve some great tasting and moderately priced Middle Eastern and Western food. For terrific Egyptian fare, Arabesque on the same street seems to have the popular vote. The entry is through a small art gallery and provides an interesting approach to dining.



After dinner, Cafe Curnovsky on Sharia Sayyed al Bakry will beckon you in for a romantic time by candlelight. We loved watching the Nile flow by with a cool drink-in-hand. Another delight is going to Ahwas (coffee houses) which are popular gathering places. The main lures here are the sheesha (water pipe) and engaging the locals in a game of towla (backgammon). If you are sensitive to cigarette smoke, this is not the place to be. The pipes give off a ton of it. However, if you're okay with the smoke it is part of the Egyptian culture that should not be missed. The people we met were fun and a warm smile and friendly hand gestures can overcome any language difficulties. Leaving Cairo without seeing a belly dancer is a mistake. While "fundamentalist" threats have scared some belly dancers from appearing at certain local clubs, many of the 5-star hotels actually host performances and are a safe venue for enjoying them. The belly dancers are beautifully garbed and the dancing is intricate and powerful. Contrary to western stereotypes, belly dancing is artistic and family friendly. Affordable and clean places to stay for the night are said to be available but you need to do your homework ahead of time. Pension Zamalek on Sharia Salah ad-Din was recommended to us for its large clean rooms at reasonable rates as well as the Lialy Hostel on Midan Talaat Harb. The Garden City House Hotel on Sharia Kamal ad-Din Salah has a reputation for being a great place to hang out with Egyptologists and scholars. We stayed at the Conrad Cairo in the northern part of the City. It is a big city hotel with all the amenities.



Well, off to Abu Simbel, another marvel that combines the wonders of modern technology with the ancient world in efforts to save this Egyptian treasure. We hope you have enjoyed our Egypt trip and information on how you can motor around to these fabulous living pieces of history. We encourage you to visit Egypt and meet its terrific people.

We'd like to wish New York Rider a very Happy Anniversary with Best Wishes for continued success and reading pleasure!

Garrison Leykam is Host and Co-Producer of the TV pilot, *DINERS*, record producer and songwriter.

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