

Rob Lentini

When I think of my friend, Rob Lentini, I think about our shared journey: a journey begun and a journey ended. With lots of stops along the way.

Our journey together began late in the last century when my wife, Jill, and I—both Wisconsin natives—began to think about a place to spend our winters in “retirement”—a place where I could ride motorcycles all winter and Jill would not be cold. We decided to try Tucson and planned some short trips to try the place out. One of the attractions that drew my attention to Tucson was a place on Grant Street called *Iron Horse Motorcycles*, a nationally renowned BMW motorcycle dealer.

I cannot remember when I first met Rob, but it was most likely through *Iron Horse*, the nexus for nearly all my early local contacts. Rob introduced me to some of the wonderful areas of Tucson, such as the motorcycling road up and down Mt. Lemmon and many other areas. I still have from those early days a large, framed blow-up of a photograph Rob took of Roger Austin and me riding down the Mt. Lemmon Highway at a not inconsiderable speed. I remember that Rob, ever the motorcycling perfectionist, admonished me that I was not looking through the curve enough as I leaned hard to the left for that photo (*see left below*).



Rob's photo of Roger and me on Mt. Lemmon. 2004: Rob's last long trip — to Death Valley.

Rob admonished me frequently during the next decade or so regarding my numerous faults. He developed a very keen eye in discerning these faults in all areas of my behavior and then delivering corrective instructions. For

the most part, I attempted to implement them, but—as he would occasionally remind me—not always to his satisfaction.

I learned quickly, however, that when Rob admonished you it was a sign that he had accepted you as a good friend. So I genuinely treasured his critiques even though I could not always measure up to them. Rob, you see, was a truly kind person. Listen to his best friend, Roger Austin:

“Rob was easy to like as person and a pleasure to ride with, he was a friend to many and In 20 years of riding with him I never heard him put anyone down, it just wasn't his style. He always saw the good side of people and had a positive impact on everything and everyone he came in contact with.”

That reminds me of the time that I was serving on the board of directors of BMW Motorcycle Owners of America, which is based in St. Louis. So impressed was I with Rob's critical eye and ability to work well with others that I asked him to run for a position as a director on the board. And I asked and asked. I finally pleaded with him before his reluctance gave way and he agreed. In 1997, I was elected president and Rob was elected a director.

My performance as president of BMW MOA was less than stellar, and Rob, who was my roommate at board meetings, was always ready to advise me on how I could improve. Of course, my improvement was not up to his standards and because of that my relations with the board got pretty rocky late in my term of office. Yet Rob was always there by my side supporting me, and after I left office he continued to defend my service when the topic arose, even though I was no longer around. I could not have asked for more from a good friend.

In 1999, Rob ran for the office of treasurer of BMW MOA and was elected overwhelmingly. He became the critical player in whipping the organization's finances into shape and in identifying and implementing a good investment strategy. He only left that office when other responsibilities took precedence. Then he was designated by the board of directors as an Ambassador of BMW MOA.

Before Rob got “sucked into” running for the BMW MOA board, he introduced me to rider education in Tucson. We both were motorcycle safety instructors certified by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF)—the national accrediting body. Rob took me to meetings of the local MSF instructors, and eventually I began teaching rider courses with him at a local training site. He was a great instructor who developed an instant rapport with his students.

Rob then assisted me annually in both arranging and teaching a set of *Experienced Riders Courses (ERCs)* held at the international BMW MOA rallies. We taught together all over the nation, from New York to Colorado to West Virginia, Michigan, Montana, and Texas. We even taught together in Ontario.

