

From Key West to Alaska, an epic ride

■ Nearly 1,000 Harley-Davidson riders will set off from Key West on Father's Day for a 7,000-mile journey to Homer, Alaska.

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Six years ago, Paul Clermont and a college buddy jumped on their Harley Davidsons and visited 48 states in two months. It was winter. That bone-chilling trip felt unfinished because they didn't make it to at least Alaska.

So when Clermont, 31, heard about the first annual Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge, a sure-to-be-grueling, Harleys-only two-week bike dash with nearly 1,000 other riders leaving Key West on

Follow the Hoka Hey race

To follow the progress of the Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge, go to the group's website at hokaheychallenge.com

Father's Day for Homer, Alaska — he jumped at the chance to finish what he started.

"This will be a ride of endurance; a real challenge for anyone," said Clermont, an international tax attorney with Carlton Fields in downtown Miami.

The additional perk of

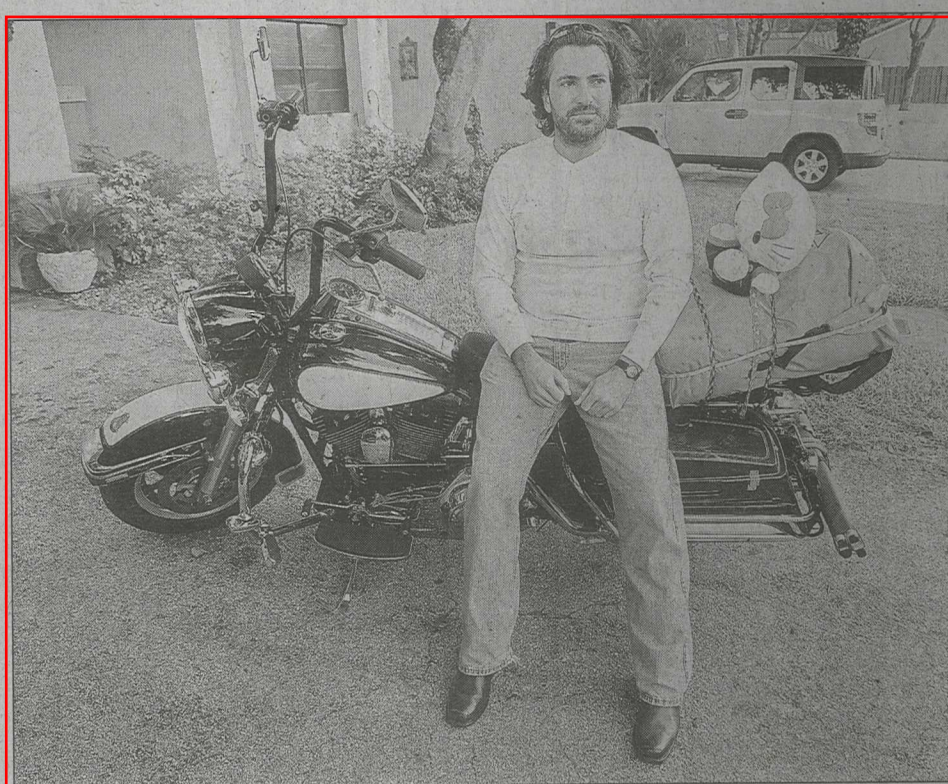
the Hoka Hey: The Harley that travels the 7,000 first wins \$500,000 for its rider.

Going along on the challenge is Clermont's Clemson University friend from the 48-state ride. Jeff Poole flew in from Singapore this week to finish the ride with Clermont.

"He's the one that taught me how to ride a bike, so it's perfect we're doing this second trip together," Clermont said.

On Friday, Clermont, who lives in The Moors in Hialeah, bid goodbye to his girlfriend, three sisters and parents and headed for Key West in his Harley, a replica of those used by local police officers — a 2008 Road King FLHP.

His co-workers have put up a map in the office



JOE RIMKUS JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

BIG CHALLENGE: Paul Clermont, of Hialeah, is ready to take his bike on the ride of a lifetime from Key West to Alaska starting Sunday.

at the Bank of America building to track Clermont's trip for the next two weeks. His sister, Danielle, will receive his e-mails and update his friends.

Clermont's adventures are second-nature to the family — and not bad for a preemie baby, his sister said.

Like last year, when he took off two weeks from work to compete in the International Dragon Boat Competition in Prague after making the U.S. team.

"While we sometimes think he's crazy, he's never satisfied with the traditional path," Danielle Clermont said. "Now this is his newest challenge; while my family is a little nervous, we are proud of his passion and drive."

The Hoka Hey, which means "It's a Good Day to Die" and is said to have been the cry of every warrior that rode into battle with Crazy Horse, is billed as a once-in-a-lifetime challenge where the contestants' mettle — that of men and women — will be tested. On the race's website, men are heard on a video describing themselves as "road warriors on a metal horse riding across America."

"It's the kind of thing that's on some peoples' bucket list," Beth Durham, a veteran of Operation Desert Shield from Hots Springs, S.D., and co-

founder of the event which was originally planned to take place two years ago. The event is promoted by Harley-Davidson dealerships across the country.

Co-founder and Hoka Hey participant, Jim "Big Jim" Red Cloud, personally selected Homer as the event's final destination after a trip to that city 20 years ago, according to the group's website. "I could tell it was a special place," he said.

Here's how the Hoka Hey challenge works:

All contestants pay a \$1,000 entry fee. They can have their miles sponsored for charity, much like a marathon.

Spanning two countries, the epic trek takes riders over 62 mountain ranges, 33 Indian reservations, 25 national forests, eight deserts and six national parks.

They will set out from Key West Sunday morning with contestants from across the country and the world, like Poole.

The daily routes are secret until each morning during the 14 days. The first checkpoint is somewhere in Mississippi.

Riders can go as far as they like each day. A typical Harley has a six-gallon tank, which will allow it to travel about 220 miles on a tank.

Riders must sleep outside each night — no hotels. "I'm not looking forward to that. I'm not

much of a camper," Clermont said.

Riders can have a support crew, but they travel a different route to the checkpoints along the way.

Speeding tickets will get a rider disqualified. At the end of the race, bikes will be inspected for the mileage and riders will be drug tested, Durham said.

And about the prize money. The original idea was to award it in Alaskan gold, but riders balked. "They have expressed that they would prefer a check," Durham said.

For Clermont, a strategy for success will be to prepare well for the elements, which he learned from his previous winter trip. This time it will mostly heat, but it gets cold at night in some parts.

"It's unlikely I will actually win, but I would be very happy to end up in the top 10 — I think I can do that," he said.

Clermont said early in the race he will put in as many miles as he can to make it to Alaska by the Fourth of July. "I'll go until I can't go anymore in the early part of the trip," he said.

His bike has no windshield, or radio. "It's funny, the hardest thing to get used to on long rides is the silence. And without a radio, it's guaranteed that the last song you hear will play in your head the whole way."