

## **DOWN ON THE FARM**

### **Going Home**

Nitro and Terry have decided to drive straight through, taking turns, one driving while the other sleeps. Celeste sits up front whenever she can, doing paper work and visiting with whoever is driving. She's also watching the driver so she can learn, because while they are up north she's going to truck driving school to get her combination license and start taking her turn driving the Bikester truck.

TK is using his time on the trip to catch up on some of his schoolwork. After meeting Jim Truesdale and talking engineering and aerodynamics, he realizes he has to hit the books even harder—especially the advanced math.

They drive north on Interstate 25, stopping in Denver for fuel and dinner, then continue north through Wyoming to Billings, Montana, where they turn west on I-90 towards Seattle.

Turning north on I-5 in Seattle, they drive through the middle of town just as the sun rises. The city and the water with the Olympic Mountains in the background are a spectacular sight. Neither Celeste nor TK have ever been here before and are very impressed. They drive north another two hours and turn west a few miles before the Canadian border.

### **Home**

Driving through rolling farmland towards the water they slow on a black top road. Celeste sees what appears to be a very nice farm, up above the shore facing out across the island-studded Strait of Georgia. There's a large house and two large buildings. One appears to be a barn and the other some kind of shop with lots of windows facing out towards the water. They turn down the long driveway towards the house. There are horses in the pastures on both sides of the driveway. Celeste loves horses, but hasn't been around them since she and TK lived at the Browns' foster home in Oregon.

"Home?" asks TK. "Home!" answers Nitro.

They stop in front of the house and a woman with long dark hair and two dark-haired twin girls come out. Terry hops out of the truck to greet them. "Terry's family," says Nitro.

"Oh," reply TK and Celeste together. Celeste and TK knew that Terry made phone calls every night on the road, but the subject never really came up as to who he called.

"Come on, and meet the gang," says Nitro. They get out of the truck and both girls immediately jump on Nitro screaming. "Meet the twins," says Nitro through it all. "This is Katie and this is Jill, but it's pretty hard to tell who is who in the melee."

Terry introduces Nerissa. It seems like she is immediately talking to Celeste like they've been friends forever. Nitro gets TK's chair out, the twins don't even seem to notice it -- they've already decided TK is just "Too cool!"

Nitro gets back in the truck along with Katie and Jill, who want to go for a ride, and moves the truck and trailer over to its covered parking area alongside the shop building. Celeste and TK go over to the shop to check it out.

### **Hangin' Out at the Farm**

Nitro and the girls give them the complete tour. The ground level is a race shop with facilities for engine building, chassis building or any other process necessary to create a racing vehicle. "There's even an elevator so TK can go upstairs in his wheelchair. I always knew we put that in for some reason," notes Nitro. At one end of the top floor is where Nitro lives.

There are also two big rooms for TK and Celeste, both with windows looking towards the water. "This looks like home to me!" says TK.

"It looks like heaven to me," adds Celeste.

They go back downstairs, while Nitro is showing TK some of the shop equipment, Katie and Jill who have by now attached themselves to Celeste, drag her to a large room that takes up one end of the shop building. Inside is what appears to be a silk screening shop, in fact a complete art studio.

Celeste notices stacks of Bikester T-shirts, which is good, because they've run out of them. There are also shirts with Northwest Indian designs, mostly whales, fish, birds and things. They are all very eye-catching.

Nitro yells in the door that it's time for lunch, and they all head for the house. After they eat, Nitro, Terry, TK and the twins go back to the shop to unload the trailer and Celeste stays to visit with Nerissa. She especially wants to know about the tee-shirt factory. Celeste learns that Nerissa is an artist, and for the last several years has taught art to kids, free, here in her studio. Most of her students are from the nearby reservation, which explains the striking Northwest Indian designs. Nerissa herself is Native American.

The Bikester T-shirts and posters are a no profit deal, and the shirts that are sold at the races pay for the shirts and to print them. The kids who work on the T-shirt project learn silk screening and are paid for the work they do, and the shirts sold help balance out all the Bikester shirts that Terry and Nitro give away to kids. Always the entrepreneur, Celeste has an idea about a marketing program for the Northwest Indian design shirts. Nerissa is all ears and brews up some tea. They sit down at the kitchen table to talk.

Out at the shop the twins have discovered TK's computer. TK is amazed at how computer literate the girls are. Terry never has figured out why the girls are so into computers. He understands why they're horse crazy, Nerissa is, too, and they've been around horses all their lives. But the computer thing is a bit out of the blue.

## **Projects**

Thanks to a side door in the shop, which lines up with the side door on the trailer when it's parked along side the building, it doesn't take long to unload. Over the next week Nitro and TK become totally involved in two projects. The first is to get SuperBike ready for the big race with Bo Barns. Nitro wants to go through the bike completely and they have to develop a more efficient throttle for the H<sup>2</sup>O-S system. The adjustments they made in Phoenix were just a temporary fix. To beat Bo Barns everything is going to have to work perfectly.

