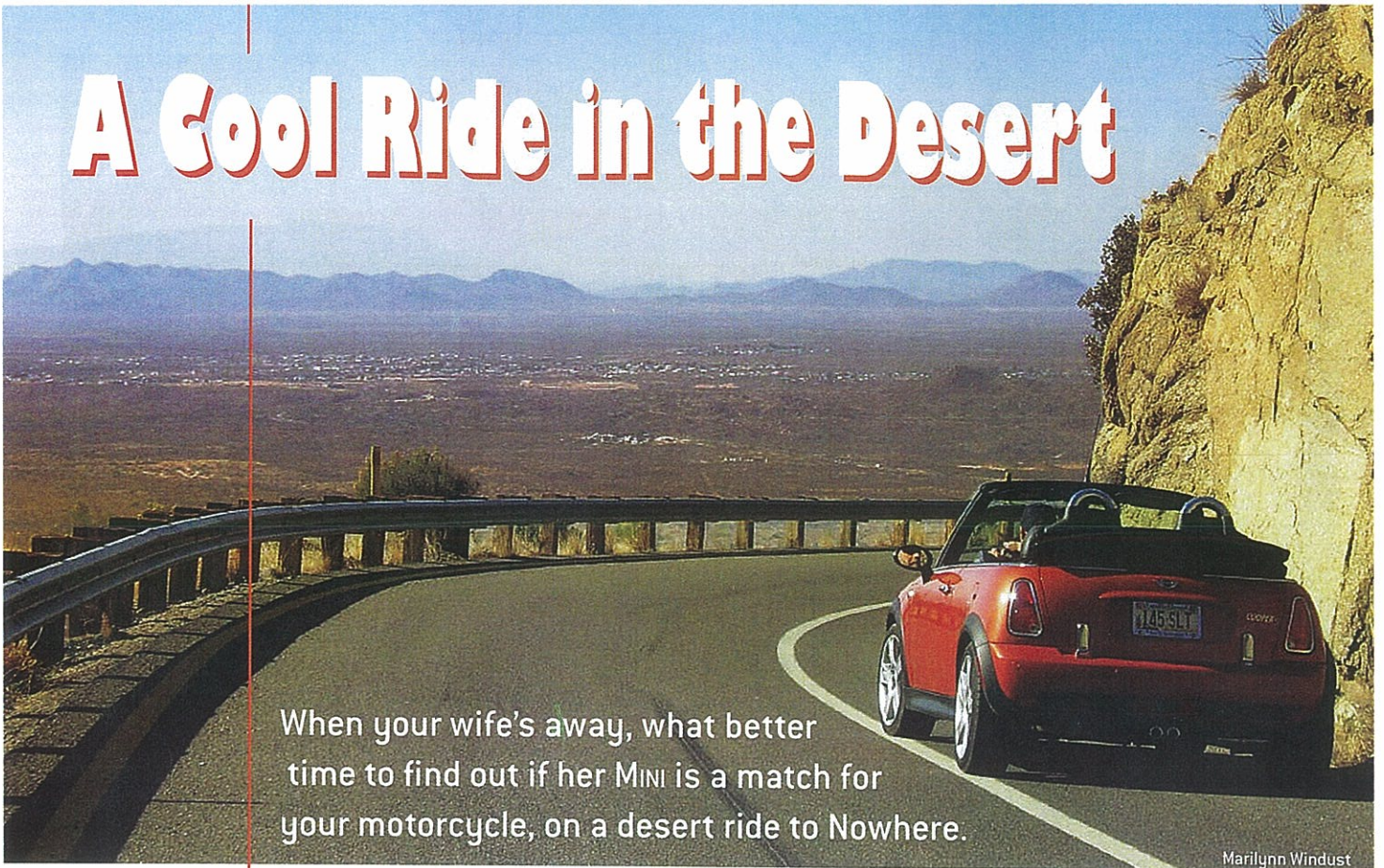


# A Cool Ride in the Desert



Marilynn Windust

When your wife's away, what better time to find out if her MINI is a match for your motorcycle, on a desert ride to Nowhere.

by Ron Mitchell

**M**y wife Mare and a friend fly to Cabo San Lucas to enjoy a girl's get away, abandoning her 2005 MINI Cooper S convertible into my care. My initial plan is to enjoy an extended bachelor weekend, tailor-made for piggish passions and bibulous behavior.

