



# BLACK LEATHER BLUES

## Texas Icehouse Season

By Mean Gene Kelton

**I**t's March! That means Texas Icehouse Season is upon us! Blacktop roads will soon be covered with endless streams of leather-clad road warriors on the never ending search for the coldest beer in Texas, at one of the thousands of Texas Ice Houses found in the Lone Star State. We in Texas take our icehouses for granted, but as a touring musician my travels around the country have made me aware that people outside of Texas, especially in northern states, have no clue what a Texas Icehouse is. For those folks outside of Texas (or those new to Texas), this article is dedicated to you.

In Texas today, the term "icehouse" refers to what most people would call a "beer joint"; not a nightclub. Nightclubs; icehouses serve only beer, wine and soft drinks (though some are branching out to include liquor, the hardcore will still see icehouses as "beer only"). Its counterpart would be what people up north call a "pub" or "tavern," and in other parts of the South they are called beer joints, juke joints, roadhouses and honky-tonks.

How did a beer joint get to be known as an icehouse? Actually it was the other way around. During the early part of the last century, before the invention of the in-home refrigerator, an icehouse was a large building where giant blocks of ice were stored. Ice men, with their horse drawn wagons, would deliver blocks of ice to residents and commercial establishments. The recipients then stored the blocks of ice in their "ice box" (thus the term "ice box" was coined long before the word refrigerator).

Working men, on their way to work every morning, began leaving bottles of beer at their local ice house so they could enjoy an ice cold beer as soon as they got off work. As the years passed, men congregating at icehouses after work to drink cold beer became a tradition. Ice house owners soon realized they could make a lot of money by keeping cold beer readily available at all times. Thus – the Texas Icehouse was born!

Today, the majority of Texas icehouses are big metal buildings with large, sliding overhead garage doors that make the place look more like a drive-thru oil change than a drinking establishment. Most icehouses should be called

hot houses. With their tin roofs, open doors and no AC, they can be hotter than nine kinds of hell in the Texas summer. Ceiling fans never put out enough wind, so most ice houses keep industrial-size shop fans on hand, blowing hurricane force winds across the room. Those open doors also allow street noise, mosquitoes, flies, birds, wasps, bees, wind, rain, dirt, sand, pollution and engine exhaust fumes to blow through. Oh yeah, then there is the occasional stray dog that wanders in looking for a handout.

When the music is loud, the beer ice cold, and some tattooed waitress is dancing on the bar flashing her endowments, everyone is usually having too much fun to care or notice the grinding roar of shop fans, street noise, suffocating heat, insects, or the fact their clothes are soaked with sweat.

Most Texas icehouses have concrete floors which makes them easy to sweep with a leaf blower or wash off with a water hose. Rarely do any tables and chairs match. Most parking lots are either gravel or ground-up oyster shells and dotted with potholes. When it rains, those parking lots can become muddy bogs full of water that can swallow a Volkswagen. Any icehouse with a paved driveway is considered a high class joint! I once saw a sign that read "Pickups in the front. Bikes on the side. Horses in the back."

Texas icehouses are very earthy places that cater to a clientele of multi-cultural blue collar beer drinkers, hell raisers, construction workers, refinery workers, veterans, cowboys, roughnecks, rednecks, truckers, bikers, aging hippies, and literally people of all races. Anywhere you find real men still in their work clothes (which signifies they have a job and a paycheck), you'll find real women ready to help them spend it! Tough women! Women who can out-cuss a sailor and bang your brains out or beat your brains out... or both... all in the same night! If the woman is wearing a Harley T-shirt, chances are she rides her own bike.

Bikers love Texas icehouses because they can have a few beers, dance to a band, hang with friends, shoot a game of pool and still keep an eye on their bikes through the giant open doors. Many biker friendly icehouses offer

outdoor seating areas with picnic tables and designated bike parking. Anywhere you find a rowdy drinking crowd, you'll find a smoking BBQ pit cooking up some of the world's best flame-broiled brisket, burgers, sausage, or chili. Sunday afternoon fish fries and crawfish boils are also popular during icehouse season.

With nearly a quarter century of performing in Texas icehouses, I've seen the same people sit on the same bar stool for years. I've seen people meet, court, dance, get laid, have sex in the parking lot, get married, have babies, fight, get hit, get their hair pulled out, get beat up, spit out teeth, stabbed, shot, wounded, shoot back, get naked, dance naked, streak naked, get caught, get busted, go to jail, get paroled, get religion, backslide, move away, move back, get divorced, lose their wife, lose their husband, get drunk, get high, fall down, get dragged out, get sick, get sober, catch fire, run in, run out, run off, run hide, get ran over, crawl, cuss, cry, pray, bleed, puke, shit, piss in their pants, laugh hysterically, throw fits of rage, throw glasses, knives, bottles, cue sticks, billiard balls, lit candles, chairs, tables, have heart attacks, and I've seen 'em die... all in a Texas Icehouse in the glow of flashing neon beer signs while the band played on.

Speaking of the band, depending on where you are in the Lone Star State, you'll hear some of the world's greatest unknown musicians and aspiring bands who play everything from classic country to Texas Swing, Cajun, Zydeco, Mexican, Czech, German Oompah, Oldie-Goldies, 50's & 60's, Classic Rock, Southern Rock and Texas Blues! You'll meet the most unique characters in the universe, drink the coldest beer on the planet, eat the best BBQ you've ever tasted, and have and have the most fun you'll ever have in your life.

Now... ya'll go have fun at a Texas icehouse! Tell 'em Mean Gene (and Thunder Roads Texas) sent you!



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