

Michael Lichter on the Shelf Road leading to Eldora Mountain in Nederland, CO.



THE LUMINARY / MICHAEL LICHTER

Words & Photos: Ed Subias

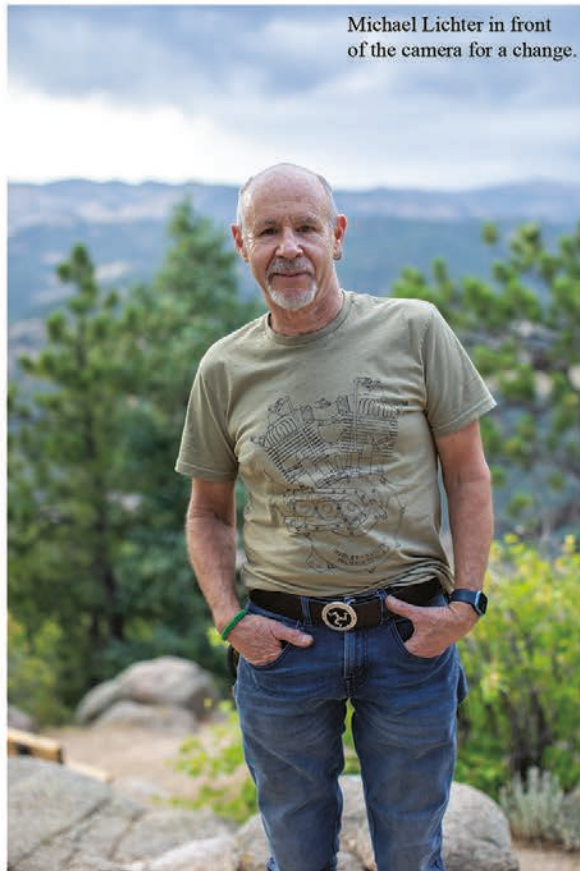
If you have been involved with the custom motorcycle world even slightly, you have seen Michael Lichter's photography. For over 40 years, he has created iconic imagery of biker culture and people, custom and vintage motorcycles, and events. We had the opportunity to turn the tables on him. He would be the subject getting photographed and questioned.

Michael took us riding for the day on the gorgeous mountain roads near his home in Boulder, Colorado. Here is our little chat with him as we sat in his backyard post-ride eating ice cream he made himself (it was delicious, by the way). - Ed

The Faction Moto: We were on a breathtaking road to Eldora Mountain the other day, the Shelf Road. You mentioned before that you had quite an adventure there on the mountain. Can you tell us about that?

Michael: Eldora Mountain Resort is our local ski area. I used to trade photos for ski passes. I had a whole family ski pass. Then, when the kids got older, they became ski racers. Every year for 40 years, I have gone to Daytona Bike Week, the first week of March.

One year, I returned from Bike Week, and there was a big snowstorm coming, so the kids wanted to go skiing. So we go up to Eldora, and it's snowing, snowing, snowing. Everything's great. And we come in at lunchtime and the sheriff announces, "Hey, everybody, don't want to alarm you, but we had a little avalanche, and the shelf road is closed. We'll update you in an hour or so while the road clears." Long Story short, I went up there Monday morning and got home for dinner Thursday night.



Michael Lichter in front of the camera for a change.



Michael loves being behind handlebars as much as he loves being behind a camera.

They couldn't get us out. The mountain received five and a half feet of snow. All we could do for several days was shovel snow, try to uncover cars, and make it so that we could all get out when they did open.

The Faction Moto: Where'd you sleep and eat and all that?

Michael: Because the area is local, there's no lodge or anything. There's just a restaurant where they have a bar and cafeteria. That first night, they opened up this back area where they had all the ski jackets for the ski instructors. They passed them out to everybody. I had a 10-foot by 20-foot velvet black background in my truck, and we used that to sleep on and wrap ourselves up. It was me, my son and daughter, and one of their friends from the ski team with us. We were comfortable, we were warm, everything was great.

The Faction Moto: Do you still go skiing there now?

Michael: Oh yeah, every winter. During COVID, I got in 50 days of skiing. I'll be working and editing photos or something during the week, and I'll take a little break in the afternoon, head up there for a couple of hours, and be back before dinner. I'll get more runs in those 2 hours than people will all day on a weekend day.

The Faction Moto: How long have you been in Boulder, and what are some of your favorite roads and areas?

