

Living in Luxury on Suzuki's Deluxe Cavalcade LXE
Photo Essay: Great American Gas Pumps

Rider®

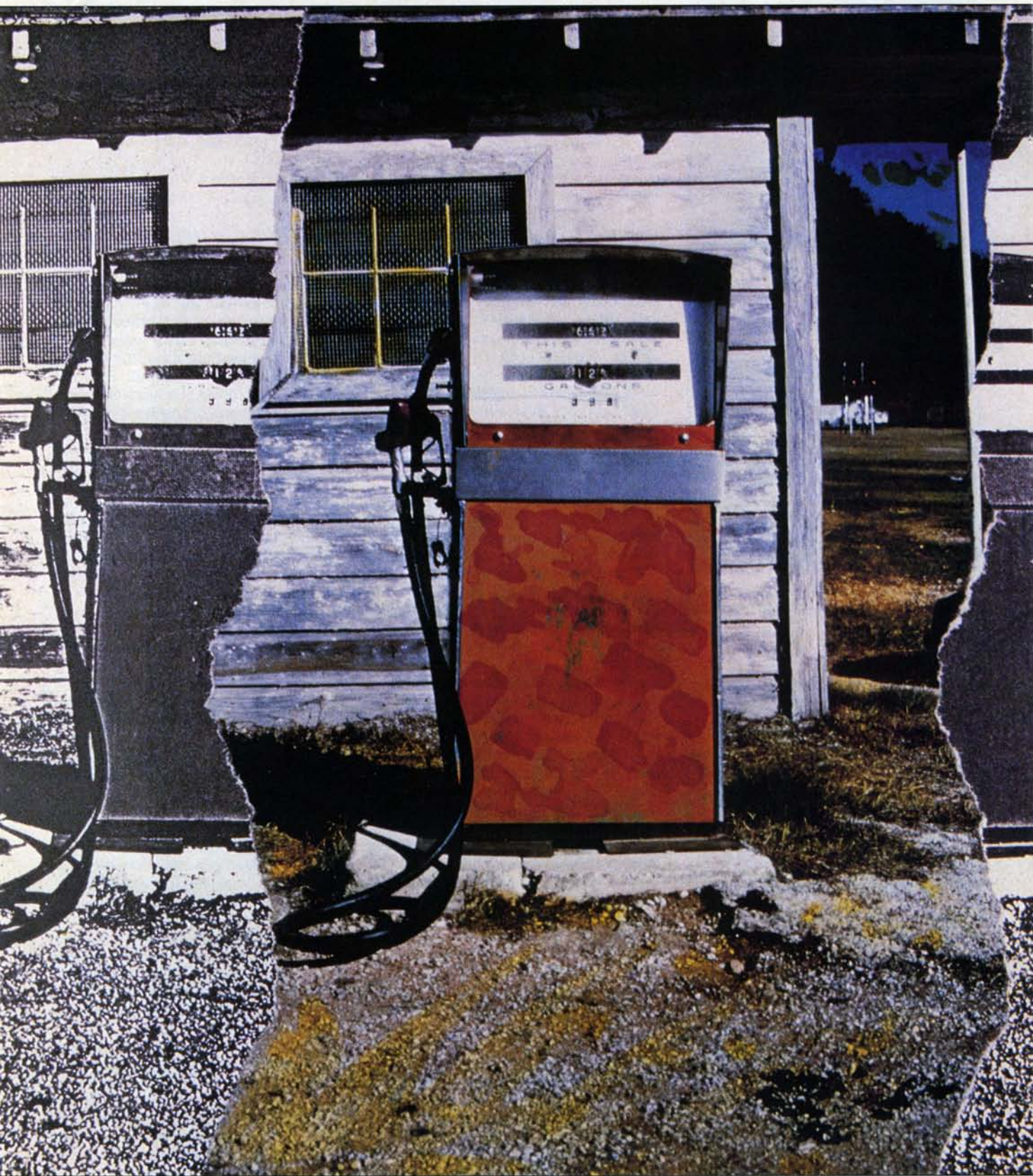
Touring, Sport & Street Motorcycling At Its Best
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Sport-Touring Challenge:
Kawasaki ZX1000R Ninja
and Yamaha FJ1200
on Great Western Roads