But smug in the garage, the convertible Cooper dares me to test its 1.6 liter, 168 hp supercharged inline engine, which lurks under an orange hood with black racing stripes. I am hard on cars. I dent 'em, scratch 'em, and trash 'em and don't want to be the first to dent this one – Mare's dream car and first splurge. My motorcycle is a whole different story – my dream machine that wears spotless black and chrome concealing an Andrew's cam and high flow air intake, which kicks the engine up a notch when I caress the throttle.

I'm restless and the speedometer on my motorcycle is broken, which makes it impossible to track the exact mileage to the high desert town of Nowhere, Arizona. I need the mileage for my slant on an article I'm writing about the Arrowhead Bar in Nowhere, so I decide to ride that MINI with the ragtop down.

About fifty-two miles west of Nothing, and twenty-three miles south of Nowhere, (Arizona desert towns) the "Arrowhead Bar" abuts scenic route 89 in west central Arizona. It has endured the metamorphoses from a general store/bar in 1790, to house of prostitution, to gas station/bar, and finally the current steakhouse/bar. The homestead shack next to it continues to deteriorate.

I note the mileage as I zip past the Arrowhead Bar in the MINI, on my way to Nowhere, delighted to encounter the base of Yarnell Hill. The "S" curves of Yarnell Hill merit gold and black twenty miles per hour warning signs. I pass everything on the road in front of me like a bee buzzing by their ear, with intimidation turning to exhilaration, similar to an adrenaline motorcycle ride, where cool, dry wind waters your eyes and you smile at death slipping under your foot pegs.

Shoot! This MINI curves better than my motorcycle. I challenge the hairpin curves at forty-five and push seventy on the short, straight uphill stretches. And you know what? The windshield wipes away the bugs from the wind before they splatter on my face, while country music blares, and four wheels support me instead of two! I don't need to wear goggles, leathers, a bandana or boots. A pair of jeans and a baseball cap will suffice, because the bucket seat heater warms my bottom. I wave at a long line of vintage Corvettes winding down the hill on the

Owners' Circle



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other side of me. This road lost its secrecy long ago, and boasts fun and scenic excitement for a slew of motorized and pedaled vehicles, many belonging to clubs of some sort. Fifteen minutes later I park at the top of Yarnell Hill, and view the vast desert, where tin covered cattle barns from the dairy below twinkle under a hazy cloud.

Down the road I stop at Bernie's Bar in the desert town of Peeples, because a hanging sign says "Bikers Welcome." I think I'm on a motorcycle! Today marks my first time riding this road on anything but a bike. I park the MINI onto a four-foot wide, grassy strip stretching between the highway and the horse tie in front of the bar.

As my eyes adjust to the dim light inside, red vinyl pads come into focus and frame the square bar. Only one other person sits at the bar, and he looks at me while twirling his long grey beard.

"Hello," he says. "I'm Quazi." He extends a crumpled hand to me. "Where you headed?"

"I'm headed to Nowhere. Do you know where it's at?"

"It's exactly thirteen miles from here," he says. Then he explains to me, in between pulls on a beer, that he suffers from a Vietnam War injury. "I have so little feeling in my feet that I have to look down and watch every step I take. That's why they call me Quazi, as in Quazi Moto."

As I leave, Quazi follows me outside to look at my ride.

"I wondered what that thing was when you pulled up here," he says. "It didn't sound like a Harley."



"This is a little road rocket," I explain. "I think it could blow my Harley away."

"Well, if you go to Nowhere, the only thing there is a bar," he says. "Say hello to Virginia for me, I think she's working today." Quazi shuffles back into the bar.

I decide to head back home rather than visit Nowhere. Flying in the MINI back down Yarnell Hill, I'm having so much fun I forget to notice the gas gauge grabbing at empty. Running out of gas in this little missile would be embarrassing. As I approach the town of Wickenburg, a beeping red light from one of the many chrome lined instruments on the dash grabs my attention. "OUT OF GAS," it reminds me. "Please," I say to myself. "Just give me a couple more miles." Fuel injection systems especially dislike running out of gas.

I finally make it to a gas pump with a credit card machine and fill up, relieved and again able to concentrate on having fun driving this machine. It resembles my motorcycle not only in acceleration, but in the way it makes driving more enjoyable than arriving. And yes, it again sits without a scratch back inside my garage, still enticing me to take another ride.

*MC<sup>2</sup>*

Ron Mitchell, a freelance writer for *Wired* and other magazines, enjoys nothing better than a ride on his Harley out into the desert around Phoenix, unless it's a ride in his wife's burnt orange MINI Convertible.