Michael: I moved here 51 years ago. I came to go to school and never left. I loved it. Boulder is great because it's on the path to Rocky Mountain National Park. It's the nicest way to get there. You go through Boulder, to Lyons, and then to Estes Park. One place I'm fond of is Sunshine Canyon. It takes you to Gold Hill, and there is an overlook that offers an incredible view of the continental divide, the Rocky Mountains, and vistas over the plains. The Peoples Republic of Ward, Nederland, Central City, Jamestown, and Allen's Park are neat little towns you can link together on the mountain roads and make a fun loop. Some are old mining towns that are really interesting to stop at.

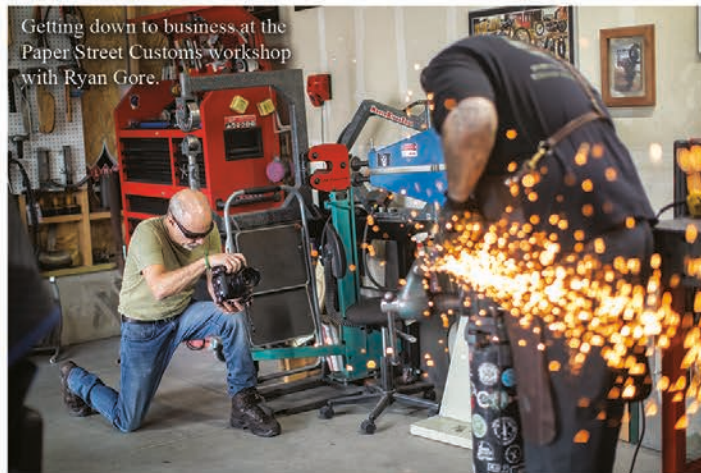
Highway 285 goes diagonally southwest out of Denver and goes to four corners. It's a two-lane trucker road that I think is drop-dead beautiful. You go through so many gorgeous mountain passes and end up at arguably the most spectacular road in Colorado, the Million Dollar Highway.

The Faction Moto: Tell us about some of your most memorable experiences on a bike, as a rider, and as a photographer/passenger sitting on the motorcycle backwards as you snap photos.

Michael: I've done Coast to Coast five times backwards. I've estimated I've done over 25,000 miles backwards. Each of those five routes was different.



Michael stays ready, he always has a camera on hand.



Getting down to business at the Paper Street Customs workshop with Ryan Gore.

I always say I need to figure out where I'm going. I know where I've been because I'm looking backward. I love the view looking out like that. It's unobstructed. It's cool.

I shoot motorcycling worldwide, but that doesn't necessarily mean I'm always riding—it's rare. I did have a great time riding once in Japan. Zak from Sundance Enterprises let me ride one of his bikes in Tokyo. I just thought it was so cool to ride a motorcycle in Tokyo.

I've had two trips with Bear from Motorcycle Sherpa in Nepal. I had never been in the dirt except as a kid through the woods. I enjoyed being on the Royal Enfield Himalayan they use on those trips. It was a nice size bike. It was enough to do what we did. We were on the highway, on the dirt, on the same route that 50 years ago I walked. It took me almost a month to walk it then and we did it in two days on the bikes.

The Faction Moto: How and when did you start riding motorcycles?

Michael: In 1976, a friend let me hop on his '47 Knucklehead chopper. It had a long Springer front and was so much fun. It was light and powerful. I didn't buy a Harley immediately; I picked up a Honda CB450. It looked like an old British bike. I loved it.

Then, I got my Shovelhead in 1977. I got it the day before Halloween from Frisco Choppers. A friend and I took a train to pick it up in California and took turns riding it back. I am trying to remember exactly how we did that. I have to ask him, haha.

I started riding that to local swap meets, little events, and things like that in '77. That's when I began photographing the culture and the bikes. I rode that bike back to California, then up to Canada, and across Canada to New York.

The Faction Moto: Tell us about the luggage setup on your Low Rider ST.

Michael: It's the first new bike I've ever bought, it's nimble and quick. The stock clamshell bags were just too small for my needs. I had Paul Wideman from Bear Knuckle Performance design some brackets so that I could run the SW-Motech adventure bags.

On my first ride with them, I did 5,000 miles, going to Milwaukee, over to Sturgis, and down Highway 285 to Durango for the Four Corners rally. I was able to carry all my gear no problem.

The Faction Moto: What gear do you carry?

Michael: I have two cameras, a bunch of lenses, a tripod, a light stand, and three lights. The SW-Motech bags carry all my camera gear, computer, and backup drives. I have an additional soft bag that goes over the sissy bar that I carry all my clothes in. The setup is excellent; I have everything I need.

I love photography, and I've been doing it since I was 13 years old. I also love motorcycling and riding. It's all come together. **TFM**



On his Harley-Davidson Low Rider ST, Michael is set up to carry all his camera gear and accessories for his travels to events nationwide.