**Is Oil Analysis
For You?**





CHANGLING

Charboneau Road, Fort Worth, Texas



GREEN LANDING UNNOTICED

Highway 67, Venus, Texas



REST STOP

Outside Colorado Springs



ROYAL LOCATION

Highway 287, Oklahoma

MICHAEL K. WITZEL

THE LAST OF THE Great American Gas Pumps

They stand as lone obelisks, along unused stretches of America's highways: the Route 66's, the U.S. 1's, the scenic drives. They sit empty now . . . silent, waiting. The rust and corrosion of the years slowly engulf their exteriors. Like faded billboards, their message has vanished. They are following the hamburger stand and the drive-in into extinction. Only a few decaying gas pumps remain. The new wave of gasoline superstations has arrived. The era of "wipe the windows and check the oil" has ended.

Mini-market stations have filled the void, offering everything from cheap, folding sunglasses to yogurt. Technological advances have made it easier for 20th century man to fill his tank, stuff his face, and empty his pocketbook. Like so many other icons of Americana, the hometown service station has mutated into a new form.

Today, motorists can look forward to a major consumer project when purchasing gasoline. Stopping at the "neighborhood gas sta-



ORANGE MARILYN

Morton Street, Fort Worth, Texas



Left:

LAST STOP

Highway 67, Venus, Texas

Below:

CAMOUFLAGED

Highway 80 West, Arlington, Texas

tion" has become a rite of passage into the 21st century! A search of the general area in and around the station is in order. Where is the gasoline pump and exactly what is it? Could it be that yellow box with coin slot? No, that's a coin operated



REVELATION

tire inflation device. Perhaps it's that hose protruding from the side of that monolithic metal structure. Yes! Those digital numerical displays are a dead giveaway! A quick look at the current edition of "Operating Instructions to Gas Pumps of the World" and we are ready. We pump our gas. We head for the glass-enclosed "service-attendant," our gas soaked hands groping in our pockets for credit cards. We wait our turn in line. A sterile stainless steel box slides out. Our money or credit card slides in, and our receipt slides out. Through an advanced communication device we get blasted by a burst of unintelligible garble: "FFFFFF. . . FSSH SHANK SHOO!" "Your welcome!" We attempt a quick stop in the restroom, but it's locked. Toilet paper theft has caused us to head back to the pay booth enclosure for the keys, along with the bowling ball attached to them to prevent *their* theft.

Remember the days when our tires were greeted by a familiar

"ding-ding" of the driveway air-hose? Those were the days when attendants checked under the hood and attitudes were friendlier. The employees still had a personality, gasoline companies an image: "A Tiger in Every Tank," the "Flying Horse," the "Man with the Star." These were the halcyon days of America's love affair with the automobile! Cheap gas under fifty cents, with full service! Hub-caps adorned the walls. Free glasses were passed out. Green



Clockwise from top left:

TURQUOISE MONOLITH

Highway 174, Cleburne, Texas

PUMP AND TIRES

Denton Highway, Roanoke, Texas

STEP RIGHT UP

Highway 81, Hillsboro, Texas

0001 PUMP

Grapevine, Texas

stamps filled our glove compartments. Gas pumps talked to us at every gallon interval with a friendly ring. Signs advertised the price per gallon with less than three digits! A visit to the neighborhood service station was a trip in itself, a sociological ritual.

Unfortunately, a metamorphosis has taken place. "Service" has a new definition: Do it yourself! The repair bays, garages and many services we once took for granted have been virtually eliminated from the new gasoline stations.

Now, only remnants of the old stations dot the highways. The common gas-pump is usually all that remains. With their blatant symbolism of another era, another way of life, these devices represent values that have since eroded. They are tombstones of the past. With an ethereal character all their own, they decay in glory. Worn out by a society faithfully served, they measure the advance of time as a type of roadside barometer. They have



been transformed. The aesthetic attitudes of former generations permeate every molecule of their structure. Environmental objects of art have been created, "sculptures of use." Whether altered by the elements, a well meaning station owner with spray paint or vandals with hammers, they are windows to another dimension.

These dioramas of the evolution of transportation will not survive much longer. With the onslaught of new shopping centers, parking lots

and wider streets, they are being eliminated from the landscape. Soon, these surrealistic signposts will vanish forever. So look now. It may be your only chance! The landscape you encounter all across this mobile America is your museum, the roadway your viewing point. The vehicle you pilot to arrive there is your point of common connection, the transitional link to the consciousness of the road and the generations who constructed it, travelled it and were born on it. □