

MAD AS HELL

Any BIKERS out there?

by Stu Segal

Last week I was talking to a friend about the mass walkout of the editorial staff at Iron Horse, lamenting the demise of a magazine I find very entertaining. - “the last biker magazine”, as my friend put it. Another guy I ride with said he thought IH was the only “hard-core” bike magazine left.

I started thinking about something that I had (intentionally) forgot about years ago - the labeling of people, or groups of people, as hard-core, bikers, citizens, etc. OK, so there are *some* labels that accurately describe a persons role - if someone tells you they're a Doctor, this better mean they attended medical school, interned, were board certified, etc. - if someone says they're an Attorney this means they've earned their LL.D and passed the Bar Exam.

But what is a "biker"? Generally, this brings to mind the stereotypical image of a Marlon Brando/Wild One type - chip-on-the-shoulder rebel-without-a-cause, jeans, leather jacket, tats, Harley (OK, so Brando rode a Triumph), engineer boots, etc. It seems a lot of people aspire to project this image - especially new riders who seem to want to prove they've been riding longer than they actually have, know everything there is to know about bikes, riding and the “lifestyle”. How come so many wannabe and new riders aspire to be perceived that way? Is there something wrong with being a new guy on a bike?

I recently read an article called “Defining Bikerdom” by Vulture, in the new on-line version of “The Horse”. I don't know Vulture, nor do I remember reading anything of his before - but here are a few excerpts from his article:

- He says “Numero Uno on my list of things that makes a biker a “biker”, is an undying devotion to the Harley-Davidson V-Twin powered motorcycle”.
- He also says “The rule is, “bikers ride Harley-Davidsons”, motorcyclists ride something else”.
- Then later in the article “So, have I ever owned a japbike? Yep, sure have . . .”.

So here we've got a guy, who labels himself a biker and sets himself up in his article as an “expert” who can tell the rest of us about bikers. He defines being a biker as an “undying devotion to the Harley-Davidson V-Twin powered motorcycle”. Then somehow, even though he admits his devotion died long enough to own a “japbike”, he makes an exception of himself. In other words - he can ride a non-Harley and still claim to be a biker, but nobody else can. After all - there's a rule, which I guess we now need to modify to read “Bikers ride Harley-Davidsons, motorcyclists ride something else - all except Vulture cause he wrote the rule”. Don't you just love people who have the nerve to tell you how to live, even though they don't do it themselves?

It reminds me of all the 1950's parents who smoked cigarettes but told us it would stunt our growth. Or Bill Clinton proclaiming his undying devotion for Hillary - "but Hillary, I was thinking of *you* the whole time" (but Harley, I was thinking of *you* every time I climbed on my Honda).

One of the reasons I was attracted to bikes (choppers) in the 60's, and one of the reasons I've never stopped riding, is that unlike the rest of the environment (work, school, family, etc.) motorcycling didn't have any authority figures or preachy types making up a bunch of rules. Now I find out that not only are there "rules", but "bikers" are making them up. Great - what next? - will the biker hall monitors report me to the assistant principal cause I forgot the chain on my wallet, and make me drive around in a cage for 45 minutes?

So - what exactly is a "biker"? Is it somebody with long hair, a beard, tattoos, and a wallet on a chain? - or somebody who rides his bike every day? - or somebody who has a more serious interest in motorcycling than anything else? - or somebody who rides a certain brand or style of bike? - or somebody who reads certain magazines, wears certain clothing, and belongs to the Bros Club? Is it all of these people? - Maybe it's none of them? Maybe it's like the commonly accepted "definition" of pornography - "you can't define it, but you know it when you see it". I'm not being sarcastic when I say - After 30 years on a bike, I don't know the definition of "biker".

Recently I saw a guy wearing a black T-shirt that said BIKER in big letters (I looked at the label - it was from Easyriders) - I've also seen a bunch of shirts proclaiming "Bikers are. . . . this or that", or "If you're ain't a biker you ain't shit". Thank goodness all groups don't feel the need to wear these kind of shirts - I think I'd get sick of seeing shirts like "If you ain't a Roto Rooter man, you ain't shit", or "Psychoanalyst - if you have to ask, you wouldn't understand", or "Better living through litigation - love your local lawyer".

So here I am, writing for Iron BIKER - it's not Iron MOTORCYCLIST, or Iron RIDER, or Iron GENTLEMAN. OK, so I ride a V-twin powered Harley - and I average over 10,000 miles a year - and the only other bikes I've ever owned were in the 60's and they were BSA's and Triumphs - and I never owned anything but an American car - and the only hobby I have is motorcycles - etc. Even so, I'll admit it - I don't know if I'm a biker nor do I care. As a matter of fact, now that we've got people making rules about being a biker - when you see me just think of me as a serious motorcyclist, who's too damned independent to want to be labeled anything that's got a bunch of rules made up by teachers, cops, generals, lawyers, politicians or self-appointed gurus.

Stu Segal lives in New Jersey, and has been riding Harleys (only) since the 60's - he continues to ride nearly daily, commutes on his bike, and vacations (tours) on his bike. He can be reached at Iron Biker, P.O. Box 201, Landisville, NJ 08326, or on-line at khst80a@prodigy.com