

Moski's BBQ

By Bryce Parks

Moski's BBQ in Cascade, IA has been on our hit list since it opened with a brick-and-mortar location last August, but because it entailed a little road trip, it kept getting bumped down the list. And then during an event for Great Give Day in Washington Park last month, we had the chance to sample their wares from the food trailer, and... wow! THAT was a pulled pork sandwich. Piled high, well-smoked, and without a sauce, it was still crazy moist which is so often a problem with pulled pork. The \$12 lunch special with two sides—mac and cheese and baked beans—was a huge meal. Moski's knows how to play this game. It's time to hit the road.

So, on a Saturday afternoon, we did just that. If you take the second exit into Cascade, you'll literally drive right up to their building if you stay on that exit road, HWY 136. How convenient?

At first glance, this place looks like brand-new construction, but it's actually



BBQ SUNDAE



PULLED CHICKEN SANDWICH

a significantly and wonderfully renovated space. An attractive aesthetic of black board-and-batten siding, brick and stone at the base, and copper accents carries inside with rustic lighting and tables made from the ends of industrial cable spools and oil barrels with a long counter where orders are placed. There's also a patio on the opposite side of a garage door for outdoor seating.

The restaurant is owned by a guy named Brice, so even if he spells it wrong, that's a good sign. But I might be biased. Mr. Morris has been a pit master for 15 years and owns the business with his wife, Shawna, who left a 22-year nursing career to start this passion project. Their kids, Shannon, Brock, and Beau, all play critical support roles in both the restaurant and the food trailer which is simultaneously busy traveling around Eastern Iowa.

On our first visit, we made a bit of a mistake because before 5 p.m., they only serve pulled pork, pulled chicken, and chopped brisket sandwiches. If we wanted ribs, sliced brisket, or smoked chicken legs, we had to come during dinner hours. Somehow we managed to survive on just the amazing sandwiches. Actually, they also serve a BBQ Sundae which is a pile of meat from the sandwich topped with two sides such as potato casserole and baked beans... just like a meat sundae should be. The chopped brisket was a lovely treat. The sandwiches with two sides or the sundaes range from \$12 to \$14.

There are a great variety of sides to choose from, and everyone was a winner. Let's run them down: BBQ beans, smoked mac n cheese, creamy baked potato casserole, spicy jalapeño sweet corn, traditional coleslaw, potato salad, a stellar honey-topped cornbread, and a banana pudding dessert option. You really can't make a bad choice.

As great as it was, you know we had to go back for the fancy cuts, and we did that a week later. That's because the hours are pretty limited—Moski's is open only three days a week: Thursday 11 a.m.–7 p.m. and Friday and Saturday 11 a.m.–9 p.m. We went on a Thursday, so we only had a two-hour window to get those specialty meats. And hit them we did. We ordered the sampler which

included 3 slices of brisket, 4 rib bones, 5 jumbo chicken legs, and our choice of 5 sides for \$60. It was worth every penny.

The ribs were a big winner. I wanted far more than my one rib allotment of the sample. So tender with a wonderful smoke ring and tasty, salty bark. Next time, I'm just getting ribs and more ribs. Not that the sliced brisket wasn't also absolutely fantastic. And the smoked chicken legs are enormous! Nuff said! You can also just order a dinner of one of the three meats with two sides; 3 chicken legs are \$13, 3 big rib bones are \$15, and 2 slices (and we mean SLICES) of brisket are \$17. All of the sides are \$3 each to keep it easy. So, if you want to add a couple extra to your dinner, no problem.

This is a classic Texas-style BBQ where you apply the sauce after it's done and only if you want it. The ribs definitely need nothing added. There are three sauces to choose from: classic, mustard-based, and spicy.

The food is FAST. This is because they designed the business to work buffet style, only it's the staff who has access to the row of goodness. So, you place your order at the counter, and they serve it up right in front of you on platters with little cardboard boats holding each of the sides. The featured meats are just laid out on the brown paper that lines the tray. It's a simple and attractive approach. I assume the plan to make all of the possible sides immediately ready to serve is why there are no fries on the menu or anything that needs special prep. We don't miss them.

We didn't get to try any, but based on their Facebook pictures, they occasionally do specials like brisket chili, prime rib, smoked pork chops, smoked sausage, BBQ shrimp for Lent, and signature specialty sandwiches like the smoked bologna with pulled pork and

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THE MEATY SAMPLER WITH FIVE SIDES

slaw. Maybe there needs to be a special Bat Signal they can create to let us know when something special is happening.

If there's anything to criticize about this essentially infallible BBQ joint is that it was sort of hard to share the food among the four of us with no plates. We had to divvy up the platters that the food came on so we each had something to eat on. It would be nice if they asked if we need extra trays, at least when ordering the sampler. Also, the sauce is in three big bottles at the end of the serving counter, so you have to choose and maybe apply your sauce before you sit. I asked for extra boats so I could put some shareable sauce in each to take to the table. It would be nice if we could have had our own set of BBQ sauce bottles to take to our table. But again, we prevailed in the end.

Like the convenience of the food setup, drinks, too, are served in cans or plastic bottles featuring a variety of Budweiser-branded tallboys and seltzers joined by canned Pepsi products, tea, or bottled water. It's set up for speed and convenience for both sides of the counter. But what they didn't rush was the smoke. I think I know BBQ pretty well. It reminds me of Downtown BBQ in Platteville, WI, and trust me when I say that is a massive compliment. This is truly fantastic BBQ,

and it is worth the trip. I just suggest going for dinner so you can have those ribs! Or maybe just move to Cascade. ■



Moski's BBQ
 329 1ST AVE W, CASCADE, IA
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 Hours: Thu: 11 AM-7 PM;
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