TK is in contact with Jim Truesdale on the computer as they design the new throttle set-up. They can not only send information back and forth, but can also send sketches and CAD (computer-aided drawings), so the design process is moving along quite rapidly. The second project is the rocket engine, and they are beginning to exchange ideas with Jim about it and the vehicle they want to put it in.

Celeste is just finishing truck driving school in nearby Bellingham and then will be able to take the test for her license. Then she will be fully qualified to handle the truck and trailer. She has also been spending lots of time with Nerissa, who is rapidly becoming her first really close friend, besides TK, since she was a little girl. They go for horseback rides, which she loves, and generally just have a good time. For Celeste it's like having a sister. She has also been helping Nerissa with

her art students, teaching the kids some marketing and business to go with their considerable art and manufacturing skills.

### **Hi-Tech**

The throttle system is an incredibly complex project. It looks like it will be done in time for the race, but Nitro is afraid there may not be much time to test it first. They're waiting on several titanium parts, or "unobtainium", as Nitro calls it, which are being manufactured for them in Seattle. It's really handy to have a city with a large aerospace industry nearby when you need something ultra "trick" made. While waiting they can devote some serious time to the rocket.

Before even considering what kind of vehicle they're going to build to put the rocket engine in, they have to design the systems to make it run. They want to use the H<sup>2</sup>O-S system on it for several reasons, beside the obvious ecological benefits and the extra power it produces. Because of the efficiency of the system they don't need the large fuel tanks normally necessary with a rocket. A little water goes a long way with the H<sup>2</sup>O-S set up. The smaller and lighter they can keep the engine and systems package the smaller and lighter vehicle they can build to put it in. TK and Nitro already have a good idea of what they want to create, and it couldn't be any wilder. They haven't even told Terry yet. He'll freak when he sees this!

### **Time with the Twins**

Terry, in the meantime, has been catching up on projects around the house and spending almost every minute with the girls. He misses them a lot when he's on the road. He knows that dealing with two nine year olds by herself can be trying for Nerissa when he's gone, so when he's home he tries to take the pressure off of her as much as possible.

Actually, he can't get enough of the twins and enjoys the time he spends with them immensely. In fact, as much as Terry loves racing, he dislikes being away from the girls for weeks at a time more and more as they grow up. And he misses Nerissa a lot when he's on the road. She tried going to the races with him years ago, but it makes her nervous watching Terry race. Lately, as SuperBike has become better known, there have been more races and more time on the road, the opposite of what Terry wants. He's been thinking seriously about flying to some of the races and back home afterwards. Now that Celeste and TK are part of the team, he might be able to do that. He was worried before that Nitro would have to drive the truck from race to race by himself.

### **Last Minute Stuff**

Two weeks have flown by. It's almost time to leave for Sonoma and the match race with Bo. Celeste and Nerissa have gone antique shopping across the border in Surrey, British Columbia to celebrate Celeste getting her truck driver's license. Terry has taken the girls fishing. He never gets bored fishing when the twins are along.

Nitro and TK (with Jim in contact by computer, phone and fax) have completed the basic systems for the rocket engine and it looks like there will be enough time to try firing it up before they leave for Sonoma. Nitro is just putting the last welds on the stand they designed to mount the rocket on to test fire it. It has to be very solid to hold up against the tremendous thrust of the rocket engine. They've put together an H<sup>2</sup>O-S system for it, which should work, but could still use some refinement. They'll go over it with Jim, who is meeting them at the Race in Sonoma.

### **Toys**

Celeste and Nerissa arrive back from their Canadian shopping trip with a very interesting find. While digging around in an antique shop in Cloverdale they turned up two of the H<sup>2</sup>O-S separator disks. And they are the good ones from the last batch Jim made, with the P-51 embossed on them. They found out they were sold as toys in the late 1940s and nowadays will occasionally pop up as collector's items. Celeste thinks that with a bit of research she can find a lot more of them. While they are looking at the discs, Terry and the girls return, the twins proudly showing off the fish they caught.

### **Rocket Show**

Nitro announces that the test stand for the rocket is done and if they want to try to fire the thing before they leave for California, they better get on with it. The sun is just beginning to set as they prepare to fire the rocket. The stand is securely chained down. "This should be interesting," thinks Nitro. He has put long wires on the controls so they can be behind the pickup truck, 100 feet away from the rocket engine when he hits the ignition button. TK does the count down to zero and Nitro pushes the button.

There is a huge roar and flame shoots 25 feet out the tail pipe. The rocket on its stand is straining against its chains. "What a beast!" thinks Nitro. Terry's eyes are big. He can't wait to ride this baby! Watching the rocket shooting flame with the sunset in the background, Celeste always the promoter thinks: "What a show this thing is going to put on!" TK, off to the side, is watching the computer screen, monitoring the H<sup>2</sup>O-S system and the heat of the tail pipe: "Super interesting stuff."

Nerissa just watches with a strange look on her face. By the time Nitro gets it shut off, it's already broken two chains. "This dude's got some power," he says, "Scary!"

The next morning, after the truck pulls out heading south, Nerissa walks out to the shop and the girls go with her. They know that she always does this when Terry leaves for a race. They go in the shop and sit for awhile. Nobody says anything.

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