

Biker Information Guide

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Toy Runs

The December riding calendar is fairly well dominated by Toy Runs, at least in my neck of the woods, and it probably is in your area, too. Actually, they started here around mid-October and are scheduled through the fall. We have been on one already this year, and at this writing November hasn't even arrived yet. I suspect we will be buying more toys several times this fall. Except for one grand niece (and a baby brother on the way), all of the kids in this extended family are grown into young adulthood. That being the case, we would rarely see the inside of a toy store if not for the annual rite of Toy Runs.

A toy store can keep you young at heart—if you can find a real one these days instead of a big-box retailer—by reconnecting you with your inner child and rekindling memories of your youth. Do you remember the excitement of childhood Christmas morning? Remember the thrill and accomplishment of saving your allowance to buy a prized toy? I sure hope you do. Every so often I get a memory rush like that when I go in to my contemporary toy box, my garage. Funny how I still keep stashed the wooden toy chest my dad made. Recently the sight of the motorcycles and antique cars in the garage brought me back to the memory of saving up my allowance to buy a matchbox car many long years ago. They were all of fifty cents then and made of die-cast metal in England—try finding a toy bike or car made anywhere but China today. Yet even though today's toys are imported plastic, they still have the same powerful effect of instilling joy into the hearts of children.

Isn't that what Toy Runs are all about? Instilling joy in the hearts of less-fortunate children during this the season of lights and joy? That is perhaps the purest of motivations, simply for love and compassion. Not being naïve, I am fully aware that some folks do the Toy Run thing for the politics of good public relations for our lifestyle, and that's not a bad thing; it is a savvy response to the often-unwarranted bad PR that we get just for being different. Then, of course, there are folks who are just out for the riding opportunity and don't "get it." You can't blame them, but I recently had an encounter that reminded me of what it means to "get it."

Yesterday I saw an acquaintance I hadn't seen in a while; she had returned to her job after a long leave of absence. She filled me in on recent events in her life, which among other things included marriage, the new bike her new husband bought, a fall, and the sale of her bike while she recovers from a broken pelvis. In short order our chat naturally turned to riding, as it often does, and to Toy Runs. It was in the discussion of the packed schedule

of Toy Runs in the Western North Carolina (WNC) region that she shared some sad news. Part of her absence was due to an illness that resulted in a hysterectomy: in her late twenties, recently married, and not able to have children. It broke my heart, but not hers. While some would be embittered or awash in self-pity, this lady was filled with love and joy. Even being unable to bring her own into the world has done nothing to dampen her love of children. In fact, I believe it has just refocused and amplified it. She and her husband will be taking part in every Toy Run in the seven-county WNC region, and they will not be bringing the minimum, ten-dollar donation or equivalent-value toy, either. She and her husband will be instilling a lot of joy in some little hearts this year. Perhaps a child who has lost its mother will receive the gift of love from a mother without a child. Yes, the Lord works in mysterious ways.

While some might look at Toy Runs as just another biker-PR effort, they are missing the hidden reality, the true point. It is not about the bikes or the toys or the ride. It is rather about the gathering of people together to help improve the lives of others. Best said by that old cliché: It is better to give than receive.

Hot Hash Browns

Serving breakfast eggs without potatoes is like going riding without the proper riding gear – you just shouldn't. With this recipe you'll never have to.

- 3 Tablespoons margarine, or more as needed
- 1 fresh red jalapeno, stemmed and minced
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 4 teaspoons chopped garlic
- 2 medium potatoes, unpeeled, cut into ¼-inch cubes
- Liquid smoke
- Salt and ground black pepper

In a large frying pan melt the margarine over high heat. Add the jalapeno pepper, onion, garlic, and potatoes. Stir well and sprinkle with several dashes of liquid smoke.

Reduce the heat to medium and sauté the potatoes, turning often, for 7 to 10 minutes, or until they are golden brown and tender. You may have to add more margarine to keep them from sticking to the pan. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve piping hot

Makes 2 to 4 servings