# Going Extinct

Moshe K. Levy · RA 43605 · MotoMouthMoshe

This past February, I had the pleasure of visiting the 6666 Ranch in Guthrie, Texas – a fabled town with a population of less than 200 people. The ranch, founded in 1870, is one of the most iconic in all of Texas – now made even more famous by its appearances on the hit show *Yellowstone*, of which I am an enormous fan.

I had 442 miles of desert highway to cover from San Antonio to Guthrie—taking the long way, with not much to look at but plenty of time to think about the themes of *Yellowstone*. It was 34 degrees when I set out, dipping into the mid-20s in places the sun hadn't reached. Texas, as it turns out, can deliver a touch of winter to the uninitiated. The show was a runaway success in part because it exposed many of us for the first time to a life not normally depicted by Hollywood – a solitary life of living off of the land, a grueling life of an honest day's physical work, and a life of stern Midwestern values. However, the common thread running through it all was the suffocating realization that this brand of life itself is being incrementally snuffed out.

I finally arrived at the ranch relaxed and ready to jump right into the tour. I must say, it was fantastic! Led by a young lady who worked in the Supply Building, she was chock full of trivia about the ranch. The 6666 is actually three separate ranches across Texas, but the Guthrie site we explored is the crown jewel. This place consisted of approximately 143,000 acres of former Comanche country, with eight full time cowboys (and 55 total employees) running the show. Many employees, like our tour guide herself, are actually married couples living on the premises. The ranch's specialties are Black Angus and world-famous quarter horses, with an advanced full-time vet clinic at the ready as well.



We drove deep into the countryside to see and experience ranch life. The ruggedness of the Texan desert and its unforgiving elements were something to behold! Barren landscape punctuated by the occasional drought-tolerant shrubbery dominated the scene, and there were no amenities for almost 100 miles in any direction. One gets a firm grasp on how tough the cowboys must be to survive working out here year in and year out. I also got to meet the retired stallions, whose pampered lives now consist of eating, sleeping, and breeding – not a bad life, if you can get it!

Fans of *Yellowstone* will recognize some of these locations in the pictures, especially the saddle barn I'm standing in front of. This is where the character of Jimmy Hurdstrom first lands at the 6666, after being sent there by *Yellowstone* patriarch John Dutton to "make a real cowboy out of him." It was here that Jimmy sat and spoke with legendary horse trainer Buster Welch, who has since passed away. Right next to this barn are two horses belonging to Boots O'Neil, whom we were told still gets up and works a full day at the 6666, even at 92 years young.

To an East Coast boy like me, seeing all of this operation in real life was quite the experience, but I couldn't help noticing the underlying message – this way of life is indeed under attack. Beef imports have decimated domestic sales. There is only so much demand for quarter horses or insemination services, and the type of people who want to rise before dawn to manually work their hands to the bone in the blazing Texas sun are fewer and farther between. It's hard to describe the dissonance of extreme pride for ranch living that the residents of Guthrie portrayed, with the sadness that this could very well be one of the last generations to exist this way. There was an inherent questioning that was never uttered aloud by anyone on the tour, but emanating unsaid from the ranchers: How could this way of life, which has given us everything we have and are so grateful for, be going extinct? Why doesn't the world know the value of what we do?

I was ruminating about all of this at the RA rally in Ohio over Labor Day weekend, juxtaposing how I felt at the 6666 versus how I felt in Athens with all of you. There are so many parallels! I remember starting out as a young rider in the late 1990s. Riding motorcycles was definitely "in," some of the biggest TV shows centered around motorcycle culture, the rallies were a bit more lively, and the average age of the attendees wasn't measured in eons. Don't get it twisted! As I've written in these very pages:

"When extra mature riders come up to me, I always assume that I'm in for a treat, and I'm rarely disappointed. They regale with tales of motorcycles that boomed and shook and left oceans of dripping fluids in their wake. They spin yarns about MacGyver-style roadside repairs of mysterious things called 'points; and 'carburetors,' using only a paper clip and a cap from a Bic pen. They rode for days in treacherous storms, before rain gear was ever invented. I love hearing every minute of it. Maybe because I see that regardless of what time has done to their bodies, there is still a sharp sparkle in their eyes as they recall the thrill of riding on the edge – and so we share the same adventurous spirit. For me, it's always a pleasure tapping into the continuum of hardcore riders from the past, when men were men and motorcycles were death traps."

That said, some 30 years later, it sure does feel like things are slowly dying on the vine – at least at national rallies. There are myriad reasons: rallies, and middle-aged guys are busy raising families while dealing with demanding careers. Overall motorcycle sales themselves are not trending well, and haven't for almost 20 years.

But this isn't an objective, rational rant – it's a gut feeling. Same as the ranchers, actually: How could this way of life, which has given me lifelong friends, incredible memories, and unvarnished adventures feel like it's marching towards extinction? Why doesn't the world know the value of the motorcyclist's way of life?

## We Are Not Going Extinct

One of the best parts about moving from the East Coast to San Antonio, Texas, was discovering its motorcycling scene. In sunny San Antonio, a vibrant gearhead culture seemed to touch every part of life. I soon found a dedicated group called the BMW Riders of San Antonio—known as BROSA—part of a larger network that included Triumph Riders of San Antonio (TROSA), Ducati Riders of San Antonio (DROSA), and more. These groups couldn't be more different than the localized riding groups I had experienced back in New Jersey. In Texas, there was a healthy cohort of younger riders in their 20s and 30s, and they were active. BROSA had events nearly every day of the week! A young, single rider could spend literally every day doing something moto-related within this network, from socializing to wrenching to traveling. I was used to Jersey, where the moto groups put on a ride every few months and most of the folks participating were in their 70s. Before living in Texas, I thought we were going extinct. I couldn't be more wrong!

Fascinated by the differences in motorcycle culture between New Jersey and Texas, I began informally interviewing my new (and decidedly younger) Texas BMW riding companions. For the most part, the Texans didn't know (and didn't care) about national groups like the RA. They saw no need for national groups; BROSA alone kept them fully satisfied. Taco Tuesdays, Bowling Wednesdays, Thirsty Thursdays, Saturday mornings at Clear Light Coffee, endless plans for Sunday rides—there was always something happening. BROSA offered all the socializing anyone could ask for, in every flavor of motorcyclist imaginable: off-roaders, track racers, world travelers, high-milers, bar-hoppers—you name it, they had it. I've spent most of my life as a solitary, introverted rider, but the Texans changed me. They were such a fun, intelligent, and overall entertaining bunch of folks to spend time with! And they had everything they needed, right there in their own little standalone group. In other words, their cups were full. No wonder they never went looking elsewhere! (If any of y'all BROSAs are reading this, I miss all of you very much.)

## Well... Are We or Aren't We Going Extinct?

Obviously, the answer depends on your perspective. My experience is that motorcycling is absolutely alive and well amongst the young, but thanks to social media, they congregate in much smaller, less trackable networks than riders did decades ago. The youngins aren't showing up to national rallies in any great numbers, primarily because they are able to spontaneously reach out to each other to plan and execute events in ways that larger national clubs simply cannot.

Like BROSA, these small groups are in many ways decentralized and self-contained, partially because they are satisfied with that organizational structure "as is." So, on one hand, it would be an interesting marketing project to try to woo them into the national RA scene by providing value-added incentives, services, and attractions—but on the other, it's probably best to leave them alone. The young generations are blazing their own trails, meeting with each other and riding in their own unique styles. And in the end, what's a better metaphor for motorcycling itself than doing your own thing in your own way?