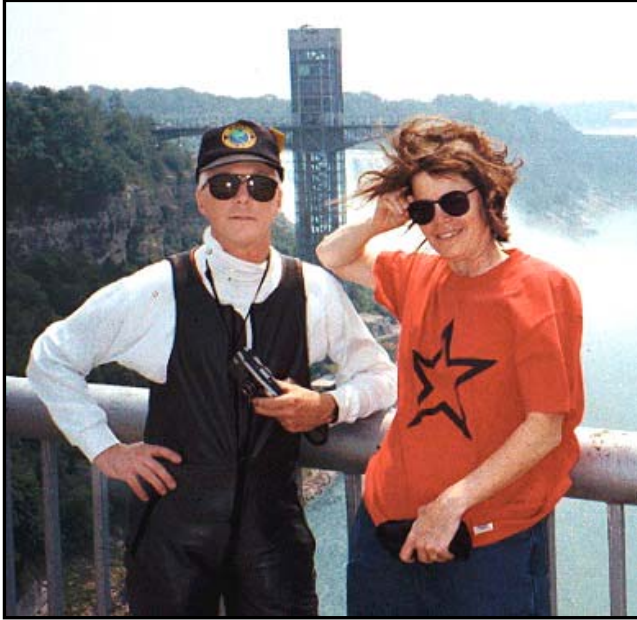
Rob had a national reputation in motorcycling circles and also had excellent instructional skills with beginning and experienced riders. His working with me made running the ERC courses a joy. And in my opinion his students benefited from being guided by one of the finest motorcycle safety instructors in the nation.



Here we are together, “teaching” in New York.

Rob’s best friend, Roger Austin, was fortunate to share many wonderful motorcycle journeys with him. I was fortunate to share a handful, including two to Death Valley, one from Wisconsin to Michigan, and a round trip between Madison and Poughkeepsie, New York, which included a stop at Niagara Falls. I always wanted Rob to lead the ride because (a) he liked to, and (b) I liked to watch him ride his motorcycle. Besides, if he followed me I knew I would receive from him critiques of my riding skills. So perhaps a little of my ego was involved.

Often there were local rides. I would receive a call from Rob saying, “*Meet Roger and me at the chemical factory at Kolb and I-10.*” And off we would go.



*Above left: Rob and BMW MOA's Marilyn Roberts at Niagara Falls.
Above right: Rob at Death Valley, January 2004.*

I believe Rob's final motorcycle trip was late last January. It was from Tucson to Death Valley and back—shortly before his cancer was diagnosed. I was privileged to share that journey and his room at the Furnace Creek Ranch. I was impressed by how many people knew and admired him. He was truly a national BMW motorcyclists' treasure. Wherever we would go, a small group would invariably assemble to ask Rob questions about motorcycles and motorcycling. Friends he had in abundance.

It has been Jill's and my great pleasure to get to know Rob's family—Linda, Lisa, and Christine. What a beautiful and wonderful family! While Rob's journey has ended, their journey will continue. It is a journey that Jill and I hope to share well into the future.

There are other aspects of Rob's incredible journey about which I know very little—the Boy Scouts and the Air National Guard. But his accomplishments in these areas seem to parallel those of the world I shared with him. Clearly, he excelled in whatever he did.

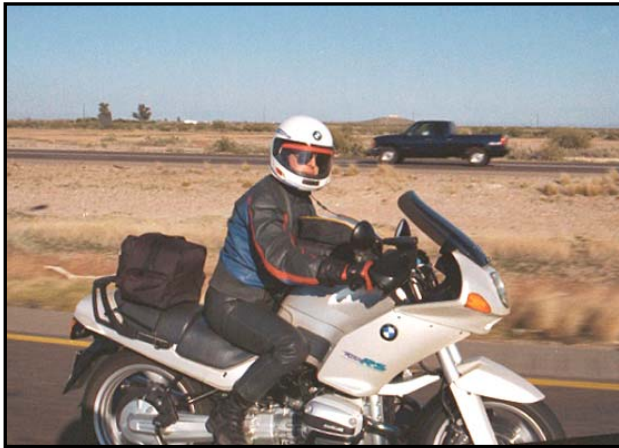
Though I have known Rob only perhaps a decade, like many others I learned to respect and love him. He will live in all our memories as a smart, helpful, and supportive friend and we are deeply saddened by his untimely death. The loss to his wonderful wife and two beautiful daughters is, of course, incalculable. Our love and our hearts go out to them.

Somehow it seems ironic to me that Rob, a New York native, should die on September 11, three years to the day after the World Trade Center was

brought down. For me, personally, the tragedy of that date is now multiplied many times over by Rob's death.

Rob's journey is over now too soon—way, way too soon. It can continue now only in our memories. For all of us life will never be the same.

Rob, we really miss you.



— Jeff Dean
Madison, Wisconsin
Tucson, Arizona
20 September 2004