

Biker Information Guide

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Double Vision



What do people see when they see a motorcycle? What do they think or feel about them? Do they have a visceral response, and if so, what is it?

Before answering, we need to define exactly which people we're talking about. As I see it, people fall into two groups: those that ride and those that don't. If you have ever been, are now, or even hope to be a motorcycle rider, you are in the rider group. Everyone else is not. Shades of grey, like folks who are related to riders, folks who rode once and had a bad experience, or pillion riders don't matter for our discussion.

Since you are reading this, you are probably in the rider group with me. Honestly, I can't even pretend to view motorcycles as a non-rider would. Since my predilection for riding goes back to childhood, I don't even have a former perspective to recall. My visceral response is, as they say, "all good." For me, riding is a wonderful thing—the deep, rich experience of the beauty and power of nature, the harmony of being one with the machine and the road, and the enduring sense of self-confidence have a true, life-altering effect. And there are many other levels as well: power, freedom, and that sense of flying along the nape of the earth, which pilots understand well.

While I can't feel what the non-riders feel, I can know what they say and do about motorcycles, and it ain't good. A quick spin around the news channels provides a few examples. In an era when we the people and our government face high fuel costs, foreign oil dependence, and urban congestion, cities like New York want to exclude motorcycles from HOV lanes, even though an average motorcycle uses a fraction of the fuel of an average car and causes much less road wear, traffic congestion, and parking demand. While some communities are struggling with budget shortfalls and job losses, a small city like Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, wastes taxpayer dollars passing likely illegal ordinances to drive away motorcycle tourist business, thus harming their economy along with the region that surrounds them. News commentators lump together funding for ATV and dirt-bike trails with idiotic pork barrel projects, even though funds for those trails were likely paid by special fees and taxes by ATV and bike owners. The list could go on almost endlessly. Why is this?

I think it's because we riders represent a highly visible Icon of Rebelliousness in American culture. Like it or not, we both benefit from and pay for that image that Hollywood and the media have created and manipulated. There isn't enough space here to explore all the psychosocial dynamics that go into our interactions with the outer society that just doesn't get the motorcycle thing. But we can identify some of the things that those people see and respond to viscerally that give them their *raison d'être* for discriminating against us and violating our rights.

On a short list, you probably know noise is at the top. The exhaust note of a motorcycle may be music to our ears—we can tell a bike from a pickup

with a loud exhaust from miles away—but that’s not so for non-riders. Most couldn’t tell a Gold Wing from a Softail from ten feet, by sight or sound. If a bike with straight pipes has ever sonically blasted them, that blends into the Icon thing and all loud exhaust they hear is a motorcycle, even if they don’t see the vehicle. And every subsequent loud bike just cements the connection, confirming for them that all loud exhausts are motorcycles. It is a vicious cycle (no pun intended) that we would have a hard time correcting, even were we to move en masse toward quiet exhausts as the next cool thing. Which is unlikely.

The list would continue with things like wheelies and stunts on public streets—they’re cool to watch, but they freak out non-riders. Add in high-speed passing (especially in no-passing zones) and the pack mentality some folks get at rallies, where they assume the road belongs only to them and block other traffic. Finally, of course, there is the plain old stupid driving some bikers bring with them from their cars—believe me, if you ride like a fool, that is the only time folks will see the motorcycle.

For the non-riding public, these things create a vision of motorcycle riders as the worst Hollywood stereotype of evil bikers. Compare that with the vision that most riders see reflected in their chrome—self-reliant, patriotic Americans who support charities and ride as an expression of their personal freedom. The two images are diplopic. Only you can choose which vision you want to project as a motorcycle rider.

Home Folk’s Diner Meatloaf - Asheville, North Carolina

6 large eggs
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon pepper
1 tablespoon garlic powder
1/4 cup Worcestershire sauce
5 pounds hamburger meat
1/2 loaf of bread, crumbled
1 cup diced onions
1 cup diced green peppers
Ketchup
Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine the eggs, salt, pepper, garlic powder, and Worcestershire sauce. Whisk together well.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the hamburger, bread crumbs, onions, and green peppers; mix together. Add the egg mixture and mix until completely combined.

Transfer to a 13x9x2-inch loaf pan; cover the top with a layer of ketchup. Cover with foil.

Bake for 1 1/2 hours, remove from oven, and drain juices.

Return to oven and bake uncovered for 20 more minutes.

Makes 10–15 servings.

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